

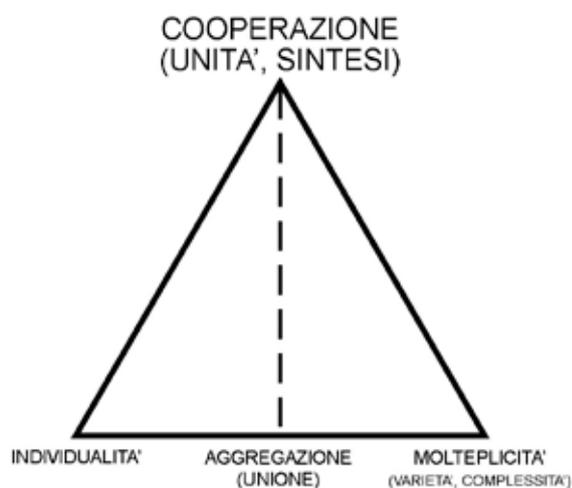
COOPERATION, COMMUNICATION AND THE MAIEUTIC METHOD

Translation by Achille Cattaneo

In the present exposition we recall first of all, the concept of cooperation according to a psychosynthetic interpretation of psychological type, and then move on to communication, of which cooperation is the foundation and finally to that which can be considered, with good reason, the finest expression of cooperative action: the maieutically oriented one.

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To describe cooperation according to a psychosynthetic perspective we can use the following graphic diagram that is inspired by the well-known representation of the triangular equilibriums of R. Assagioli:

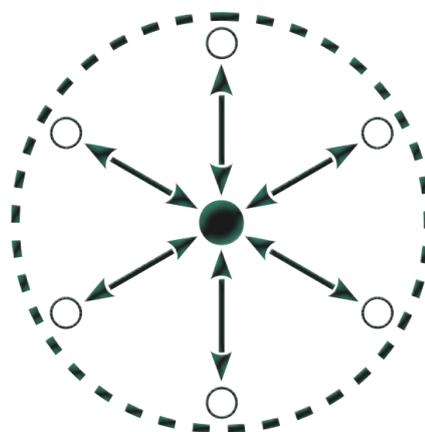


Cooperation can therefore be configured as an aggregation (union) at a higher level: that of integration, unity, synthesis.

Synthesis, as is well known, expresses a meaning and a potential that do not appear in the individual parts⁽¹⁾; in

the case considered: individuality, multiplicity and not even in aggregation. This case of synthesis is a subjective / objective totality⁽²⁾.

In the next graphic diagram we see both a principle of unity and differentiation at work. It is important to underline, with R. Assagioli⁽³⁾, that cooperation recognizes and enhances the individual specificities - also very different and sometimes opposed - without losing sight of the sense of unity: aims, values and shared rules.

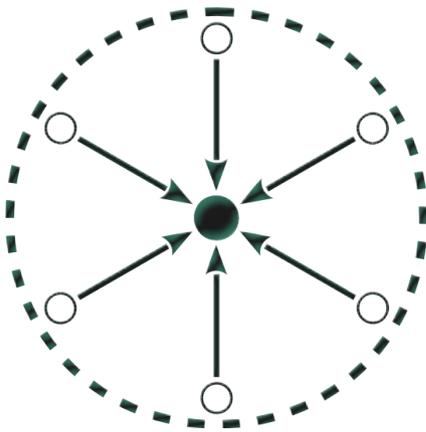


The two principles, therefore, are not excluded but coexist with different levels of expression, and this happens in all types of cooperation: between two friendly people, in the couple, in the family, in work groups and in groups formed by individuals more and more numerous. On a large scale, interactions become more complex, but if they are coherent with the cooperative principle the fundamental dynamic does not change.

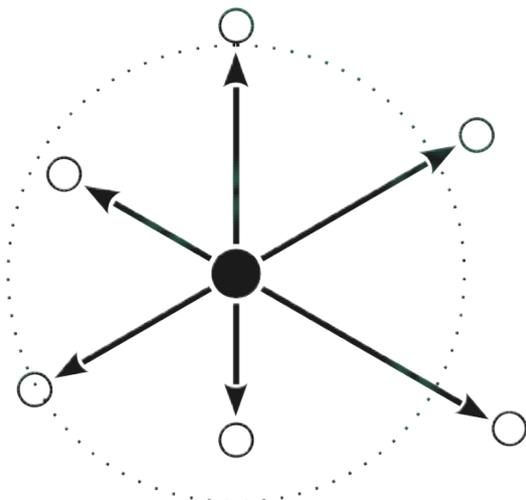
In groups, cooperation can be expressed in various ways: more biased towards the center, especially if the leader who aggregates the group has centralizing characteristics or, worse still, narcissistic.

Thus, the coalition can regress according to one of the modalities described by W. Bion (1961) in his 'basic assumptions'⁽⁴⁾: that of the functioning of *dependence*, with the idealization of the leader, as a grandiose, self-confident individual on whom the individual members de-

pend, as it appears in the following diagram:



The leader and the individual partners, by losing the sense of unity, can also express the regressive mode of operation of the *fight / flight*, in which personalisms emerge, rivalry, de-legitimization of roles, combativeness towards enemies, real or presumed, external or internal to the group, and then splitting phenomena (which also include the so-called ‘attack on the leader’), until the onset of malignant pathological dynamics, such as the paranoid fundamentalism.



The scheme below briefly describes the centrifugal, separative thrusts, but also personal values and purposes (not shared):

Everything that contributes to the ‘setting’, including purposes, statutes, regulations, contributes to the democratic functioning of the coalition and therefore is a protective factor.

A possible side effect of these protective factors is their degeneration in *bureaucratisation*⁽⁶⁾: there is a drying up of human relationships and an emptying of meaning of the purposes founding the association.

It is on the principle of cooperation that *communication* is based today in the working groups of organizations that express high levels of competence, as in the health sector.

In the medical field, communication (literally: “common action”) is now studied, refined and applied in order to improve the benefits provided but also to reduce adverse events.

The hierarchical (paternalistic) method is dysfunctional and exposes those who apply it to greater risks, related to the uncertainty of the outcome of treatment. The old approaches, centered on the disease, involved a strict continuity between the diagnosis and the setting of the therapeutic treatment.

The new frontiers of medicine (centered on the patient⁽⁶⁾) foresee the comparison with experience, expectations and even the active contribution of the patient in providing news, not only with respect to the pathology of which he is the carrier and to the relative therapy but also to the transfer of responsibilities (who more than the patient, for example, is informed on which sick kidney it was decided to intervene surgically?).

Today it is also established that communication, in the health environment, has not only the function of gathering information and imparting it, but also of at the same time creating a relationship (i.e.a cooperation⁽⁷⁾). We are witnessing a paradigm shift: from the leadership of the paternalistic model, to the *partnership* of the one inspired by cooperation. According to this perspective, communication must meet the following requirements: be understandable, empathic, independent (that is honest,

not conditioned by interests external to the well-being of the patient), able to move in the sphere of uncertainty regarding the result of care - that should be chosen in a context of therapeutic alliance, respecting roles - without abolishing hope ⁽⁸⁾.

Above all in public health we are witnessing a progressive and inexorable decline in treatment time, in an attempt to contain costs. Yet in a cooperative perspective it is the time of communication with the patient to establish the length of time of the treatment, especially in chronic and terminal diseases ⁽⁹⁾.

The most refined expression of cooperative action is that maieutically oriented: a type of partnership in which it is possible to realize the *maieutic experience*.

The term goes back to the Socratic method: the art of helping the other to give birth to his ideas, points of view, motivations, volition, just like the midwife (mother of Socrates) with the woman in labor.

Salient features of this practice (if we want to cite only a few for brevity) we find, as well as in the philosophy of Socrates and Plato, in the Neoplatonic one and, more recently, in the existentialist one; in the pedagogy of Maria Montessori, in the humanistic psychology (mainly in C. Rogers) and in the transpersonal (R. Assagioli), but also in the motivational orientation of W.R. Miller and S. Rollnick ⁽¹⁰⁾, as well as in certain philosophical and psychological declinations of the quantum physics of D. Bohm (see “groups of dialogue” he conducted, which arose under the stimulus of fruitful comparisons with J. Krishnamurti)^{(11) (12)}.

All these Authors have the same style of approach to the growth of the human being, both individually and in groups and are based, in some ways, on what clearly and authoritatively enunciated by M. Montessori about children: trust, faith in the individual who *will be revealed* by means of a ‘task’ that stimulates his interest.

The Montessori approach to the education of children is outlined in three stages, summarized as follows:

1) the teacher (or more generally the educator) stands as guardian of the environment, which includes the care for the order and beauty of things;

- 2) the teacher exudes charm, elegance, smile, brightness and can also articulate a few words, as long as they light the interest, stimulate reflection and action, support self-esteem. This phase expresses itself more with the eyes and with the gestures, than with saying;
- 3) aroused interest, the Montessori teacher *withdraws* into the shadow and abstains absolutely from interfering, if not when called into question by the child ⁽¹³⁾.

Now let’s see what the characteristics of the maieutic method applied to the groups are. It must be specified that it is an art, which cannot therefore be improvised, nor is it the result of simple common sense.

- Access to the group is spontaneous: *free* (while correct information starts from the beginning and can reinforce the process, the proselytism paralyzes it and can make it abort).
- The group or who represents it expresses *acceptance*: warm, but genuine, disinterested, non-possessive, however consisting of *refined curiosity*, interest for newcomers.
- The activity of the group is only *minimally* structured (to allow as much space as possible to spontaneous emergence of individual contributions), but coordinated by a facilitator, whose main function is *to favor, maintain and protect* the maieutic process. W. R. Miller and S. Rollnick compare the dynamics to that of the dance in pairs: one follows the rhythm of the resistances without challenging them. According to this metaphor the motivational approach, developed by the two Authors mentioned above, is a sophisticated and delicate form of guiding: it is “guiding, not directing”. Moreover, although it is based on collaboration, it has as its objective the autonomy of individuals, or their self-determination.
- The group is asked not to impose its own points of view, while leaving the freedom to express them, renouncing the competition of ideas and the need to defend one’s ego, as happens in disputes ⁽¹⁴⁾.
- There is extreme clarity on the task of the coalition (aims, founding principles, etc.), rules and roles (statute, regulation, etc.).

This guarantees:

- 1) the protection of the exercise of *freedom of thought and action* in the context of civil dynamics: all must be able to express their ideas, but without prevarication;
- 2) the democratic functioning of the group (renewal of corporate offices, as per the Statute / Regulations) and, consequently, its survival over time. In any case, as we said, particular attention will be paid to the possible degeneration through bureaucratization.

The maieutics is the essence of *service*, as it appears with great emphasis in the Montessori practice: whoever practices it, at a certain point, escapes it (while remaining

in the background), acting as a catalyst for the maieutic process, without being obstructive with its own personalism. To those who fear the undermining of discipline in this kind of educational approach, M. Montessori replies that the discipline is obtained by giving *freedom*, that is the possibility of action previously denied. Provided that the freedom granted, adds who is writing, is not fueled by the sense of guilt of parents, teachers, etc. Always according to M. Montessori, disorder and violence are not an expression of man's will, but an unequivocal sign of suffering and violation ⁽¹⁵⁾.

Also R. Assagioli stresses that the *relationship* between teacher and student is not only the basis and the meaning of ideal teaching, but that it is "a condition of freedom, which allows the student to show his true life, often in a joyful way and always with enthusiasm, with active participation, with intimate benefit" ⁽¹⁶⁾.

Positive aspects of the maieutic method are both *individual and collective*. Coming to the first, we witness a 'flowering', a sort of a self-birth (maieutic precisely), which can also be seen as a finding (reunification with your own Self). The maieutic dimension involves a particular experience of *intimacy*, even in the aggregation: it is a good feeling with ourselves, among the others. Free from the need to impose or defend their ego, thought becomes intelligence, creative act, with the possibility of the emergence of genuine intuitions and proactive actions.

At the collective level (maieutically oriented cooperation) emerge common values, the joy of participation and a matured ability to reach shared decisions, expression of a subjective / objective totality: a type of collective consciousness that seems to transcend the particularities of individuals, while recognizing them, as already highlighted at the beginning of this article. This peculiar collective consciousness is not a common thought, but a global, non-separative consciousness; in one word: transpersonal. In ordinary conditions, characteristically, there is unfortunately little or no awareness. Such existential experience can therefore be framed in the phenomenology of the *collective Superconscious*. In terms of D. Bohm's quantum physics: a branch of the 'implied order' (the one that underlies the manifestation, called the 'explicit order').

According to the most famous theory of D. Bohm, 'holographic model', fragmentation is an illusion: each region of space and time contains in itself the total order of the universe (see *The Bhagavad Gītā*, VI, 29: "The Yogi ⁽¹⁷⁾ ... sees himself in all creatures and all creatures in himself. "Plotinus:" All things belong to the One and this One is all things, for a term is so connected to the other that it is impossible for one to remain separate from the other").

The *connection* to this particular state of *consciousness* requires a deconditioning from fear and the experience of competition, but also a less frenetic juxtaposition to life and, paradoxically less globalized (see the thought of J. Krishnamurti, fundamentally based on the importance attributed to the ability of observation, and to the awareness of the conditionings that are interposed to it and that increase the distance between 'observer' and 'observed'). ⁽¹⁸⁾



In essence, a slowing down of thought processes is required (xx), the opposite of what we are witnessing today in our 'liquid' society: progressive and inexorable acceleration of the exchange of information and thought processes and, in cascade, also of human acting (compulsion replaces reflection).

We are witnessing an evident difficulty in metabolizing information and integrating it harmoniously, both in the brain and in the overall functioning of the person. There is therefore an urgent need for a change of direction in the direction of a greater human sustainability of communication - in terms of quality and quantity - both individually and collectively.