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The Creativity and the Culture in the critical idealism of the philosopher Ernst Cassirer

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[...] If all civilization proves to be active in the creation of certain worlds of images, of certain shapes symbolic, the purpose of philosophy is not to return beyond all these creations, but instead in the understand them and make them conscious in their fundamental creative principle.

Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*

Introduction

Ernst Cassirer, philosopher, was born in Germany in the city of Breslavia in 1874 (Fig.1). He had trained at the Neo-Kantian school in Marburg where he met the philosopher Hermann Cohen (1842-1918) who, starting from the Kantian theories, considered philosophy a synthesis between theoria, ethics and aesthetics^{* 1}. Kantian inspiration

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^{* 1} Hermann Cohen (1842-1918), a German philosopher, analyzes the concept of ethics that he defines as the science of pure will and of having to be, therefore the science of human dignity, fundamental in the relations between living beings. Perhaps it is important to go back to analyzing this concept of dignity even through oriental philosophies. Gibbs, R. (ed.), 2006, *Hermann Cohen's Ethics*, MA: Brill Academic Publishing, Boston.

was certainly the aesthetic also called “pure feeling science” of which he recognized the value of subjectivity.

Cassirer was particularly influenced by Cohen’s teachings and this was evident in the university courses he had at the University of Hamburg from 1919 where he also took up the post of rector. Unfortunately, with the advent of racially motivated Nazism Cassirer was forced to leave Germany and move first to England, where in 1934 he worked at the University of Oxford, and then from 1935 to Gothenburg in Sweden where he remained for over six years before He moved to the United States teaching at Yale University and then at Columbia University in New York where he died in 1945.

Analyzing Cassirer’s thinking, however, is not easy if this is not adequately observed in relation to the historical context of reference. The contribution of the lesson of Kant and Hegel is the basis of Cassirer’s training and from these, he draws the main support to know the reality and in particular the theme of art and culture that this contribution intends to analyze most. Cassirer had trained in Marburg, in a Kantian school, and starting from these ideological foundations he was particularly concerned with the logical structure of contemporary science. In this analysis, the concept of a substance independent of human cognitive activity and guarantee of the objectivity of knowledge (metaphysical concept pivotal in Aristotle) is replaced by the concept of function. This concept is referenced in the definition of “architectural observation” of Kant’s thinking, which Cassirer defines as “functional” * 2.

In fact Daniela Sacco says that:

[...] The structure, the architecture, is therefore defined in the field of relationships, in the functional interrelationship of the parts that go to compose the whole, in the law of the mutual connection of the parts, of the details. All relationships are maintained in the structure because each particular element is valid as the end of the relationship with the other elements and with the multiple totalities. So the meaning and value of each element are explained in the position it occupies in the structure, in the relationship that weaves against the whole of the elements. A logic of relationships and structural legality, which Cassirer derives from the logic of

* 2 Orth, E. W., 1995, Storia e letteratura come dimensioni dell’orientamento nella filosofia di Ernst Cassirer. La filosofia delle forme simboliche come filosofia della cultura, in *Rivista di Storia della Filosofia*, 50, 4, pp. 729-752.

mathematical relations, are therefore the basis of the formation of concepts, but also of the process of giving a form that unites all symbolic forms at the root and defines Cassirerian morphology. For Cassirer, the pure form has a functional character in the sense that it serves as a medium in the relationship between the individual and the world * 3.

In this way, the objectivity of knowledge is constituted by the functional relationships that the intellect establishes through the data provided by the observation. But Kantian theories had also addressed very interesting themes concerning myth, religion, art, culture, all topics that Cassirer will develop within his theories on symbolic forms * 4 where, while keeping the setting firm Kantian, strongly influenced the phenomenology of the philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831).

In the book entitled "An Essay on Man" * 5 (Fig.2) published in 1944 Cassirer had consolidated his theories on the relationship between man and symbolic forms and had affirmed the role of "mediation" in the process of knowledge of the environment surrounding living beings. It was this mediation that then established the difference between the animal and the man and then between the reactive system and the receptive system. But in man, Cassirer identifies a third system that he defines as "symbolic" * 6. In this 1944 book, Cassirer actually questions the existence of man and states that self-knowledge is a fundamental condition for his own realization and this distinguishes us from animals * 7.

Thus, while in animals any external stimulus is capable of provoking an immediate and direct response, in the case of man instead this response is mediated by the mental

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* 3 Sacco D., 2018, Per una critica dell'irragionevolezza. Sul concetto di funzione simbolica in Ernst Cassirer e Aby Warburg. *Aisthesis* 11(1): 185. doi: 10.13128/Aisthesis-23282. [The translation of the original text, from Italian to English, has realized by Olimpia Niglio].

* 4 Cassirer, E., 1961, *Filosofia delle forme simboliche*, Volume I: Il linguaggio, La Nuova Italia, Firenze.

* 5 Cassirer, E., 2006, *An Essay on Man – An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture* (1944), in Cassirer E., *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. 23, herausgegeben von M. Lukay, Felix Meiner, Hamburg (trad. it. *Saggio sull'uomo. Una introduzione alla filosofia della cultura umana*, a cura di L. Lugarini, Armando, Roma 1969).

* 6 Cassirer E., 1923, *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen. Erster Teil. Die Sprache*, in Cassirer E., *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. 11, hrsg. von Rosenkranz C., Felix Meiner, Hamburg 2001, p.11 (trad. it. *Filosofia delle forme simboliche*, vol. I, a cura di E. Arnaud, La Nuova Italia, Firenze 1996, p. 12).

* 7 Sandkühler H.J., 2010, Linguaggio, segno, simbolo. L'anti-ontologia di Ernst Cassirer, in *Rivista Internazionale di Filosofia e Psicologia*, Vol. 1, n. 1-2, pp. 1-13. doi: 10.4453/rifp.2010.0001

process and therefore by an unnatural system from which man cannot escape by having himself determined this change. Man has built around him a symbolic universe that no longer allows him to perceive the pure reality except that which man himself intended to build around himself.

It is possible to see in this a form of insecurity and anxiety that has led man to build symbolic references to give a concrete response to the many uncertainties that characterize life. Creative arts, for example, architecture and the arts in general, are symbolic activities, that is, these are not reproductions of a defined reality but rather represent the objective vision of human life. For this reason, the creative arts are not imitation but the continuous discovery of reality.

The meaning of Art

With reference to the themes proposed in this short introduction Cassirer questions art and argues that the artist is the one who discovers the forms of nature, just as the scientist discovers the laws of nature. However, while the artist through his works tries to make this reality concrete and tangible, otherwise the scientist circumscribes his ray of observation and abstracts reality.

Still according to Cassirer, the scientist separates the subjective world from objective one; otherwise, this separation is nullified if we observe the work of the artist that goes beyond the distinction between these two spheres of perception. In fact, unlike the scientist, the artist discovers the realm of “universality”, of language capable of communicating with everyone and everywhere. Let us think, for example, of the universality of music or the opportunity that everyone has to be able to read a work of art within their subjectivity. The real artist is the one who subjectively manages to grasp and express this universality, and this allows the work of art to be universally communicable.

So art is a symbolic form, but a symbolism to be understood in an immanent and non-transcendent way. The subject that art describes is an elaboration of a universal form that can be perceived through the five senses available to man. So art is an aesthetic experience that provides pleasure, intense enjoyment and its enjoyment is connected to the ability of contemplation and the sensations that this procures.

Thus for Cassirer, the function of art is to enhance the universal forms that are hidden behind symbolic reality and that allows man, through imagination, to enter into the depths of reality. The main theme is that Cassirer argues that man, unlike the animal, no longer perceives reality as such, but a symbolization of this reality. This theme allows

Cassirer to question the value of this symbolism of the real and thus to affirm that man has come to completely overturn the natural order of things, with the consequence that this estrangement from natural reality can also cause a loss of reference to face the future^{* 8}.

The central theme in Cassirer is that man is no longer able to observe the natural reality that gives way to symbolic activity. This symbol allows man to manage reality for his own use but that does not mean that it is in favor of communities. However, this conception of symbolism gives way to the *Weltanschauung*, or “worldview” which in the symbol finds a functional tool of implementation.

Between 1923 and 1929 Cassirer devoted himself to the writing of the book *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*^{* 9} published in three volumes (Fig.3) and where the concept of symbolism is analyzed by reading the meaning that this has taken on especially in the context of Greek culture. In this context, the word *συμβάλλειν* indicates the meeting between two parties, indicates “putting it together”, and then to establish an agreement. Therefore, the symbol indicates the involvement of multiple parties within an objective system.

However, the concept of a symbol in Cassirer’s theory evokes a knowledge that does not necessarily depend on what is observed. In truth, the symbol in Cassirer represents content that is not always accessible.

Let’s look at the language of art. For example, in a museum, the object we are looking at can be translated as text, so the artist’s words that have materialized. Meanwhile, words, while limited to a particular meaning and understood within a linguistic code, free communication from any space-time condition that would block the subject observing or listening in an eternal present and in a fixed place. It is possible thanks to the symbolic character of language and therefore of art to talk about what is not necessarily real. The symbol, from the most intuitive to the most theoretical, does not base its “existence” in a reality that is exhausted *hic et nunc*, but differently, it presents itself as a representative of totality, of a complex of possible contents, in front of each of the which this symbol represents universality.

This allows art to be a language that adapts to different cultures and its meaning is connected to the paradigms inherited from each culture.

* 8 Fornero G. Tassinari S., 2002, *Le filosofie del Novecento*, Vol. I, Bruno Mondadori, Milano.

* 9 Cassirer E., ed. 1970, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (Complete in three volumes): Language; Mythical Thought; The Phenomenology of Knowledge, Yale University Press.

So to build a knowledge not conditioned by sensitive experience and to aspire to a universal representation it is essential that this knowledge is not conditioned by space that interferes with all things. Otherwise, it is important to establish a certain distance from the context to ensure the emancipation of thought and to implement a more lucid and less conditioned cognitive process.

However, it is important to observe that this interference with the context, if on the one hand slows down the contacts between man and reality, on the other hand it allows a deeper inclusion precisely in this reality, through those symbols that are able to converge the multiplicity sensitive content according to a universal order, so as to make it declining to different cultural contexts.

It is interesting to reread these assumptions of Cassirer, for example, within the language of Christian theology to define the contents of specific dogmatic and religious processes. The contemplative power of art has taken on a strong symbolic value and constitutes a means by which man has approached the divine, thus creating a symbol that, according to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, in *Maximen und Reflexionen* n.1113 (1827), transforms the phenomenon in idea and idea in image; in this way the image can always remain unattainable but universally understandable.

However, it is difficult to find a field of spirit between mythology, philosophy, art, technology, medicine or psychology, in which the word "symbol" has not been used, but today it has become a fashionable word.

The meaning of Culture

To the symbolism is combined with the study of critical idealism that underpins the philosophy of culture. It is known to all that after the birth of the New Science (17th century), idealism and mechanistic empiricism reappear and intertwine, conditioning the whole worldview. In fact, the idealism of science had opened the doors and new interpretations of the world, to new cultural paradigms and this had laid the foundations for the development of a new critical thinking^{* 10}.

This critical thinking places the accept on the value of Culture. But what do we mean

* 10 Abbagnano N., 1927, *Il nuovo idealismo inglese e americano*, Napoli; Cassirer E., 1997, *I concetti di spazio e tempo dell'idealismo critico e la teoria della relatività* (cap. V), in Id., *Teoria della relatività di Einstein*, with an Introduction by G. Raio, Newton Compton, Roma, 1997, pp. 111-137, in part. pp. 114-122.

by the word culture? Let's analyze the etymology of the word.

The word Culture comes from the Greek language. Its root is found in the term "education", ethical and moral training of young people and citizens.

The culture constitutes the set of intellectual knowledge that, acquired through study, reading, experience, the influence of the environment and reworked in a subjective, critical and autonomous way, becomes a building block of personality. Culture contributes to enriching the spirit, to develop and improve individual characteristics, in particular, the ability to judge.

Culture, therefore, contributes to the intellectual and moral formation of the individual and promotes the growth and awareness of its social role for the development of humanity. In fact, the heritage of knowledge and experience acquired during life are fundamental to contribute to the development of knowledge in all its many aspects. Certainly, the formation of the communities allows activating development processes fundamental to the realization of increasingly evolved societies. However, only with cultural support can every action of man be characterized by two components, spiritual and aesthetic, that are fundamental to be able to appreciate and valorize the world in which we live. Culture is, therefore, a fundamental component to building important projects based on a "humanistic conception" of the world *¹¹.

Ernst Cassirer in particular says that Culture is not a speculative issue. It is often thought that culture is a complex system of theories; different culture requires only a simple system of actions.

[...] Culture means an organic set of verbal and moral activities: activities that are not conceived in purely abstract terms but show the constant tendency to realize. This realization – this construction and reconstruction of the empirical world – is an integral part of the very concept of culture and constitutes one of the essential and most characteristic traits *¹².

Reworking the concept of symbolism, Cassirer considers culture as a symbolic universe created by man to develop its very existence. However, the different ways in which the human spirit develops represent precisely the different symbolic expressions created by

*¹¹ Lee E.Y. J., Niglio O., 2019, *Cultural Diplomacy & Heritage*, Tab edizioni, Roma.

*¹² Cassirer E., 1981, *Simbolo, mito e cultura*, a cura di Donald Phillip Verene, Laterza, Bari-Roma, pp. 73-74. The translation of the original text from Italian to English has realized by Olimpia Niglio.

man in the process of interpreting reality and his experiences.

The physical world is no longer the human world represented by the cultural universe. This is true because this physical world is what man has built through the symbols that he himself has made to make sense of his living. However, the cultural universe represents the true and unique "habitat" where a man can develop his existence and where the symbols of language, art, religion, and politics form a very complex plot and help the progress of knowledge.

We can compare this symbolic plot to an architecture where each element contributes to giving meaning to a form that has a content and that must fulfill a function useful to the life of man.

This conception of reality integrates the physical world into the cultural world. In fact, man does not live in two distinct and overlapping areas. In truth, man lives in a single reality where culture defines the physical world that constantly changes in relation to the individual and therefore to his critical thinking * 13.

So the cultural references are symbolic and therefore do not present a real existence in the physical world but contribute to create a "value" to this world * 14. An example can be a sculpture. The use of the marble block transforms matter into an ornament, into a work of art. Its transformation is only determined by a symbolic will of a man who transforms marble into a sculpture. So its meaning depends on the man but its original and natural existence does not change.

So the culture is a system of symbolic forms where every element does not enjoy autonomy except a close relationship that exists with the other elements that make up this system.

The world of Culture is therefore formed by a system of forms that are an expression of the spirit of each individual. These forms give rise to verbal and moral activities that are not abstract but otherwise require a lot of energy for their realization. In fact, Cassirer, as we have already noted, considers culture to be an active and non-passive system and therefore where actions are fundamental * 15.

The culture is, therefore, the progressive objectification of our human experience:

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* 13 Cassirer E., 1972, , Critical work 1964-1970, in *Bulletin of Bibliography*, n.29, pp. 21-24.

* 14 Paetzold H., 2002, *Symbol and Culture: Cassirer's Concept*, in Foss G. & Kasa E. (eds.), "Forms of Knowledge and Sensibility: Ernst Cassirer and the Human Sciences. Høyskoleforlaget. pp. 22-33.

* 15 Cassirer E., 1979, *Language and Art II*, in "Symbol, Myth and Culture. Essays and Lectures, 1935-1945", New Haven, Yale University, pp. 194-195.

the objectification of our feelings, thoughts, emotions, ideas, and intuitions. The specific result of cultural creation is the construction of a world of thoughts and feelings, a world of humanity that pretends to be a common world, rather than the individual dream of each. From this concept also comes a humanistic vision of the world.

If we then analyze all this with respect to the different cultural forms present in the world then it is easy to guess that preconceived patterns cannot help to understand symbolic reality. Differently, preconceptions only contribute to the slow and unproductive development of the human world.

Respecting different cultures we are all invited to learn about the symbolic forms and cultural phenomena of the archetypes that define our existence: language, history, science, art, religion. All these symbolic forms contribute to the realization of content that cannot be universal; on the contrary, these symbolic forms contribute to creating a world, from time to time different and that relates to the needs of man. This aspect is very important to appreciate and enhance cultural differences.

So the language, myth, religion, art, science are all symbols that man has consciously realized to interpret reality and dialogue with it. Each symbol becomes a mirror of our existence and also the existence of the symbol develops in relation to the dynamics that govern human life * 16.

In this complex system Cassirer identifies three main functions:

- (a) The *expressive function* that forms the foundation of all things and helps to build the myth that is the first expression of man's cultural activities.
- (b) The *representative function* that creates the language.
- (c) The *conceptual function* that is the one that generates knowledge and therefore characteristic typical of mathematical thought and natural sciences.

Each of these functions contributes to the symbolic forms but then each individual uses these in relation to their own needs. Surely everyone has known the categories of "space" and "time" but their perception changes in relation to the individual and his culture. Certainly the "space" of an artist is not the same concept of "space" for a mathematician; likewise, a straight line can have different meanings. This implies that every symbolic form requires an individual interpretation that comes only from man.

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* 16 Cassirer E., 1974, *The Logic of Humanities*, Yale University Press, New Haven.

[...] The main purpose of all forms of culture is precisely the task of building a common world of thought and feeling, for a human world that wants to be an individual dream, or a quirk or imagination no less individual. In the construction of this universe of culture, individual forms do not obey a preconceived and predetermined pattern, a pattern that can be described once and for all on the basis of an a priori procedure. All we can do is follow the slow development that manifests itself in the history of the various forms and indicate, to say the truth, the milestones of this journey * 17.

Thus analyzing the philosophy of Cassirer culture, he confirms that art is an authentic symbolic form, through which the world comes to be configured and the different experiences related to the formalization of language and all other forms are organized. Symbolic. Art, like science, offers order in thoughts and moral order in actions, so art plays a fundamental role in the formation phase of the individual.

The main feature of art is its linguistic value that cares about building forms. The aesthetic perception of this art belongs to a more complex and superior order of ordinary sensitive perception, because in art reality is not conceptualized, but rather perceptual: impressions are not reproduced, but forms are created that they are not abstract, but sensitive.

Art is a peculiar type of language that does not use verbal symbols but intuitive symbols. Those who do not understand these intuitive symbols, can not feel the colors, know the figures, perceive spatial forms, harmonies, and melodies, so it is excluded from the art world. All this does not mean that art is an aesthetic joy that few can perceive; Differently, the knowledge of art needs a deeper dimension to which not all men are interested.

In fact, the knowledge of art implies an aesthetic experience that goes beyond the mere perception that can be reduced only to mythical, religious or other considerations. For this reason, the reference to symbolic forms takes on an individual value * 18.

* 17 Cassirer E., 1981, *Simbolo, mito e cultura*, op. cit., p.81.

* 18 Itzkoff, S.W., 1971, *Ernst Cassirer: Scientific Knowledge and the Concept of Man*, University of Notre Dame Press, Indiana; Itzkoff, S.W., 1977, *Ernst Cassirer Philosopher of Culture*, Twayne Publishers, Boston.

The critical fortune of the “man who creates culture” in Cassirer’s thinking

The great production of books and articles written by Cassirer during his life, with particular reference to Western scientific knowledge, have allowed inheriting wide documentation with very suggestive analyses and descriptions still very Current.

The innovative aspect is that his reflections are intended to make us reflect on themes that are always rational but whose approach is more related to vision, imagination, feelings and for this reason, from a cultural point of view, the theories of Cassirer’s are truly innovative to this day. The man who creates culture is certainly a fundamental theme of his thought and constitutes a very stimulating chapter of his scientific production.

Of course, to do all this Cassirer was not a closed scholar, that is, he did not only look at his discipline but, like a good philosopher, tried to open dialogues with many other cultural and research contexts. A demonstration of all this is a beautiful letter in which Cassirer, a philosopher, writes to Albert Einstein, a physicist, to ask for a cover letter for a student of art history interested in a period of study in Japan (Fig. 4). Edgar Wind, a pupil of Cassirer, was an important historian of interdisciplinary art, a member of the Warburg school and first professor of art history at the University of Oxford.

Ernst Cassirer to Albert Einstein, January 27, 1924 * 19

Esteemed colleague,

one of my former students, Dr. Edgar Wind, asks me to write you a few words to inform you about his scientific aptitude, as he wants your reference letter for an academic place in Japan. As far as I’m concerned, I can only say the best about Dr. Wind. He studied with me for a long time and I had the opportunity not only to learn about his scientific work but to approach him also humanly. I believe that he possesses a particular talent both in his basic subject matter, the history of art, as well as in philosophy and that in both areas, although his economic position allows him only a little free time, he will have the ability to improve himself: already his thesis of degree was a

* 19 D’Avanzo I.B., De Biase R. (eds.), 2019, *Ernst Cassirer. Epistolario scientifico (1893-1929)*, Aracne Editrice, Roma, pp.95-96. Translation from Italian to English by Olimpia Niglio.

great test of talent.

As far as his personality is concerned, I think it is particularly valid for the honesty and purity of his character, for his scientific title and his particular diligence. I also believe that you will not regret it if you grant him your desired letter of reference. Let me, on this occasion, renew my most fervent and profound admiration, assuring you the warmest greeting from the

His
Ernst Cassirer

This letter demonstrates Cassirer's great professionalism and his "creativity" beyond the limits of a discipline that if it does not relate to other cultural contexts risks are to involve and die.

However, although Cassirer's philosophy has been so positive and innovative, unfortunately as always happens this recognition took place after his death and for many years his theories have been much criticized and considered devoid of "systematicity". Symbolic values were not understood. Among his greatest critics, of course, is the Canadian epidemiologist Robert Nadeau, who points out gaps in symbol theory, especially if these symbols are analyzed in relation to different genetic aspects * 20.

This certainly has its base but it should be remembered that Cassirer was aware of the cultural differences that he himself had known directly working in different countries because of his Jewish origins. Origins that have certainly been a fundamental and important resource for his studies.

These symbolic themes had also affected the themes of cultural anthropology and Edward Burnett Tylor, an English anthropologist, had commented mainly on Cassirer's early writings about symbolism and believed that the German philosopher did not had paid close attention to the symbolic forms, traditions, customs, collective values of different culture * 21.

There is no doubt that the most important objections to Cassirer's philosophy stem precisely from anthropology and epistemology and surely Kantian thought has

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* 20 Nadeau, R., 1990, *Cassirer et le programme d'une épistémologie comparée*, in Seidengart, J., *Ernst Cassirer. De Marbourg à New York. L'itinéraire philosophique* (Actes du colloque de Nanterre, 12-14/X/88), Cerf, Paris.

* 21 Tylor, E.B., 1987, *Antropología: Introducción al estudio del hombre y la civilización*, Alta Fulla, Barcelona.

contributed a lot to the cultural approach undertaken by Cassirer with reference to the scheme interpretive of the symbols.

Perhaps Kant's transcendentalism had somewhat limited Cassirer in his descriptions considered "rigid" by those who did not recognize explicit formalism in the experiences and realities he described.

Even the American anthropologist Clifford Geertz in his writings, commenting on Cassirer's symbolic theories, comes to the conclusion that the German philosopher often confuses symbols with the proper references of each culture * 22.

However, it is interesting to note that, in the difficult cultural context in which Cassirer had begun to develop his theories, an important goal was to demonstrate that every human-created cultural product is always mediating between the outside world and the subject that creates it. So the human world is the cultural world, but this also implies the existence of a pre-cultural reality, that is, represented by the intuitions on which man then creates culture. These insights are found as a reference in Plato's thought that affirmed the existence of innate and primordial ideas.

These ideas are closely related to the identity of the subject and cannot be mediated. The development of these ideas allows man to build a world made of symbols and therefore a cultural world. Therefore, man is the one who creates culture and therefore builds his symbols.

Certainly this is a very interesting reason to consider Cassirer's thinking a fundamental reference for the philosophy of culture.

Conclusions for cultural sustainability

Although Cassirer's thinking has not been valued and only in recent decades has he found interest in some scholars, his research is certainly a fundamental reference for those who want to deepen the value that culture assumes in the development of humanity.

We live in a very delicate historical moment and all over the world are open revolutionary hotbeds that are a mirror of a reality that has clearly overshadowed the value of culture and its teaching.

Contrary to what the history of peoples all over the world has passed on to us, today

* 22 Geertz, C., 1968, *Religion as a cultural system*, en *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*, Ed. Michael Banton, Tavistock, London, pp. 1-46.

culture is no longer an important reference for the construction and development of communities.

In fact, unlike the teachings received by ancient communities such as that of the Egyptians, the Greeks, the Inca, and Mayan peoples or the great Eastern Dynasties, today culture is no longer a basis in support of communities most interested in profits without giving them a sustainable value for future generations.

Surely we live in a deep period of identity and therefore cultural crisis determined by material factors that have been considered priorities over more humanistic and egalitarian principles.

The great social unrest that is uniting all over the world mirrors supremacy that has no longer looked to communities as opportunities for development but, differently, has oppressed man in a vortex of minimal subsistence where the power of the strongest is Dominant.

All this has led to great inequalities where the cultural aspect has been suppressed with the consequent enhancement of principles that are not always ethically correct and proactive.

It is therefore essential to regenerate the value of culture as a tool for human development and sustainability in order to put the needs of communities back at the center.

The United Nations Organization has also outlined the objectives for the new 21st century in recent years and has highlighted the concept of “cultural sustainability” whose points are also well expressed in the 2030 Agenda *²³.

Certainly the notions of economic sustainability, environmental sustainability are well known but now it is necessary to focus on the cultural heritage of each community that through its own academies and creative cultural enterprises must build the skeleton strategic development. Too often it is thought that culture is a “luxury asset” intended for a few people. Otherwise, culture is not a luxury asset, but it is a fundamental necessity for the life of communities. Culture is an essential part of the life of every individual and precisely during times of crisis, in which the compass of ethics and morality has been lost, which it is essential to put the role of culture as an engine of development at the center.

At a time when communities have overshadowed the value of culture, they have

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* ²³ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld> (consultato il 30 Novembre 2019)

decided not to bet on life anymore. Every man represents the culture and at a time when the policies of individual countries no longer look at culture, then this indicates that one no longer looks to the man. Culture involves investing in deep, historical, immeasurable values.

History teaches us that all communities have lived in culture and for the culture. In different languages of the world, culture constitutes “our permanent habitat”. Culture is, in fact, our observatory and laboratory; it is our dictionary, it is our irreducible identity as well as our form of openness to others and into the unknown.

Culture is certainly a fundamental means of accessing knowledge but not of code, or of a standard or convention. Different culture allows us to enter into ourselves to better dialogue with others. Culture is a window that opens up to a world of opportunity but is also a mirror of our soul and the ability we have to put ourselves in constructive dialogue with the world.

Unlike what we are witnessing in recent years when culture has become a symbol of the “detention industry” and economic affairs. The real culture, on the other hand, is one that establishes constructive dialogues with the needs of life and opens up opportunities to face the complexity of reality. This is what Ernst Cassirer teaches us in his dimension of critical idealism but whose principles find interesting results also in the writings of George Steiner *²⁴. In particular, in an interesting interview with Steiner in December 2011 *²⁵ we read:

[...] Culture is in danger of becoming provincial. Perhaps we need to rethink our entire conception of culture. I would like share with you an experience that I found infinitely moving: one evening, I was asked by one of my Cambridge colleagues with whom I was having dinner, a charming man who is also a Nobel prize laureate, for help in deciphering a text by Lacan, which he found baffling. I was very touched that a great scientist could be so modest when faced with the pride and haughtiness of a Byzantine master of obscurity...

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*²⁴ Boyers, R., 1993, George Steiner as Cultural Critic: Confronting America, in *New England Review (1990-)*, Vol. 15, n.2, pp. 136-156; Ward, G., 1993, George Steiner and the Theology of Culture, in *New Blackfriars*, Vol. 74, n.868, February, pp. 98-105.

*²⁵ <https://voxeurop.eu/en/content/article/1320071-george-steiner-certain-idea-knowledge> (consultato il 2 Dicembre 2019).

With absolute certainty, we must start from this example of high cultural morality that has left too much room for the arrogant supremacy that has produced forms of obscurantism that we certainly cannot define as a culture. The hope is that the new generations, analyzing today's mistakes well, can be builders of a better world where culture is the generator of creative languages open to dialogue and inclusion.

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Fig. 1
Ernst Cassirer

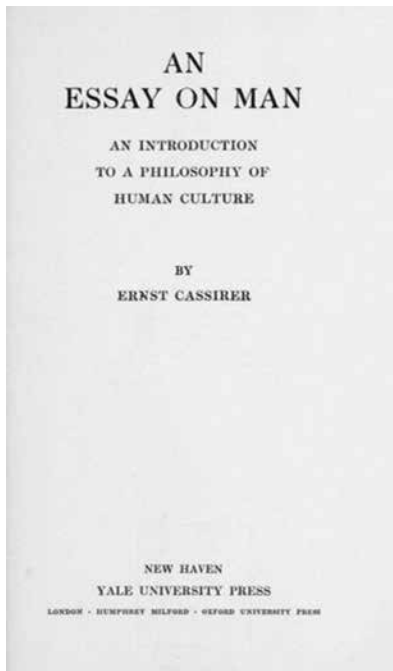


Fig. 2
Cover of the book "A essay on man"
published the first time in 1944
in Hamburg, Germany

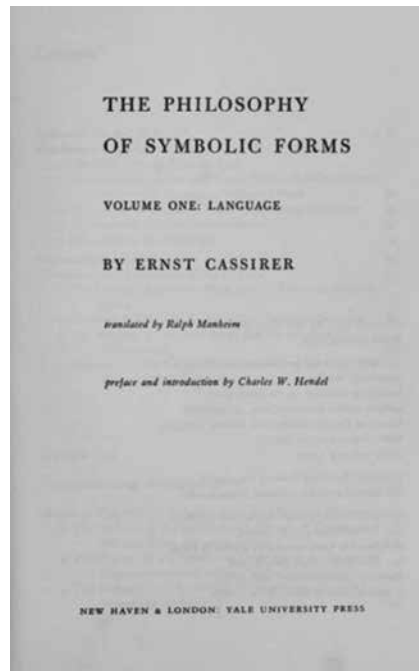


Fig. 3
Cover of the book "The Philosophy of
Symbolic Forms"
written between 1923 and 1929

46. Ernst Cassirer an Albert Einstein, 27. Januar 1924

Hochverehrter Herr Kollege!

Ein früherer Schüler von mir, Dr. Edgar Wind, bittet mich um einige Worte an Sie, in denen ich Ihnen über seine wissenschaftliche Befähigung Auskunft gebe, da er für eine Stelle, die er in Japan in Aussicht hat, Ihre Empfehlung wünscht. Was mich betrifft, so kann ich über Dr. Wind nur das Beste sagen. Er hat lange Zeit bei mir studiert und ich hatte dabei Gelegenheit, ihn nicht nur in seiner wissenschaftlichen Arbeit kennen zu lernen, sondern ihm auch menschlich näher zu kommen. Ich glaube, daß er sowohl für sein Hauptfach, die Kunstgeschichte, wie auch für Philosophie eine starke Begabung besitzt, und daß er in beiden Gebieten, wenn seine wirtschaftliche Lage ihm nur einige Muße gewährt, einmal sehr Tüchtiges leisten wird: schon seine Doktorarbeit war eine starke Talentprobe.¹²³ Was seine Persönlichkeit betrifft, so schätze ich ihn wegen der Geradheit und Gediegenheit seines Charakters und wegen seines wissenschaftlichen Grades und Arbeitseifers besonders hoch. Ich glaube also, daß Sie es in keiner Weise zu bereuen haben werden, wenn Sie ihm die von ihm gewünschten Empfehlungen geben.

Erlauben Sie mir, Sie bei dieser Gelegenheit erneut meiner herzlichsten und tiefsten Verehrung zu versichern und seien Sie herzlich gegrüßt von

Ihrem
Ernst Cassirer.

Fig. 4
Original copy of the letter to Albert Einstein by Ernst Cassirer, January 27, 1924
[Central Library, University of Naples "Federico II"]

The Creativity and the Culture in the Critical Idealism of the Philosopher Ernst Cassirer

Olimpia NIGLIO

The historical events of the 21st century have once again put the topic of Culture at the center of international debates. Culture certainly has a fundamental value for the peace and stability of the world and constitutes the set of values that give meaning to the community. Culture, in fact, includes all those components through which a nation dialogues with other cultures. This is how Cultural Diplomacy was born.

However, it is essential to reflect on the ideological origins of the value of Culture and to start from these ideologies in an attempt to reconstruct a methodological path that can support laws and treaties of international collaboration. In this context is inserted the reinterpretation of the critical ideology of Ernst Cassirer and his desire to put the value of Culture back at the center. In fact, Culture in all its manifestations is an essential tool for understanding the identity of a people and represents the material and intangible heritage fundamental to deal constructively with the objectives of globalization and contemporary. The German philosopher, who was familiar with the theories of Kant and Hegel, had written extraordinary pages on which it is very important to return to reflect.

This contribution aims to address a re-reading of some of Cassirer's writings and bring readers closer to reflecting on the value of culture as fundamental to a more inclusive and forward-looking world. The considerations analyzed in the contribution are also supported in several contemporary bibliographic references that are an excellent basis for future research developments on these specific issues.