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LIFELONG LEARNING FROM ETHICAL PERSPECTIVE

Abstract

The author reflects upon the specific character of ethics as a domain of knowledge that came into being in order to gather truths, which would help human beings to wisely take care of themselves. She argues that the ethical perspective should be taken into account while planning the lifelong learning activities. Further, she notes that if the goal for lifelong education would only be the constant development of knowledge and professional skills, then it may pose a danger of treating people who participate in such programs as merely enhanced means to an end. In such cases praxeology seems to be more useful than ethics. The author writes about the relationship between education and subjectivity and describes the educational situation as an organized encounter in designed surrounding. She claims that the person planning the situation, the one carrying it out, and the one partaking in it as a pupil are all responsible for the result of the educational situation. She emphasizes that the *ergon* is necessary for creating ethical educational situations. The aim of the educational activity carried out within the lifelong learning system should be, she claims, the experience of truth, good, and beauty.

The Need for Lifelong Learning and the Specific Character of Ethics

Theoreticians and practitioners have noticed that the dynamic of the changes in human environment constrain lifelong learning. We discern the necessity of constant improvement and development of competences, as well as, more and more often the need for retraining. The constantly changing world is an inspiration for education allowing to make a better use of the opportunities created by the new reality not only in the sphere of professional activity.

It is often emphasized that the goal of lifelong learning is to maintain or to enrich the knowledge and professional skills (Le Robert, 1990). It should be noted, however, that if we decide to identify the goal of lifelong learning only with the constant development of knowledge and professional skills, we may verge upon treating the human being as a tool enhancing the chances for attaining a certain goal; the goal to reach the highest productivity efficiency in various spheres of human activity. A logical consequence of having such a goal is mercantilization of education. In such a situation the ethical perspective disappears from the reflection on education and it is exchanged for the praxeological one.

Ethics as a domain of knowledge came into being in order to be a collection of truths needed by human beings to wisely take care of themselves. Ethicists seek the answer to the question how human acts should be conducted. Attaining knowledge, skills and competencies needed for such a conduct should be the result of partaking in the educational process. Teaching and learning should be related to the care for the human being.

Praxeology pertains to human activity, too, but it is interested in the effectiveness and economy of actions, and not in whether the consequences of those actions bring about good or evil. Praxeologists look for the answers on the questions

regarding the issue: how efficiently and economically realize the goals? The reflection on the sense of the goals perceived from the perspective of human goodness must be carried out by ethicists.

In order to act wisely one has to be able to employ both, the ethical and praxeological perspectives. For the two perspectives should be taken into account if one wants to understand human actions and plan them sensibly. It should be noted that the ethical perspective is related to that what should be, and hence, it may go beyond that what is. Ethics appeals to the universal values and should not give in to pressure of some concrete practice systems. It should suggest the directions of actions which will result in wisdom of human beings and a human-friendly world. An important advice that should not be forgotten by pedagogues is Kant's practical imperative. The philosopher claims that if one wants to behave ethically, one should always treat every human being, both oneself and others, as the goal of actions and not as a means required for reaching the goal (Kant, 1984, p. 68).

The consequence of accepting efficiency as the basic criterion for the assessment of actions is the fact that esteem is accorded to such technocrats who see morality as something that limits the efficiency of actions, and the old philosophical discipline – ethics – seems redundant. The characteristic feature of pseudo-professionalism, which is rootless and lacking the broad context that allows to understand the meaning of actions, is limiting the perspective of thinking and ignoring the long-term outcomes of the undertaken actions (Wiśniewski, 1995). When the awareness of the responsibility pertinent to the sense of authorship disappears, when the subjectivity of the person undertaking the action is lost in the thick of extemporary goals, it is a signal that he or she is unable to find the time for ethical reflection. In consequence we observe that quite often the outcomes of human actions lead to significant damage in social and natural environment; that human beings act against themselves. In order to be able to do good, human beings should not only be efficient but responsible, as well. Moreover, they should be able to experience and recognize values. In the rapidly changing world the latter skill is greatly valuable. It is difficult to realize the subjectivity without it.

Subjectivity

The category of subjectivity is associated, for a reason, mainly with the paradigm of modern thinking. In that thinking paradigm the subject is an important element of the relation schema that orders the understanding of "facts" and the relations between them. In the subject-object schema it means that active is that what has the capability of perceiving, changing, wanting, producing.

Thinking about relations within the modern, simplifying, linear and unidirectional subject – object schema one objectifies everything what belongs to the area of cognitive or practical activity. We as well become the "object" of our reflection and may become the "object" of our actions. It is a short way to instrumental treating others and ourselves instrumentally. In the modern subject-object schema, where the subject's freedom is contrasted with any conditionings, it is easier to treat oneself as a means to an end, than as the end. Kant's practical imperative arises as a response to that easiness (Kant, 1984, p. 68).

However, the subject can be conceived differently – as the "source" of the activity based in a certain system of behaving and understanding, and leading to a

particular end. Such an understanding makes us resign from an antagonizing way of thinking.

An interesting concept of the subject is proposed by in Roman Ingarden's philosophy. He proffered an original theory of systems and an interesting notion of "relatively isolated systems". This notion turned to be useful in discussing the requirements the subject of responsibility must comply with. In the opinion of the Polish phenomenologist the fundamental condition for being the subject of responsibility is to have within oneself the acting center that allows for grasping the initiative (Ingarden, 1972, p. 133). According to the philosopher an acting person (a certain entirety constituted by the unity with the body) must form a relatively isolated system, which is a system of a particular kind that is unreachable for inanimate objects but which may not also be realized in every living beings (1972, p. 134). If we employ such a notion of the subject, we must emphasize the importance of preparing the human being for responsible actions.

We face a dangerous phenomenon today – the domination of the world of notions over that what is unreachable for the discourse, and in consequence, the domination of the discourse and virtual world over that what is real. When we try to understand reality in the framework of the discourse imposed order, we resign from opening ourselves up to that what is beyond the discourse. The word may lose its creative power and become a refuge for the human being escaping from it. Theories will not be the result of "love of wisdom" any more, but tendentious constructs, which aim not at the truth but at attaining an alleged good. If we do not value the truth, if we do not know it, we are unable to realize our will. As the source of our actions we are unable to be either wise or efficient. We need to prepare ourselves for experiencing the truth because it is worthy to learn how to discover it. The truth is not limited and learning it does not have to take place in a defined certain time. The idea of lifelong learning harmonizes with the understanding of the discovered by Socrates the specificity of the truth.

The Educational Situation – an Organized Encounter in Designed Surrounding

Martin Heidegger in his analysis of the word *ethos* discovers an important intuition regarding the meaning of the interrelationship between the human being and a broadly understood environment, which also includes the spiritual dimension. In his *Letter on Humanism* he modifies the hitherto prevailing, in his opinion somewhat falsified translation of that word. Heidegger states: "If the name 'ethics', in keeping with the basic meaning of the word *ethos*, should now, say that ethics ponders the abode of the human being" (2008, p. 256). If we accept the proposed by Heidegger translation of the word *ethos*, we must realize how important "the abode", the open space of human dwelling is for the realization of the essence of the human being.

In his etymological analysis of the word *ethos* Józef Tischner observes that in the original sense it is a place where a plant may develop without hindrances, where it can live and bear fruit (1982, p. 53). He believes that a living creature, in order to "bear fruit", must find its proper *ethos*, i.e., the "environment", "dwelling", living space. In Tischner's opinion the objective point of properly practiced ethics should be an introduction of the internal order in the human being, i.e., the internal

integration (1982, p. 53). The *ethos* co-created by the human being favors such an internal order, an interruption of which is dangerous for the human being and, in consequence, for the environment the human being stays in relation with. The surrounding allows us to discover and realize our potential.

If we appreciate the meaning of the surrounding, we may reflect upon the specificity of the educational situation. Every situation, where the human being is involved has an educational dimension. However what is called educational situation is the situation that is designed and organized in order to attain the planned outcomes related to knowledge, skills and competencies. How to plan an educational situation to ensure that it is friendly to all the participants?

Approaching the task from the ethical perspective, which emphasizes freedom and human authorship, one may reach the conclusion that the educational situation should foster discovering the truth, learning how to carry out good deeds and experience beauty. It should enable the contact with the three fundamental and universal values of the European culture: truth, goodness, and beauty.

Such a way of looking at the problem of education does not harmonize with the postmodern thinking. In the postmodern reflection the universality of values brings about anxiety, as any form of constancy does, just like anything that may assign to itself and strengthen the human activity and the existence of the being. The fear of constancy is accompanied by a longing for a certain “disappearing aesthetics” that remains in the hearing metaphor. This longing harmonizes with the resignation from the classical perspective of truth, goodness, and beauty. We should notice however that without that perspective the reality becomes a positive universe of facts; the universe that does not have to be true, does not undergo evaluation, does not captivate. Then, not only disappears the distinction between the truth and false but also the difference between that what is apparent and that what is real.

For the educational situation to be ethical, it must prepare for avoiding the trap of tentativeness, which confines human beings in that what is, and it deprives them of the possibility of being creative; it disenchant the world and conjures it in the *profanum*. The educational situation should foster the discovery of multidimensional nature of the world and protect it from flattening and trivialization. It should help humans to unveil their own capabilities and assist in comprehending what freedom and responsibility are about.

Who is Responsible for the Educational Situation?

In order to reach positive outcomes of an educational situation the involvement of all the situation participants is required. The person planning the situation, the one carrying it out, and the one partaking in it as a pupil are all responsible. In the case of lifelong learning, the situations may occur where one person can play all three roles at the same time. In the reflection on the relations in the educational situation it is often emphasized that all the participants are simultaneously pupils and teachers. It is noted that such a situation is open and dynamic. People participating in it are responsible for the results they are set to achieve.

The goal of the educational situation is a change in the scope of knowledge, skills and competencies possessed by the participants of such a situation. In order to achieve that goal, all the participants have to do their work. Ethics defines work as a conscious, purposeful human activity, which results in a change of reality. The

distinction between the types of work that is to be found in the ancient Greeks' reflection seems important. They introduced the differentiation between *ergon* and *kopos*. The *ergon* is the work carried out for its direct outcome. It enables satisfaction and free citizens' activity. The *kopos* on the other hand is the work carried out for the equivalent we get for the time and effort dedicated to the completion of the task; it is a toilsome employ of the slaves. It should be noted that the *ergon* is related to the sense of responsibility for the results of the activity, and *kopos* is linked to feeling responsible towards those who assess us and who provide us with the expected equivalent. The *ergon* is necessary for creating ethical educational situation. What direct outcome do we want to reach in the case of educational activity? Is it experiencing the truth, goodness, and beauty? The Platonic triad marks the areas, which correspond to the three attitudes towards reality. The truth recapitulates the cognitive attitude, goodness – the moral attitude, beauty – the aesthetic one. We should take into account these values while planning an educational situation. The aim of the *ergon* carried out within the lifelong learning system should be to experience them. For then, we will avoid the trap, observed already by Socrates, of “going around in circles”, which can successfully keep us in the reality we have constructed on the basis of the dogmatically treated truths established in the currently valid paradigm of science.

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