

Original Paper

Some Aspects of Respect and Dignity of Individual

On the Europeanism as Values-system: Moral and Individual

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Received: October 26, 2022 Accepted: November 7, 2021 Online Published: November 20, 2022

doi:10.22158/eshs.v3n4p9

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/eshs.v3n4p9>

Abstract

The most philosophical writer of the 20th century, Robert Musil wrote: the individual is nothing else but one's own primary performance. God has become Deus absconditus—claims Milan Kundera—humans have become all's stone. In this matter, Europeanism signifies that the individual becomes what one makes oneself become. I think the great challenge of pedagogy (from theoretical and practical aspect aspect): how can the ability and competence of independent thinking be realised during educational work? How does the schooling system facilitate the development of the autonomy of pupils, students and teachers? In my opinion (summary of this study) the respect and dignity are the most beautiful and charming quests of Europeanism and education.

Keywords

value, individual, autonomy, philosophy of education

Motto: “the existence of mankind orients towards values”

Eduard Spranger

In the above-mentioned sections the concepts of virtue, moral, responsibility, diligence and so forth have been mentioned, but I have not discussed them one by one. Fortunately, Europeanism has aspects which are not related to the spheres of politics and economy but virtue and pedagogy. In that manner we must analyse ethical and pedagogical correlations.

The European development's and Europeanism's greatest invention beyond religious, political and economic evolution is that the individual's social role has become more important. In other words, it is the historical “debut” of the individual. The individual's general respect and dignity came into being that had not been experienced before. What does it mean? The most philosophical writer of the 20th

century, Robert Musil shortly summarises it: on this level of civilisation, “the individual is nothing else but one’s own primary performance” (Musil, 2000, p. 61). In the modern European civilisation, the individual has occurred as the autonomous, virtuous and responsible citizen possessing several skills, abilities and competences. The individual who chooses and professes her or his own life comes into being: who believes in her- or himself, own willpower and future. “God has become Deus absconditus—claims Milan Kundera—humans have become the philosopher’s stone” (Kundera, 1992, p. 177). In this matter, Europeanism signifies that *the individual becomes what one makes oneself become*.

Emphasizing once more, the European Union and Europeanism express a deeper contact and a more general value system than what a political and economic integration can mean. The thought and aim of the individual as a citizen are articulated, and her or his everyday struggle commences. The realisation of such an ideology and its practice or at least the attempt to put into practice give a moral starting point and content to the development process of Europeanism. Such general and important values, moral principles and virtue come at forefront, as the liberty of the individual, his/her autonomy, the faith in his/her own existence and power, the need and struggle for his/her own dignity, the respect of other individuals and the tolerance of other social groups, states and nations. Last but not least, the ability and competence of self-criticism. György Konrád (contemporary Hungarian writer and sociologist) grasps this correlation precisely: “Europe is [...] is where the most important value is the personal human dignity [...] where the liberty of thought, expression [...] prevails, where patriotism is contradictory to the interest of the whole continent [...] where the liberty of the individual cannot be violated, where they dignity of life is the alpha and omega of value judgement [...], where nobody can rule over the other, [...] Europe is at first in being able to criticise itself” (Konrád, 2004, p. 274, pp. 82-83, p. 384, p. 342).

A solemn value is being articulated on the author’s side. Although not everyone would accept the standpoint of the author, namely that the protection of the individual’s dignity is the most important value of Europeanism, one can be certain that the value based on the respect of the individual is as important as the progressive religious tolerance or dynamics of the capital in the history of Europe. If it is true (Why would one contest such an argument? One will become more convinced about it, if one reads the book of Tamás Barcsi, a contemporary Hungarian philosopher (Barcsi, 2013, pp. 399-301)), then one can easily admit that not only the history and theory of religion, economics, political science and legal science are competent in the research of Europeanism, but philosophy, ethics and *pedagogy* as well.

In relation to pedagogy, I raise attention to the unfortunate situation that the connection between Europeanism and pedagogy has not been accentuated in either the Europe-research or the analysis of Europeanism. It was also disregarded by practical pedagogy and theory of education. It is an unfortunate fact that seemingly the aspect of education has been disregarded by researchers of Europe

and Europeanism! Researchers of pedagogical theory and pedagogues have not seemingly realised yet how important role they could have in educating students towards Europeanism. In my opinion, sciences interested in the topic of Europeanism could liberate themselves of the aristocratic bias which devalues or at least gives less importance to pedagogy as a science and practical pedagogy. In the other way around as well, pedagogical researchers and pedagogues should give up on their “comfortable” conception that they do not have any task in relation to Europe and Europeanism, because the science of history, political science, economics and so forth fulfil it.

One can see and experience that the respect, dignity and autonomy of the individual do not come into life on their own, one should *educate* children toward such values in a conscious and systematic way. Pedagogy’s primary task and challenge—although not exclusively—are the independent and concentrated representation of the above -mentioned three values (and other values as well) and value system which lie in Europeanism. From this point of view, one can easily identify oneself with Patočka’s argument, which seems brave at first glance, claiming that the essence of Europeanism in a broad sense is education (Patočka, 2003, p. 12). To put it differently, Europeanism as a theoretical and practical framework for given values becomes the tutor and cradle of humans and humanity (Poszler, 1989, p. 24, p. 54).

Let me briefly refer to a positive and a negative example for the utilisation of pedagogy in relation to the topic being discussed. 1) At the end of the 1990s the French education policy and science of pedagogy raised the attention to the task of clarifying the relation of education to Europeanism. Based on it, they suggested the introduction of the term “European dimensions”. Its main representative is Dominique Barthélemy, a French researcher and education politician who firmly stated: “When we are talking about Europe, we should think of the words civilisation and *value*. [...] The key term “European dimensions” [...] is a method for teachers and their students to practise a difficult task: doubt, humbleness and tolerance (Barthélemy, 1999, p. 65, p. 93, highlighted by me—K. S.). The author’s endeavour triggered a re-enactment which could even be felt in the Hungarian pedagogical research. One can only agree with the thesis that the essence of Europeanism can only be examined on the level of values. What is more, the concrete values in relation to education should be integrated into all spheres of education. Sadly, the motion in the beginning has become less intense. In my opinion, the *independent, direct and systematic* adaptation of such a value system in public education and higher education is still missing. 2) Without discussing the Hungarian education policy and pedagogical science in detail, I would like to briefly refer to two fresh publications. Both of them discuss what difficulties and challenges our educational system and practical pedagogy have. Péter Radó, while philosophising on the future of the school, raises our attention to the fact that “education towards citizenship cannot only be limited to [...] the ‘ghetto’ of civic education [...] Autocratic systems will become stupid, if the state and public political discourse become stupid” (Radó, 2017, p. 69, p. 159). The harsh criticism continues in János Szüdi’s book: “the idea of the state which solves everything is

part of the public thinking. Why would pedagogues think something else if they did not learn about [...] the essence of the democratic state, fundamental human rights and *European values*” (Szüdi, 2019, p. 177, highlighted by me—K. S.). The last two negative remarks can be an exaggeration, but it is obvious that there are a lot of things to do in order to clarify certain questions. For example, how does the schooling system facilitate the development of the autonomy of pupils, students and pedagogues? Or is it the other way around? Does it undermine autonomy? How can the ability and competence of independent thinking be realised during educational work? It is incontestable that the most important tasks of education are making children autonomous and making them respect the dignity of the individual. According to my conception, the latter one is its most beautiful and charming quest.

Let us get back to the respect of the individual’s dignity (not solely touching upon its pedagogical aspects)! More precisely to the dilemma that such a positive European value has some negative sides. Many important issues could be mentioned, but I focalise on two questions which reach beyond the value system of Europeanism: One of them concerns the process of global commercial, political and ecological crisis, and the other one is related to negative effects stemmed from the digital society. In connection with the former problem, one should analyse the thoughts of a famous Hungarian representative of applied philosophy, Tibor Szabó: “There are several threats to human existence on the Earth [...] which warn us more and more intensively that the planet cannot be exploited limitlessly [...] Instability has become persistent [...] in the age of economic and ecological crisis, instability reigned (and is still reigning) over the everyday life of human beings and international relations” (Szabó, 2014, pp. 217-218). According to these statements, we are facing such an enormous global problem which pushes humanity towards an era where instability is not a minor side effect among many other characteristics but the main and most important characteristic feature that determines everything. We have reached another era, it is called the *age of instability*, when humanity wages the bloodiest war against one another for crude oil, water, cleaner air, fertile land, religious faith, preservation of Western (and European) values or the destruction of them. Undoubtedly, under such political, economic and environmental circumstances partly triggered by the pandemic *the situation and security of the individual has been shaken*, individuals can be traumatised, and their existence can become insecure. Relating it to our topic: the beautiful principle, virtue and value of the respect and dignity of the individual *becomes less and less important and charming*.

Furthermore, we are also facing a new and grave danger when we consider the universal reign of the digital society. The application of digital tools brings along many novelties in all aspects of life. Its positive effects can be felt on a daily basis among the youth. It is a historic experience that all important scientific and technological inventions cause conflicts and paradoxes. Overcoming such negative repercussions can hinder the evolution of the normal and natural adaptation of human beings. In some cases, it makes such an adaptation completely impossible. One can experience various worrisome processes. The digitised world considerably affects the state of mind. The Hungarian

philosopher Miklós Almási summarises the problem in the following manner: “the other as a person is gradually disappearing. On Facebook and Twitter, we are surrounded by followers. In others words, by unknown figures who are around me, but as they are not actual human beings, they are unable to reflect on me, so my personality cannot develop. [...] the more followers one has the lesser chance one has to develop a socially integrated personality. One gets excluded from the real world and becomes the citizen of an alternative reality. The social nature of the individual is shaken. The individual as such has not completely disappeared, but the threads leading from the self to the other have been considerably weakened” (Almási, 2019, pp. 22-23). Social media, smartphones and other gadgets do not see individuals but mere data. They count on *creatures stripped of their intellect and emotions who do not live in the actual reality but in a parallel virtual universe, in the omnipotence of the online world*. If we consider that the machinery of the digitised society penetrates the private sphere and opens the way for shady businesses, sexual and aggressive instincts, it is superfluous to prove that we are distancing ourselves from the respect, dignity and autonomy of the individual.

We will philosophize on and argue a lot about the essence of individual. It does not matter in what way one elaborates on the topic, we can be certain that the desired and needed cooperation can only be established along common values.

A teacher is not directly made sure of the effectiveness of his/her job on a daily basis (not in the same way as other practitioners of other professions and vocations): the pupil might not be there “intellectually”; the child might be daydreaming. The pedagogue’s impact can manifest later in an indirect manner. In conclusion, I would like to refer to one of Krisztian Grecsó’s wonderful ideas. Krisztian Grecsó, a contemporary Hungarian writer and poet articulates: a real pedagogue has *a living oeuvre* (Grecsó, 2008, p. 136). In general, one can say that a pedagogue will never get a direct reassurance of her or his work. Independently of it, a teacher can believe that his or her educational work has meaning, significance and effect. Faith keeps the whole of our life in an intensive motion, strengthens one’s feeling of responsibility and can help one overcome one’s failures.

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- Barcsi, T. (2013). *Az emberi méltóság filozófiája [The Philosophy of Human Dignity]*. *Typotex, Budapest*, 399-401. I consider the author’s book to be a fundamental literature for the topic. I can only agree with him when he emphasizes the (possible) importance of education in making this basic value conscious.
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