

Kamilla Frejusz

ORCID: 0000-0001-7620-6599

Pontifical Faculty of Theology in Warsaw, Collegium Bobolanum, Poland

Authenticity and Education: Inspirations of Personal and Existential Pedagogy

Autentyczność a wychowanie –
inspiracje pedagogiki personalno-egzystencjalnej

ABSTRACT

Authenticity currently poses a tremendous challenge for the process of education. The authenticity of being, acting and interpersonal relations seems to be a particularly important subject in the context of the development of methods of communication that favor the possibilities of concealing one's true self and adopting the desired attitudes or behaviors. The article aims to show the category of authenticity and its complexity in the process of education in the sense of personal and existential pedagogy of Janusz Tarnowski. This category is a particularly important condition for Tarnowski, essential for a pedagogical process, often threatened by the use of unilateral violence. Tarnowski connects the authenticity with the realization of the one and only existence. The authenticity understood in this way includes the following factors: internal depth, intense training and life consistency. Therefore, the authenticity as a pedagogical category is included in the context of the "authentic existence" being at the same time the basis and condition for the existence of a real dialogue in the education.

KEYWORDS

authenticity, education, authentic existence, personal and existential pedagogy, Janusz Tarnowski

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE

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ABSTRAKT

Autentyczność stanowi współcześnie ogromne wyzwanie dla procesu wychowania. Autentyzm bycia, postępowania, relacji międzyludzkich wydaje się być tematem szczególnie istotnym w kontekście rozwoju sposobów komunikacji, które sprzyjają możliwościom ukrycia swego prawdziwego „ja” oraz przyjęciu żądanych postaw czy zachowań. Artykuł ma na celu ukazanie kategorii autentyczności i jej złożoności w procesie wychowania w rozumieniu personalno-egzystencjalnej pedagogiki Janusza Tarnowskiego. Kategoria ta stanowi dla Tarnowskiego warunek szczególnie ważny i niezbędny w procesie pedagogicznym, często zagrożonym użyciem jednostronnej przemocy. Tarnowski wiąże autentyczność z rzeczywistniem jedynej, niepowtarzalnej egzystencji. Tak rozumiana autentyczność zawiera w sobie następujące czynniki: głębię wewnętrzną, intensywny trening oraz życiową konsekwencję. Autentyczność jako kategorię pedagogiczną ujmuje on zatem w kontekście „autentycznej egzystencji”, będącej jednocześnie podstawą i warunkiem zaistnienia prawdziwego dialogu w wychowaniu.

Introduction

Today, being authentic is a huge challenge on many levels of human activity. The authenticity of being, acting, interpersonal relations seems to be a particularly important subject in the context of the development of methods of communication that favors the possibilities of concealing one's true self and adopting the desired attitudes or behaviors. The issue of authenticity in the process of education is all the more a challenge and a task. What does it really mean to be an authentic educator? What should the education be based on to be authentic? What is the real authenticity of man expressed in? We find answers to those questions in selected assumptions of Janusz Tarnowski's personal and existential pedagogy.

Describing the basics of his educational thought, Tarnowski enriches the concept of a person with new elements taken from existential philosophy. According to him, the features that characterize a person in existential terms include the following: accentuation of existence in full knowledge, individuality, authenticity, “tragic

optimism,” specific location, involvement, freedom and dialogue.¹ According to Tarnowski, those elements,

can be limited to three elements, namely: authenticity (...), because it is connected with the realization of the one and only existence (...); involvement (...), which results from the proper discovering of its specific location including its difficulties, conflicts, all tragedy (...); dialogity (...), that is in fact based on the recognition of freedom, both the own and the others ones.²

These three characteristics (authenticity, involvement and dialogue) are understood by Tarnowski as pedagogical categories that he introduces into existential education. He adds to these the category of encounter, drawn from existentialism which is the essence of education. According to Tarnowski, the purpose of educational influence should be

an existential encounter with God and people, which in turn leads to human and Christian involvement. Hence the educational path and the essence of personal and existential pedagogy consist of the following four pedagogical categories: dialogue, authenticity, encounter and involvement.³

For him, the encounter category is the purpose of education. Instead, dialogue, commitment and authenticity are understood as methods of Christian education.⁴ In this sense, the category of authenticity will be presented as a method in this article.

“Authentic existence”

For Janusz Tarnowski, “a particularly important and even essential condition—especially for the pedagogical process, often endangered by the use of unilateral violence—is the authenticity.”⁵ He connects connects this category “with the realization of the one and only

¹ Cf. J. Tarnowski, “Pedagogika egzystencjalna,” in: *Pedagogika*, vol. 1, eds. Z. Kwieciński, B. Śliwerski, Warszawa 2003, p. 257.

² Ibidem.

³ J. Tarnowski, *Jak wychowywać?*, Warszawa 1993, p. 9.

⁴ Cf. J. Tarnowski, *Problem chrześcijańskiej pedagogiki egzystencjalnej*, Warszawa 1982, pp. 178–179.

⁵ J. Tarnowski, *Jak wychowywać?*, op. cit., p. 126.

existence in a whole range of its variable possibilities.”⁶ Authenticity as a pedagogical category is included in the context of the “authentic existence” being at the same time, the basis and condition for the existence of a real dialogue. What does he mean by the term “authentic existence”? He presents this concept in two ways. In the negative sense, i.e., according to him “freeing ourselves from alienation (...), which occurs when man’s creations take power over him. Then a reification occurs, because he ‘is’ like the objects, and ceases (or does not begin) to exist humanly.”⁷ The human alienating factors, he mentions, include above all the opinion (of which man becomes a slave), then conformism, snobbery, fashion, daily automation (daily monotony of work and care for economic position) or functions fulfilled, and finally all the schemes and abstractions that rule in a technologized world. The alienation is characterized by the attitude of many people who can never overcome this state.

Through numerous processes of alienation resulting especially from the opinion of the environment, the projection of other people’s demands, the self-image or professional activities that is inconsistent with reality, a man, according to Tarnowski, wears a “mask.” This mask impedes the development of a man who “loses then authenticity, identifies himself with the role played and lives in self-deception, which dies when the environment changes. Therefore, it is necessary to remove the mask, awaken the person to authentic existence.”⁸ The mask is always an adulteration of reality. Tarnowski emphasizes that “it is wearing the mask that makes dialogue—especially in its personal and existential form—impossible to a large extent. Therefore, it is essential that the dialogue partners join it without any masks.”⁹ Tarnowski does not consider a total authenticity the removal of mask, he considers it only a partial, initial, “not yet positive” authenticity.¹⁰

It is much harder to unambiguously (and positively) define the identity of authentic existence. Referring to numerous authors and

⁶ J. Tarnowski, *Problem chrześcijańskiej pedagogiki egzystencjalnej*, op. cit., p. 173.

⁷ Ibidem, p. 206.

⁸ J. Tarnowski, *Człowiek – dialog – wychowanie. Zarys chrześcijańskiej pedagogiki personalno-egzystencjalnej*, Kraków 1991, p. 75.

⁹ J. Tarnowski, *Jak wychowywać?*, op. cit., p. 130.

¹⁰ Ibidem.

discussions in periodicals, Tarnowski attempts to express the content of the concept of “authenticity” with the help of the following four imperatives: “to be ourselves—to live consciously and independently decide about proper actions—not to undergo reification—to live actively.”¹¹ Especially the first of the above indications touches the essence of the issue the most. In his opinion, the authentic existence consists in conformity with the deepest “self”, what happens “when words and actions result from the most internal, personal attitude and are truly, intensely experienced.”¹² Tarnowski does not understand this conformity with own “self” not as fulfilling own preferences (identical to the so-called small “self”) but as a conformity with the deep, existential “self” being the core of personality, creating true authenticity.¹³ Therefore, the danger resulting from incorrect understanding of the authenticity is the subjectivism, and therefore seeing reality through the prism of the own small “self”, satisfying above all personal needs.¹⁴

Improper understanding of the authenticity

In identifying the authenticity of “being ourselves”, Tarnowski also points out the danger of the improper, infantile understanding of this imperative. Referring to the words of Jan Kłoczowski, he recalls the colloquial, often heard saying: “Lord, You created me like that, and you have me like that.” In this approach, “being ourselves” would mean renouncing any transformation of our personality, consenting to our own vagueness and passive resignation from all effort. This kind of attitude usually goes hand in hand with the so-called following the voice of our heart, but this heart is nothing but a momentary whim, a mood, an actual frame of mind. According to Kłoczowski, in contemporary culture the fashion for just such authenticity prevails, which opposes imposing anything to man from both outside and inside. In this way, a model of life is created without responsibility,

¹¹ J. Tarnowski, *Problem chrześcijańskiej pedagogiki egzystencjalnej*, op. cit., p. 206.

¹² Ibidem.

¹³ Cf. J. Tarnowski, *Jak wychowywać? W ogniu pytań*, Ząbki 2003, p. 291.

¹⁴ Cf. J. Tarnowski, *Jak wychowywać?*, op. cit., p. 133.

without duties, devoid of internal discipline, oriented only to any spontaneity in the name of the humanistic slogan of authenticity.¹⁵ Tarnowski completely agrees with the view that the authenticity comprehended in this way leads to infantilism and shows immaturity. He writes: “It is not surprising if a small child is guided by temporary impulses and is unable to overcome them for higher purposes, yet unconscious of the hierarchy of values. However, if such an attitude characterizes an adult man, then we are dealing with the phenomenon of stopping himself in development.”¹⁶ According to Tarnowski, seemingly authentic in this context is the “self-respect”, which is based on spontaneous submission to impulses and feelings, whose pressure deprives the possibility of a truly free choice. According to Tarnowski, a true authentic conformity with the deepest “self” is done “by appealing to liberation from all, both external and internal pressures, and taking responsibility for ourselves and others.”¹⁷

The common understanding of authenticity as failure, honesty, conformity with our own “self”¹⁸ also results in incorrect interpretations. According to Tarnowski, one should not

identify authenticity with honesty or truth, which are values, while the authenticity is rather a response to perceived values. All the more dangerous—as it often happens to existentialists—is to consider the authenticity as the highest value. It would be an extreme subjectivism and confusion of concepts.¹⁹

Warning against the contamination of authenticity with infantilism and subjectivism, Tarnowski formulates the definition of true, full authenticity, which he defines as: existential. The authenticity understood in this way is connected with the deepest “self”, with the core of the existence of the human person, and contains the following factors: internal depth, intense training and life consistency.²⁰

¹⁵ Cf. J. Kłoczowski, “Jak żyć – spontaniczność czy dyscyplina,” *W Drodze* 1980, no. 2(78), pp. 30–39.

¹⁶ J. Tarnowski, *Jak wychowywać?*, op. cit., p. 131.

¹⁷ J. Tarnowski, *Problem chrześcijańskiej pedagogiki egzystencjalnej*, op. cit., p. 209.

¹⁸ J. Tarnowski, *Jak wychowywać? W ogniu pytań*, op. cit., p. 291.

¹⁹ J. Tarnowski, *Problem chrześcijańskiej pedagogiki egzystencjalnej*, op. cit., pp. 206–207.

²⁰ Cf. J. Tarnowski, *Jak wychowywać?*, op. cit., pp. 133–134.

Existentialist existence occurs “when a certain reality is lived in full accordance with the deepest “self”, that is, an internal, personal conviction (...), very intensely (...), up to accepting the most far-reaching consequences of life.” According to Tarnowski, “if all three above conditions are implemented, then the full consciousness of humanity, or a positive existential authenticity in the subjective terms, is experienced.”²¹ In other words, the existential authenticity can only develop when “a man is calmed by liberation from the sensations ‘bombing’ him constantly, and begins to search for his deep ‘self’.” Therefore, simply speaking, the existential genuineness is being ourselves, in other words: the authenticity. But it must be immediately emphasized that this is not about the external, superficial “self”, which is a reflection of various sensations and feelings, drawn from many sources, but about the inner, deepest, stable, self-image of God Himself.²² Only in the context of looking for our deep “self”, we can speak of the inner depth conditioning the existential authenticity, also defined as “the realization of what is the deepest in man.”²³

Authenticity in terms of personal and existential pedagogy is a challenge that requires constant work and self-discipline, it is never something that man achieves once and forever. As Józef Tischner rightly states,

the game about the authenticity of our education does not occur in the world of abstraction, but in the context of the clashing forces constituting the content of our present day. The authenticity is never an finite data, but a value for which we must constantly fight.²⁴

This sentence is also shared by Sylwia Jabłońska, when she states that “the authentic existence—is the actual learning of ourselves, together with daily struggle for the meaning of life.”²⁵ Hence, Tarnowski calls the illusion the conviction that

²¹ J. Tarnowski, *Próby dialogu z młodymi. Prekatecheza egzystencjalna*, Katowice 1983, p. 321.

²² J. Tarnowski, *Jak wychowywać?*, op., cit., p. 134.

²³ J. Tarnowski, *Jak wychowywać? W ogniu pytań*, op. cit., p. 292.

²⁴ J. Tischner, *Świat ludzkiej nadziei*, Kraków 2014, pp. 99–100.

²⁵ S. Jabłońska, “Pryncypium autentyczności egzystencjalnej a osvajanie przyszłości w przełomie połowy życia,” in: *Filozoficzne implikacje w pedagogice. O sensie życia, edukacji i wychowaniu*, eds. J. Spętana, D. Domagała, V. Drabik-Podgórna, Kraków 2015, p. 168.

by some strong decision of will, we will make our deep “selves” the center of our physical, mental and spiritual lives once and forever, and that we will have peace in this respect. (...) Everyday experience proves that even an internally well-established man still slips into the outer sphere of his existence.²⁶

Thus, in his opinion, an “intense training” consisting in a constant search for its inner depth and listening to its most intrinsic “self” or making an effort of constant struggle for authenticity is important. The existential authenticity in Tarnowski’s pedagogical thought is not something that a person cannot lose. Therefore, he indicates specific spaces that determine its maintenance and constant renewal. In his opinion, “two things: creativity and humanity” are of special importance in this respect.²⁷

Creativity and humanity as development spaces of authenticity

The “creativity” is aimed primarily at awakening the creative instinct of a child in all areas, and from an early age. At the same time, it is important to require the child not to reproduce as much as to create.²⁸ Only in this way, the child able to be authentic and not only meet the demands imposed on it by the pressure of the environment. According to Tarnowski, by stimulating the creative instinct, the danger of the so-called defensive mechanism of the ward which consists in identifying ourselves with some respected person, or our own social role is prevented. Therefore, as Buber claims, the creative instinct

plays an enormous role in the education. It is an instinct, (...) which alone out of other instincts can grow to passion, never to lust; which alone out of other instincts cannot lead the subject to violate the fields belonging to other human beings.²⁹

Buber sees this instinct as “the beginning of a person’s growth.” In the context of those words Buber, which Tarnowski himself recalls in his habilitation dissertation,³⁰ it seems proper to assign a special me-

²⁶ J. Tarnowski, *Jak wychowywać?*, op. cit., p. 134.

²⁷ J. Tarnowski, *Próby dialogu z młodymi. Prekatecheza egzystencjalna*, op. cit., p. 323.

²⁸ Cf. Ibidem.

²⁹ M. Buber, “Wychowanie,” transl. S. Grygiel, *Znak* 1968, no. 4(166), p. 445.

³⁰ Cf. J. Tarnowski, *Problem chrześcijańskiej pedagogiki egzystencjalnej*, op. cit., p. 209.

aning in pedagogy of personal and existential stimulation of the creative instinct, which aims to maintain the true authenticity of the ward.

The humanization, as a reference and reliance on human dignity and values, both of the ward and the educator, is another important moment for understanding the category of authenticity in the pedagogical process. Tarnowski claims that “if we consider humanity in the dynamics of its continuing development as the ‘base’ of education, then such the assumption implies that all contemporary pedagogy should have a human or humanistic character.”³¹ The term humanism used here means a view or attitude that affirms the dignity of man, treated as the center and the peak of temporal values, and the creative subject of autonomous actions, equipped with the social and individual entitlements of the human person.³² A special task in this respect, is the task of the educator, who is to see primarily the subject, the human person in his ward. At the same time, he should feel more a man than a teacher.

He must be (...) conscious as a man of his deficiencies, imperfections and even falls. For this reason, he will be able to understand children’s weaknesses and sins. Not being perfect together with the child, he can and should constantly strive for what is higher.³³

Every educator is, above all, expected that he will be an authentic man, both when it comes to his own personality, as well as his way of existing in the world. According to Marian Wolicki,

the whole influence of the educator on the ward is dependent from this authenticity, who in general very easily and quickly distinguishes the authentic behaviors and attitudes from the inauthentic ones. The authenticity does not certainly exclude weaknesses, deficiencies or defects of the educator, but rather assumes them.³⁴

Janusz Tarnowski also adopts a similar position in this matter.

The existential authenticity understood as a conformity with the deeply understood “self” which is the center integrating the whole

³¹ J. Tarnowski, *Jak wychowywać?*, op. cit., p. 67.

³² Cf. S. Chrobak, “Urzeczywistniać swoje człowieczeństwo – humanizm integralny ks. prof. Janusza Tarnowskiego,” *Studia z Teorii Wychowania* 2013, vol. 4, no. 1(6), p. 10.

³³ J. Tarnowski, *Próby dialogu z młodymi. Prekatecheza egzystencjalna*, op. cit., p. 325.

³⁴ M. Wolicki, “Autentyzm bycia i jego rola w życiu,” *Collectanea Theologica* 1987, vol. 57, no. 3, p. 34.

person: his feelings, thoughts and will, contributes to the fact that “a man becomes harmonized, internally and externally coherent, as if made of one solid. (...) It is obvious that from such a conceived authenticity even heroic acts result, as its natural consequence.”³⁵ Therefore, in Tarnowski’s opinion, the final element conditioning the authentic existence is a life-long consistency, consisting in complete devotion to a decision or matter. In the context of this issue, Tarnowski evokes the figure of Janusz Korczak and his final decision, which was the life consequence of his activity. Recalling his words, in which he admitted his weaknesses, he saw in them “a positive sense of authenticity: they would clearly show Korczak’s intensely vivid experience of loving children in full harmony with his deepest ‘self’ and up to accepting the most far-reaching consequences of life.”³⁶

An intense training, expressed in the constant struggle to be authentic, experiencing reality in full harmony with internal, personal conviction (internal depth) and adopting the most far-reaching consequences of life are the constituent elements of the existential authenticity. From a psychological point of view and consequently to the above elements, Tarnowski also outlines the existential authenticity as an integration of the following three spheres: “subconsciousness, awareness and interpersonal communication.”³⁷ In a sense, those spheres correspond to the above-mentioned constituent elements, among which the inner depth would belong to the sphere of the subconscious, the intense training to consciousness, and the life consequences to some extent would fit in the aspect of interpersonal communication.

“Awakening a person to the authentic existence”

In the context of the existential authenticity, Tarnowski also takes up the important issue of the possibility of “awakening a person to the authentic existence.”³⁸ Can this awakening of a person happen to

³⁵ J. Tarnowski, *Jak wychowywać?*, op. cit., p. 136.

³⁶ J. Tarnowski, *Janusz Korczak dzisiaj*, Warszawa 1990, p. 107.

³⁷ J. Tarnowski, *Próby dialogu z młodymi. Prekatecheza egzystencjalna*, op. cit., p. 322.

³⁸ J. Tarnowski, *Człowiek – dialog – wychowanie*, op. cit., p. 75.

a child? Answering this question, Tarnowski notices that in the metaphysical and ontological sense a person is a person from the moment of conception in the womb of the mother, but the possibility of “updating” his personality, that is, becoming a personality, occurs much later. This moment, although dependent on particular phases of psychophysical development, does not result directly from them, but it is mainly connected with the sense of responsibility for ourselves, for the tasks entrusted and for other people. Therefore, in his opinion,

one cannot demand a personal and existential decision from the child. The child cannot be truly independent and is only capable of more or less passive participation in the basic attitudes of his surroundings, and mainly with the parents. But the child gradually grows up and the educator should prepare them for free, personal and existential acts. This is the purpose of awakening, aiming at reviving the child’s abilities.³⁹

Thus, “awakening to the authentic existence”⁴⁰ in the case of a child, Tarnowski understands as “the touching of the most important layers of the emerging personality,”⁴¹ aimed at preparing the child to independently undertake the authentic existential acts.

The recognition of the possibility of “awakening” the existential authenticity causes further specific consequences in the process of education. Tarnowski formulates them in a double postulate: firstly, he calls for learning the authentic existence of a child or a young person, and secondly—for reaching it.⁴² In his opinion, to complete the first of those tasks, it is not enough to learn sciences operating the general rights such as sociology, psychology, etc. Although rejection of their achievements would be a mistake, nevertheless important, according to Tarnowski, is to remember that the existence of each ward is unique, specific and therefore it cannot be closed in any schemes.⁴³ The second task of reaching the personality of a student Tarnowski does not only identify with

³⁹ J. Tarnowski, *Problem chrześcijańskiej pedagogiki egzystencjalnej*, op. cit., p. 210.

⁴⁰ J. Tarnowski, *Człowiek – dialog – wychowanie*, op. cit., p. 75.

⁴¹ J. Tarnowski, *Problem chrześcijańskiej pedagogiki egzystencjalnej*, op. cit., p. 210.

⁴² Ibidem, p. 207.

⁴³ Cf. J. Tarnowski, *Pedagogika egzystencjalna*, op. cit., p. 260.

the individualization—understood as matching the pedagogical impact to the interests or needs of a particular ward, but it tends for something much more serious: to hit the very core of his ever-growing existence, to lead him to a free decision.⁴⁴

Authenticity, as understood by Tarnowski, poses a wide range of challenges and tasks to the education process. Being ourselves, being aware and independently deciding about our acts, not submitting ourselves to adulterating, conforming with our deepest selves, learning about the real existence of a young person and getting to it is not an easy task. Tarnowski is aware of the difficulties encountered by the educator in this regard and sometimes those difficulties and tasks seem unbearable by human forces. Tarnowski acknowledges that in their implementation, not everything depends on the educator himself. Hence, in his pedagogical thought, he refers to the reality of God's grace, which—in the spirit of Christian faith—mysteriously influences the freedom of a ward and educator, and is an effective aid in the educational process.⁴⁵

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⁴⁴ J. Tarnowski, *Problem chrześcijańskiej pedagogiki egzystencjalnej*, op. cit., p. 207.

⁴⁵ Cf. *Ibidem*.

- Tarnowski J., *Człowiek – dialog – wychowanie. Zarys chrześcijańskiej pedagogiki personalno-egzystencjalnej*, Znak, Kraków 1991.
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ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE:

Dr Kamilla Frejusz
Pontifical Faculty of Theology in Warsaw
Collegium Bobolanum, Warsaw, Poland
kamif@poczta.onet.pl