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Half-education as a hermeneutic challenge for religious education in schools

Abstract: School is not a place of neutral education. The theory and practice of “school life” are conditioned not only by pedagogical, cultural and legal concepts, but also by the forms of social consciousness and ideological interests of various social groups. The idea of half-education or *Halbbildung* was formulated by Th.W. Adorno. It describes a distorted education, organized around dominant ideological interests, including utilitarian and instrumental thinking. In this article, the concept of *Halbbildung* is applied to school religious education in Poland. Not only does this concept reflect the hermeneutic dimension of critical theory but also underpins the hermeneutics of educational practice. The analyses presented use data on students’ participation in religious education lessons and the results of original research on the rationality of school education. Such a critical approach is an impulse to reflect on the essence of religious education at school, especially in light of the idea to make religion a compulsory school subject. The obligatory status of religious education as part of the curriculum of in public schools poses a challenge to the pedagogical discourse in Poland and in other countries that have made or are considering such a decision and in such a scope. From a theoretical perspective, this is a challenge in terms of pedagogical hermeneutics.

Keywords: theory of education, pedagogic hermeneutics, half-education, *Halbbildung*, religious education.

1. Introduction

The conservative political discourse in Poland is calling for religious education to be made a compulsory school subject. There is talk of a subject block that would consist of religious education and ethics. In fact, such proposals had already been formulated in 2005-2007 and are now being revived. This article is an attempt at a positive reception of such an approach, while at the same time emphasising the need for a critical revision of the very concept of religious education at school. I will focus on one issue only, and analyse religious education through the lens of half-education (*Halbbildung*). The concept of half-education does not refer to some preliminary stage of education, but to a distorted understanding of its essence. It derives directly from the critical tradition and involves a hermeneutic revision of the theory and practice of religious education at school.

The term *Halbbildung* was forged by Th.W. Adorno on the basis of the critical theory. One of the aims of critical theory is to interpret social practices through the lens of critique of ideology. In critical theory, such interpretation is usually carried out from the perspective of the “emancipatory and communicative interest”. In the case of education, the analysis is based on the “interest of general, liberal education” (*allgemeine Bildung*).

School education can refer to the acquisition of various skills. It includes qualifications understood in terms of certified competences. In this sense, education pursues utilitarian and measurable objectives. However, education cannot be reduced to its praxeological aspects. This statement also applies to university education (Nowakowska-Siuta, 2018, 233-267). The essential markers of general education are: emancipation, self-determination and responsibility, as well as the acquisition of communicative, ethical and hermeneutic skills in the spirit of building and understanding a pluralistic community as common good. Reducing education to utilitarian issues or to arbitrarily selected subject areas results in its distortion, i.e. it is a form of *Halbbildung*.

In this sense, *Halbbildung* is the opposite of general education. It is from this perspective that we can verify educational theories and practices. Such verification will entail critical hermeneutics as a theory of interpretation (understanding), and not only in terms of reading/assigning meanings to cultural texts, but also to social actions and school practices.

I started writing this article on 11 September, the day we remember the savage attack on the World Trade Centre in New York. Undoubtedly, the motivations behind this attack had been political, social, cultural and historical. However, it was religious factors that were very quickly used to

explain it, as they have been for many other conflicts as well. Religion had not been the direct cause of these tragic events. Instead, it had served as a demagogical instrument used to achieve political ends. While it is certainly inadequate to invoke the memory of the World Trade Center attack in the context of reflections on religious education in Poland, it does illustrate, if in an exaggerated way, the fact that religious education can serve instrumental purposes. In this sense, religion can be dangerous! On the other hand, religious education is also capable of exposing such instrumental purposes by asking about the reasons for the existence of community, man and education. From this perspective, religious education can be an essential part of modern school education.

What supports the instrumentalisation of religion however, is a utilitarian public awareness or utilitarian tendencies in thinking about schooling. This is confirmed both by the principles of educational policy and by our research, some of which I will recount later in this article. From a theoretical perspective, the dangers of utilitarianism and instrumental reasoning are exposed by the concept of half-education. Moreover, not only does it criticise the dominance of utilitarianism, but also a kind of thinking about education that absolutizes one of its dimensions.

2. The term *Halbbildung*

The concept of *Halbbildung* was formulated by Th.W. Adorno. The framework for its interpretation is provided by the critical theory of the Frankfurt School. The origins of critical theory are linked to the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt am Main. The institute was founded in 1923 and brought together left-leaning representatives of various scientific disciplines. In 1930, M. Horkheimer took over the directorship of the institute and became its face. After the Nazis took power in Germany in 1933, the institute was disbanded. It was reactivated at Columbia University in New York. When the Second World War ended, the conditions were right for the institute to be reconstituted in Germany. In 1951, the Institute for Social Research was reopened in Frankfurt am Main. In the years to follow, Adorno returned to Germany as an advocate of Holocaust remembrance and a critic of absolute reason who exposed authoritarian positions and the ideological premises of cultural and social change.

At the 1959 congress of sociologists, Adorno gave a lecture entitled “*Theorie der Halbbildung*”, which was subsequently published in his “*Gesammelte Schriften*” (Adorno, 1959). Adorno’s theory of education is linked to the theory of rationality and the ideology of social and cultural change. In

this article, rather than report on the historical analyses of cultural processes proposed by Adorno and Horkheimer in many monographs. I will focus exclusively on issues important for critical pedagogical reflection. Adorno's motto was the much-quoted statement: "What is half understood and half lived is not the initial stage of education, but its mortal enemy: the content of education that enters the consciousness without being incorporated into the continuation of something holistic turns into a hostile and toxic substance" (Adorno, 1959, 111-112).

One of the most important characteristics of critical theory is its rejection of the notion of a transcendental ego in favour of linking subject and object of cognition within a single life process (Horkheimer 2011, 217). A key element is the category of social consciousness, which cannot be reduced to the sum of individual consciousnesses. Social consciousness is a reality in itself. It is marked not only by the historicity (*Geschichtlichkeit*) of the experienced world, but also expresses the ideological interests of specific social groups (ideology as a form of social consciousness).

The classics of critical theory revisited K. Marx's thesis: social existence determines social consciousness. In this sense, the different living conditions of different social groups translate into the ideological interests preferred by these groups regarding the organisation of social life. These interests are often unconscious. As such, however, they are reflected in social and cultural theories and practices, including those of education. For this reason, Horkheimer's and Adorno's analyses include a philosophical-cultural context: They study philosophical ideas in their relation to cultural transformations and the shape of the social consciousness of specific social groups in a specific historical period. This type of argumentation is also characteristic of the reflections on the concept of *Halbbildung*. I will leave them out of this article, and instead begin my analysis of *Halbbildung* with the notions of reason and rationality.

In Germany and Poland, Horkheimer's work was published under the similar titles: "Zur Kritik der instrumentellen Vernunft" and "Krytyka instrumentalnego rozumu". However, the English-language title was different: "Eclipse of Reason". And indeed, instrumental reason is not just reason used technically to achieve utilitarian ends. According to Horkheimer, but also to Adorno, the concept of instrumental reason refers to a specific use of reason and is not limited to technical and utilitarian issues. It includes idealistic thinking as well. Any of these types of thinking be a manifestation of reason in an eclipse.

Reason implies different types of rationality, different logics underlying the understanding of reality. I define rationality as follows: Rationality is the latent logic that makes the world comprehensible to us so that we can decipher its meaning. Adorno and Horkheimer, in various works, emphasised two types of reason and consequently two types of rationality: the objective type and the subjective type. The following generation of scholars representing the critical theory formulated an additional typology of rationality. For the purposes of this article, I will leave it aside.

Objective reason and rationality tend to locate the logic of reality in an immanent or transcendent principle of reality. The realm of objective understanding of reality are myths, religion and idealism. Whereas subjective reason and rationality emphasise the praxeological aspects. Positive experience and effective action become their realm. The critique did not aim to annihilate objective or subjective reason. The critique focused on: (1) absolutizing of a particular type of reason and rationality and (2) losing a holistic cognitive perspective and the ability to comprehensively explain *raison d'être* of reality. It is the absolutisation of a type of reason or the avoidance of fundamental questions that gives such a reason its instrumental character. Instrumental reason is half-reason. By analogy to the concept of *Halbbildung*, we can refer to it as *Halbvernunft* (a concept introduced by the author of this article). Instrumental reason, reason in an eclipse, is not a part of comprehensive reason or its preliminary stage. Instrumental reason is a complete distortion and caricature of reason as such.

An important role in the shaping of modern civilisation was played by the Age of Enlightenment. In “Dialectic of Enlightenment”, a treatise written jointly by Horkheimer and Adorno, the authors analysed the intellectual and cultural patterns underlying modernism and modern culture. The work begins with the following characterisation: “Enlightenment, understood in the widest sense as the advance of thought, has always aimed at liberating human beings from fear and installing them as masters. Yet the wholly enlightened earth is radiant with triumphant calamity. Enlightenment’s program was the disenchantment of the world. It wanted to dispel mythos, to overthrow fantasy with knowledge. (...) Knowledge, which is power knows no limits, either in its enslavement of creation or in its deference to worldly masters. Just as it serves all the purposes of the bourgeois economy both in factories and on the battlefield, it is at the disposal of entrepreneurs regardless of their origins. Kings control technology no more directly than do merchants: it is as democratic as the economic system with which it evolved” (Horkheimer & Adorno 1994, 19-20; citation from the English version of the monograph).

The culture of the Enlightenment, on the one hand, promoted a free and non-dogmatic exploration of the world, while, on the other hand, it started to see reason as an instrument for achieving specific ends. Utilitarian reason and utilitarian rationality turned into egalitarian reason and egalitarian rationality. The Enlightenment made a fundamental contribution to the formation of modern knowledge, modern societies and economies. Yet the Enlightenment also contained within it a destructive potential. “Knowledge, in which, for Bacon, ‘the sovereignty of man’ unquestionably lay hidden, can now devote itself to dissolving that power. But in face of this possibility enlightenment, in the service of the present, is turning itself into an outright deception of the masses” (Horkheimer & Adorno 1994, 59; citation from the English version of the monograph).

Adorno later repeated the same diagnosis in his “Negative Dialectics”. A rational analysis must not be limited to the question about the method of cognition or the method of achieving an end. Reason must explore, according to the classical approach, the *ratio* behind the existence of a given reality (Adorno 1986, 64-65). If reason does not capture the foundations, the *raison d'être* for the existence of a given reality, it becomes a “non-reason”. This is what half reason or *Halbvernunft* is.

Half-reason leads to neutralisation of thought. “Thought, stripped down to knowledge, is neutralised, harnessed merely to qualifying its practitioner for specific labour markets and heightening the commodity value of the personality. In this way the self-reflection of the mind, which counteracts paranoia, is disabled” (Horkheimer & Adorno 1994, 220; citation from the English version of the monograph). From a pedagogical perspective, neutralisation leads to the formation of “self-without-self awareness” (Adorno 1959, 115; vide Gruschka 2004, 157).

The neutralisation of thinking corresponds to technocratic tendencies in culture and education. It destroys the ability to critically reflect on reality and opens societies to the expansion of superstition and totalitarian ideologies. The neutralisation of thinking also corresponds to the neutralisation of religion (Adorno 2010, 278-282).

The above considerations also apply to education. For the consequence of *Halbbildung* is the neutralisation of thinking, the neutralisation of the “self” and the neutralisation of the human spirit. *Halbbildung* does not refer to some initial stage of education. The term characterises an education that: 1) ignores questions about the *raison d'être* of reality and 2) absolutises only one chosen dominant, e.g. objectivism and idealism or subjectivism and utilitarianism. From a historical perspective, the idea of education (*Bildung*)

was developed in a polarised way: one pole was marked by the cultural goods recognised by a given social group as the cultural canon, while on the other side were the challenges of world experience and the praxeology of action.

According to Adorno, the marks of *Halbbildung* are: 1) focus on mastering cultural, social and economic techniques and on the accumulation of knowledge and its utilitarian character, 2) absolutisation of objectivity and focus on setting cultural canons without critical reflection on the criteria for their selection. Adorno's aim, therefore, is not to correct the methods or content of education. The essence of his programme is a new thinking about education as such and a total change in social consciousness (Adorno 1959, 93). „The anachronism of today is to insist on education in a situation where society has taken away the basis of education. Education, however, has no other means of survival than a critical reflection on half-education [*Halbbildung*], which it has now inevitably become“ (Adorno 1959, 121).

Therefore, Adorno's *Halbbildung* is not a new concept of education. It does not offer a definition of general or humanistic education. Instead it offers a critique of contemporary pedagogical discourse and pedagogical practices. At the same time, it invites each individual to maturity, subjectivity and freedom (Adorno 1971). In this sense, it is relevant to the analysis of any form of education, and thus also to religious education. Religious education is an ambiguous concept. It refers to different theological and denominational traditions, religious backgrounds and areas of educational activity.

3. Religious education in Poland: general information

Poland is a state with a high level of religiosity. It is also a state with a high level of religious homogeneity. The population of Poland is 38.41 million (Statistics Poland 2020, 208). Averaging the various statistics, it can be concluded that approximately 90% of the population identifies with the Catholic Church to some degree. In 2022, the percentage of those practising regularly (once a week and more often) was 42%. For the rest of those declaring adherence to a religious tradition, religious identity is not necessarily tied to participation in worship and acceptance of dogma. It often has a family and cultural character. Survey results indicate a slow but consistent decline in religious belief and practice (CBOS 2022b, 1-3).

There are approximately 180 churches and religious associations registered in Poland. The largest of these work on the basis of acts on the relationship between the state and a particular church, adopted by the Polish Parliament, the others on the basis of registration with the Ministry of Internal Affairs. All minorities account for less than 2% of Poland's population.

For example, Protestant churches have a combined total of around 140,000 adherents, the largest of these, the Lutheran Church - 61,000. The largest minority church is the Orthodox Church, with 507,000 adherents (Statistics Poland 2020, 198-199). Recently, the number of Orthodox believers has increased significantly. This is linked to a very large immigration from Ukraine. While data on migration is known, data on the religious affiliation of migrants is not officially collected. There is a growing phenomenon of secularisation in Poland. According to one major social research centre, in 2022 13% of Poles declared themselves as non-believers (CBOS 2022b, 4). In the age group of 18-24 year olds, non-belief was declared by almost 25% of respondents (CBOS 2022b, 6).

During the communist period, religious education in schools was first repressed and, from 1961, completely abolished. From then it could only be taught in local parishes. The political transformation in Poland, which took place in 1989, resulted in the inclusion of religion in the school system. Religious education was reintroduced into schools from 1 September 1990. In subsequent years, legal regulations in this regard were refined, their essence, however, remained the same. Religious education is organised in the Polish school system as 2 hours of additional lessons per week. They have a denominational character but are not obligatory. Students are enrolled in religion lessons at school only if their parents or, in secondary schools, their parents or the students themselves have expressed such a desire. In Poland, a pupil may opt for religion lessons, or, alternatively, for ethics lessons, or neither for religion lessons nor for ethics lessons. On the school certificate, he or she receives a grade under the heading “religion/ethics” without specifying the name of a particular confessional tradition. If the student does not attend religion or ethics lessons, a dash (-) appears under the heading “religion/ethics”. The grade of religion or lack of participation does not affect progress to the next grade.

With regard to religious education at school, Polish educational law is liberal towards religious minorities. If religion teachers meet the formal, curricular and qualification requirements, religious education of religious minorities can be conducted “physically” in the school building, but also in so-called out-of-school catechetical posts operating at parishes of minority churches. Religious education classes conducted in out-of-school catechetical posts are regarded as part of the school system. Such religion lessons are attended by pupils from different schools in the region. The religion teacher is employed by a particular school designated by the educational authorities, performs all additional duties for this school, but the actual teaching takes

place in the aforementioned out-of-school catechetical post. He or she keeps full records of the classes and gives grades. These grades are then recognised by all schools where students receive their overall education.

There is a discussion in Poland at the moment to transform religious education from an optional subject into an obligatory subject block: religion/ethics. To reiterate: today, a pupil can choose to attend religion lessons or, alternatively, ethics lessons. He or she can also choose not to enrol in any of these classes. This does not affect his or her educational journey. The state authorities are seeking to change this in favour of a compulsory choice: religion or ethics.

For many years, it has been reported that more than 90 percent of students participate in religious education at school. In 2020, the Institute of Statistics of the Catholic Church in Poland released data about a participation level of 88%. However, these data came from a survey carried out in 2015 and referred to all types of schools (ISKK 2020, 46). In 2022, the Institute of Statistics of the Catholic Church in Poland provided new data for school year 2021/2022. According to these data, 82.4% of students attended religious education at school. These data come from the sources of the internal church unit - the Catholic Education Committee of the Polish Episcopate Conference (ISKK 2022, 31). In primary schools, religious education is closely linked to the sacramental procedure. For this reason, participation in religion lessons in primary schools is significantly higher than in secondary schools and raises the overall average. According to a survey carried out in 2014 on a representative sample of secondary school students, 80.3% of them were enrolled in religion lessons. Of this group, approximately 75% declared actual participation in more than 50% of the classes (Milerski & Karwowski 2021, 8).

In recent years, education departments, especially in large cities, have increasingly verified students' participation in religious education lessons. They have observed a significant decline in this respect. This has mainly applied to secondary schools. In Łódź, for example, in 2021, for the first time the percentage of pupils attending religious lessons in all types of schools dropped below 50% (sic!). According to data from the Centre for Public Opinion Research "CBOS" regarding secondary schools, in 2010, 93% of pupils participated in religious education lessons, in 2017 it was 70%, and in 2021 it was 54%. This means that, in Poland, nearly half of secondary school students - general and vocational schools - no longer attend religious education lessons at school. In 2021, the survey was conducted in 80 randomly selected secondary schools on a representative group of final-year students (N=1531). The reasons for this are, of course, varied. Of the students surveyed,

only 29% said that religion lessons at school are an interesting subject (CBOS 2022a, 5).

In the European context, such a situation is not unique. On the contrary, in the case of religious education as an additional subject - as it is nowadays - such data should not lead to pessimism, but to reflection on the changes in contemporary consciousness and questions about how to teach such classes under conditions of increasing secularisation (Franck & Thalén 2021). The multiplicity of theoretical concepts in the didactics of religion makes it one of the most original subject didactics (Grümme & Lenhard & Pirner 2012).

4. Confessional religious education in school as a compulsory subject: contexts

Religious education in Poland is provided separately for different denominations. Currently, there is a proposal to make confessional religious education a compulsory subject. In the European context, such a status for religious education is not unusual. The subject block religion/ethics (alternative names may be used for ethics) is compulsory in, for example, Austria and Germany. In other countries, such as the Netherlands, the profile of religious education depends on the local education authority or even the educational association running the local school. In Sweden, religious education is compulsory, except that its emphasis lies more on religious studies, while care of the spiritual dimension rests with local faith community and its educational work. The most comprehensive analysis of this issue can be found in the 6 volumes of “Religious Education at Schools in Europe” (2015-2020) published jointly by the faculties of Catholic and Protestant theology at the University of Vienna, and in an abridged version in the work “Religious Education in Europe. Situation and current trends in schools” (2007). Here we are not concerned with a broader comparative description, but only with a statement of fact concerning the presence of religion as a school subject. The compulsory character of religious education at school is connected with the necessity to consider this subject as a part of general education serving not only the particular interests of one religion, but also building a community of citizens in terms of the common good. This means that religious education at school carries out tasks related to a particular denominational tradition and, at the same time, its stewards must recognise their own obligations towards school and education as a common good, and thus also towards the Other.

Confessional tasks relate to the formation of religious identity, the development of religious spirituality, the transmission of knowledge in the

area of doctrine, worship and ethos and the creation of positive attitudes in this area. It should be emphasised that, as a rule, every church and, more broadly, every religion are by definition exclusive, otherwise religion would not be religion. In this sense, religious education pursues the particular interests of its own denominational tradition. Nevertheless, as a subject of school education and especially as a compulsory subject, religious education must not focus exclusively on particularistic denominational issues, but must take into account a broad spectrum of questions and define itself as part of general education. The above statement needs to be developed.

Firstly, it is not a matter of a purely formal expansion of the catalogue of content, which will each time be evaluated from the perspective of the axiology of the respective denomination only. There is no escape from the normativity of religion, as well as from the normativity of culture. However, it is about recognising the right to speak of on behalf of what is different, attempting to understand other positions and forming a culture of dialogue.

Secondly, it is not a matter of a purely formal declaration concerning the understanding of religion as an element of general education. Religion is an element of general education if it is part of a universe of education that seeks human maturity, freedom and, at the same time, a sense of community and responsibility for community life understood as the common good.

The above-mentioned issues have marked contemporary discourse in pedagogy, both Catholic (Boschki 2008, Marek 2014, 2022) and Protestant (Domsgen 2019, Schweitzer 2006).

Religious education in a public (state) school necessarily involves the principle of worldview neutrality in a democratic and pluralistic state. In this section I do not intend to analyse in detail the problem of state impartiality and the separation of state and church (Zielinski 2020). My aim is only to point out the fundamental problem faced by Western democracies. Worldview neutrality of the state is based on three assumptions: 1) The state recognises the plurality of citizens' worldviews and does not interfere with their beliefs. Doctrine, worship, organisational structure are an internal matter for religious associations and their members. 2) The state sets legal boundaries for the functioning of individuals and communities within their different worldviews. The legal system and its enforcement are guarantees of social order and peaceful coexistence of citizens. 3) The state can influence the formation of dialogical social attitudes, civic identity and the understanding of social reality in terms of the common good. It can use the school system for this purpose.

The above statements are ideal constructs. The very notions of state, law, school system, religion, worldview neutrality are such constructs. And as we know from the theory of knowledge developed by M. Weber, an ideal type is a rationalisation, created by the researcher, which makes a given reality comprehensible. Therefore, ideal types explain the world, but they are not themselves its actualisation.

These statements also raise fundamental questions about religions that are closed and promote exclusivist and fundamentalist thinking. After all, how can social order be ensured in a situation in which a denomination is part of the social order and at the same time, by definition, undermines the sense of existence of other denominations, aiming at overt social conflict? For this reason, in some European countries where religion is a compulsory school subject, there is a demand for the inclusion of other religions, such as the religion of Islam, as a compulsory subject, similarly to Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox or Judaic religious education. Moreover, there are additional forms of teaching, which are not only viewed as the transmission of religious knowledge in the broadest sense, but also as a mutual encounter and common experience (Jackson 1997).

Religion taught exclusively in places of worship and sometimes additionally funded by external institutions escapes any control by school authorities. Such teaching tends to focus exclusively on the particular interests of a particular religion and to overlook a dialogical approach (Milerski & Zieliński 2022). Religious education within the school system should therefore not be perceived as the privilege of a church or a few churches, but as an opportunity for society to shape the understanding of the common good and to develop an individual identity rooted in one's own tradition and at the same time ready to encounter otherness.

The understanding of religious education is conditioned by: 1) the theological and denominational context - religious education must not be disconnected from the theological identity of a particular religious tradition, 2) the theoretical context - there are many theoretical approaches in the pedagogy of religion, 3) the constitutional and political context, and the legal solutions adopted in a particular country, 4) the social and cultural context of a particular country or region. In this article I do not deal with theories of religious education. From the perspective of the idea of *Halbbildung*, I will analyse selected practical trends concerning religious education organised within the school system in Poland.

In Poland - as already described - religious education was introduced into the school system in 1990, a decision that came as a form of reaction

following the years of communist rule. In practice, it meant that traditional parish catechesis was simply transferred to schools, together with the existing practices and all the stereotypical perceptions. This applied not only to the Catholic Church, but also to minority churches. For example, in the progressive Lutheran Church to this day, religious education textbooks carry the title „Podręcznik do nauczania kościelnego – religii ewangelickiej” (en. Handbook for church teaching of the evangelical religion).

For Catholic religious education, Vatican documents are binding, especially the “General Directory for Catechesis” (Polish edition 1998, original 1997) and the “Directory for Catechesis” (Polish edition 2020, original 2020). The first Directory emphasised the distinction between two profiles of education: parish catechesis and religious education in school. The second Directory was written from the perspective of the church’s mission of evangelisation (Zellma 2021). In educational terms, the Directory emphasises the particularistic religious interest of the church as a response to the “signs of the time”. This approach is not only translated into the curriculum documents for “particular churches”, but also into the practice of religious education in schools. The curricula in Poland contain the whole spectrum of topics, not only theological, but also ethical, social and cultural. However, they are delivered in line with the dominant evangelistic focus. Religious particularism comes to the fore, rather than the interest of general education and the ethos of the common good as the good of all social groups. In this view, religious education becomes a form of *Halbbildung*.

Religious education at school can be viewed from the perspective of the multidimensional concept of religion and religiosity (Wulff 1999, 192-197). Ch. Glock distinguished between five dimensions of religious commitment: ideological (doctrine), ritualistic (worship), intellectual (knowledge and cognitive search), experiential (religious experiences and emotions), consequential (behaviour, attitudes and social consequences of religious beliefs). The confessional and evangelistic view of religious education in school focuses on the ideological (doctrine) and ritualistic (worship) dimensions. Such teaching also aims at shaping religiosity in the dimensions of intellectual development, experience and behavioural consequences. The problem is that while the conservative and evangelistic understanding of religious instruction develops intellectual, experiential and behavioural competences, it also limits them to the confines of confessional orthodoxy and therefore of particular interests of the church. Such restriction is a form of *Halbbildung*.

Religious education does not take place in an ideological vacuum. Above I have demonstrated an ideological interest in the form of confessional

particularism. I will now make a connection between confessional particularism, which corresponds to the conservative view of religious education at school, and utilitarianism as a claim of the neoliberal concept of the school system. In the last two decades, the concept of qualification has gained popularity in European educational policy. It is understood as a certified competence. What is certified by its very nature must be measurable. This approach is convenient for the managers of education systems. It is not only a tool of the European Union to ensure comparable criteria for the recognition of qualifications at different levels. It also makes it possible to monitor the effectiveness of school education and to compare schools. Educational systems in many European countries have begun to implement the Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning, together with its modified version of 22 May 2017. In Poland, this recommendation has been implemented in the school and university system. Critics of this approach emphasise that the prominence of measurable outcomes as a criterion for assessing the effectiveness of education leads to a deformed understanding of the essence of education itself.

Religious education at school is a particular issue from the perspective of the general concept of education. In school systems in which religious education is part of the curriculum, it is often argued that it is a subject that - at least in part - goes beyond the catalogue of measurable outcomes. Indeed, an important aim of religious education consists in the pursuit of existential and hermeneutic tasks. Hence, contemporary pedagogy of religion formulates the demand for an education that should not only include qualifications, but also support the acquisition of an understanding of one's own existence and social reality. The guiding idea is represented by the slogan: *School Education Between Qualification and Orientation*.

The concepts of qualification and orientation become markers that define the scope of humanistic and religious education. Both of these dominants are not only defined by pedagogical discourse. From the perspective of critical theory, they are also created by different types of social consciousness. Exposing the importance of shaping qualifications grows out of adaptive, praxeological and neoliberal consciousness. Exposing the importance of forming an understanding of one's own existence and social reality, on the other hand, reflects humanistic and critical consciousness. Such a binary image is - as Z. Baumann has repeatedly written - a great simplification desired by some people confused by a pluralistic world. Such great simplifications

are also sought by some people in thinking about the meaning of education. They seek to emphasise, to absolutise one or more aspects of education. A critical stance towards this kind of thinking about education is the idea of half-hearted education - *Halbbildung*. This idea is a critique of the partitional thinking of general education.

5. The primacy of utilitarianism and *Halbbildung*: own research

Philosophical research and empirical research follow their own logic. It is extremely difficult to directly verify philosophical theories in an empirical way. Therefore, my only intention is to show the analogy between the *Halbbildung* theory and the results of my empirical research on the idea of the rationality of school education in the context of religious education.

In 2013/2014, we conducted a study on the rationality of school education from the perspective of the cognitive interests of its participants: students, parents and teachers. The project was funded by the Polish National Science Centre. It included quantitative and qualitative research. We presented the theory, methodology and findings in a separate monograph (Milerski & Karwowski 2016).

The starting point of the study was on the one hand humanistic pedagogy (*geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik* - Dilthey, Nohl, Weniger, Bollnow, Hessen, Nawroczyński) and hermeneutic pedagogy (Danner 1998; Rittelmeyer & Parmentier 2001; Uhle 1989), while on the other hand, critical theory (Habermas 1973; Apel 1988), critical pedagogy (Giroux & Witkowski 2010; Gruschka 2004, Krüger 1999, Kwaśnica 2007; McLaren 2015; Mollenhauer 1968; Wulf 2003) and critical pedagogy of religion (Zilleßen 1982).

The theoretical basis of the study was provided by the tetragonal concept of the rationality of schooling. The rationality of education is the latent logic that justifies assigning a certain meaning to schooling. Each rationality was understood in terms of an ideal type. The following four types of educational rationality were defined from the perspective of hermeneutic theory and critical theory:

1) praxeological and utilitarian rationality - the meaning of school education is conceived in terms of measurable effects and the formation of competences for effective action, and concrete life benefits are also important, e.g. a profession bringing high earnings, independence in life, social recognition,

2) emancipatory rationality - the meaning of education is conceived in terms of the capacity for self-determination and the utilisation of spaces

of freedom, including the critical understanding of social processes, the promotion of an ethos of freedom and mutual recognition,

3) Hermeneutic rationality - the meaning of education is understood in terms of the ability to understand one's own existential situation and the challenges of social life, this rationality refers to the understanding of the world and its conditions; comprehension is the ability to read or attribute existential meanings.

4) negational rationality - the meaning of education is construed in terms of negating schooling and seeking alternative ways of self-realisation.

For the purposes of the quantitative study, we developed a questionnaire on the rationality of schooling (Karwowski & Milerski 2021). It consisted of a test in which each rationality was represented by a separate scale. Students gave answers to the individual items in a range of values from 1 to 9. The survey was representative of the population of secondary school students in Poland (N=2810). In the 2013/2014 study, in addition to the School Education Rationality Questionnaire itself, we used a questionnaire on religious education (Milerski & Karwowski 2021).

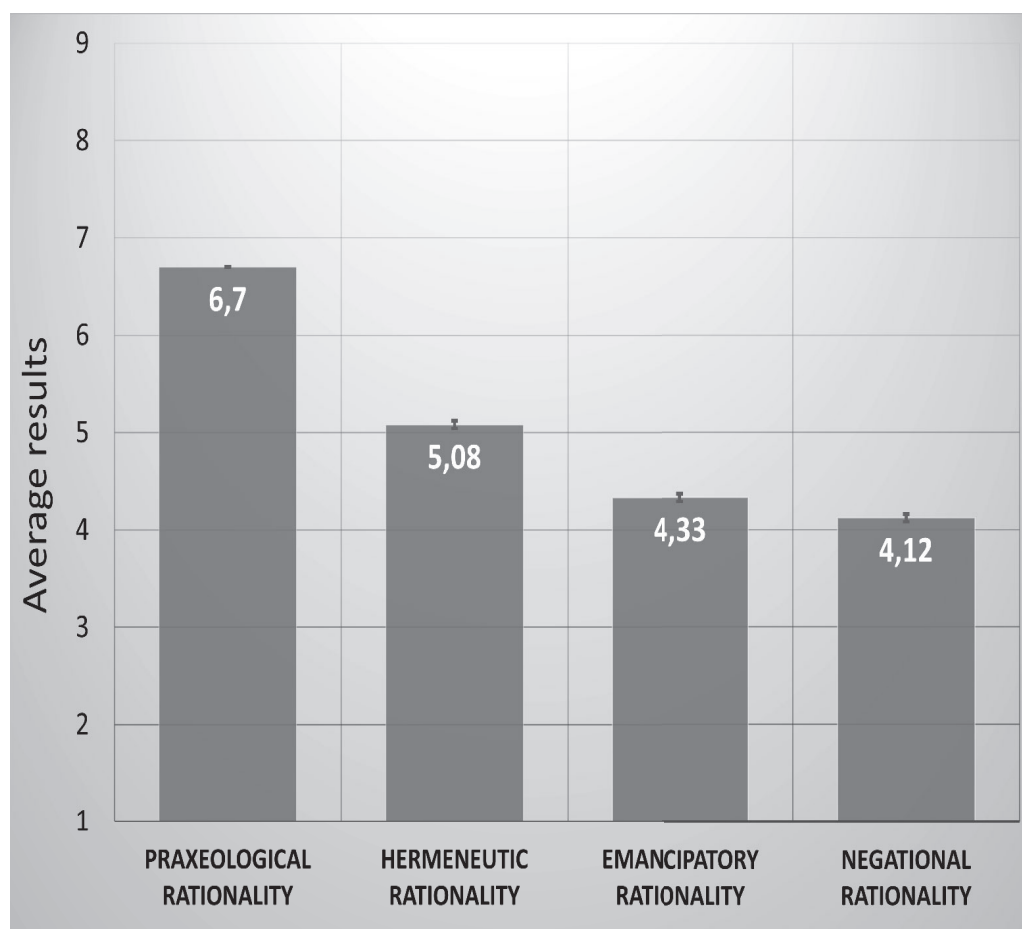


Figure 1: Types of educational rationality. Intensity of occurrence.

In general, it can be said that the study showed the manifestation of all types of rationality of school education. In other words, students justify the meaning of school education by referring to all types of rationality: praxeological, emancipatory, hermeneutic and negational. They therefore recognise - to a greater or lesser extent - the whole spectrum of arguments.

A significant result of the study found the dominance of praxeological rationality. On a scale of 1-9, the average for this rationality was 6.7. This means that praxeological and utilitarian arguments dominate the students' opinions (Figure 1).

In the theoretical concept, emancipatory rationality has been defined not only in relation to the expansion of freedom and self-determination, but also - as in critical theory - as a rationality that justifies commitment on the side of responsibility.

In our study, we recorded a correlation between praxeological rationality and emancipatory rationality in the areas of professional self-determination and stability in life. This is especially true for respondents who most often referred to praxeological rationality or emancipatory rationality to legitimise schooling (Figure 2).

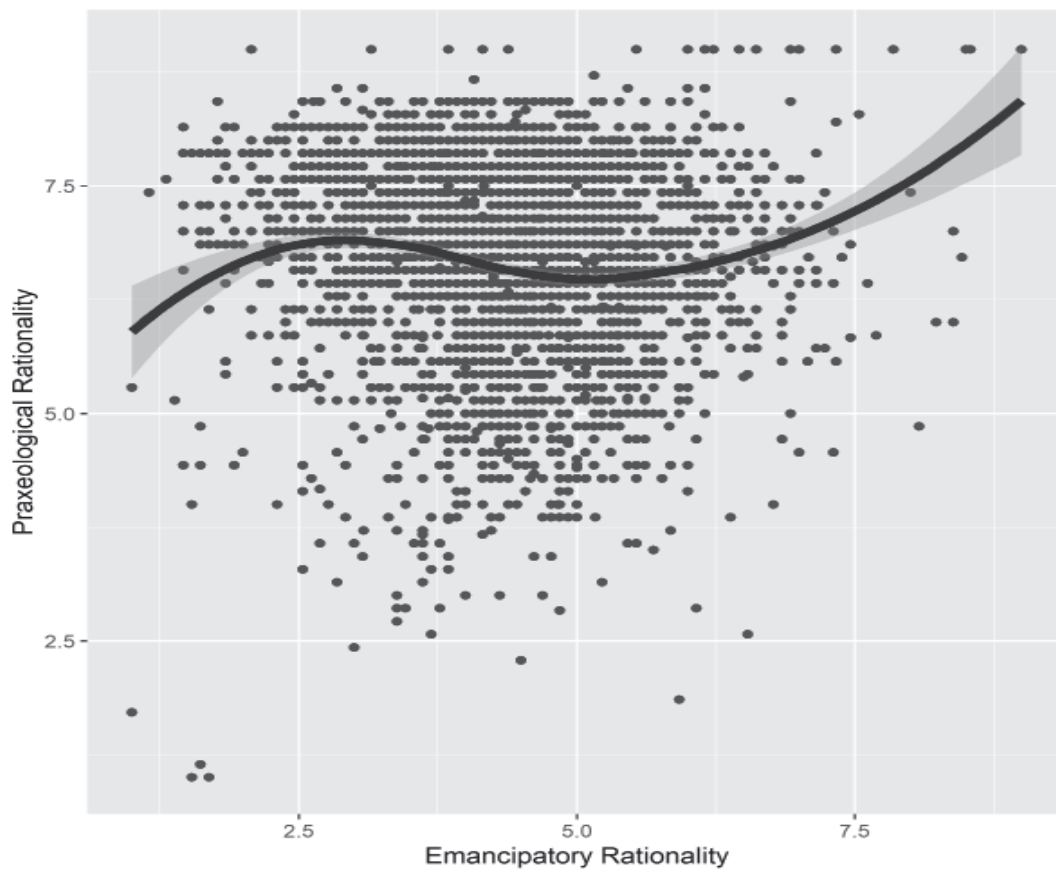


Figure 2: Correlation between praxeological rationality and emancipatory rationality.

It should be recalled that, according to critical theory, emancipatory rationality was contrasted with technical (praxeological, utilitarian) rationality. Leaving aside Habermas' earlier writings, in which the praxeological element was also combined with hermeneutic rationality (Habermas 1973), in contemporary pedagogy praxeological rationality is oriented towards the acquisition of measurable competences and tangible psychological, social and economic benefits. Showing the correlation between praxeological and emancipatory rationalities contradicts the noble demands of critical theory, which exposed the humanistic, social, ethical and political dimensions of emancipation. We have called this phenomenon inward looking emancipation. Praxeological rationality and emancipatory rationality have a common denominator. This denominator is utilitarian and inward looking realisation of of the practical interests of the individual.

The dominance of praxeological and utilitarian rationality distorts - according to the idea of *Halbbildung* - the sense of general education and the essence of religious education. Education in this form is not a preliminary stage or part of education, but a caricature of it.

Another element of the study of religion that should be criticised is its unambiguously apologetic, confessional and catechetical dominant focus. This was clearly demonstrated by the study. A representative group of secondary school pupils were unequivocally in favour of changing the current practice of religious education in schools. With regard to 7 issues in this regard, on each occasion the students were in favour of the necessity of change.

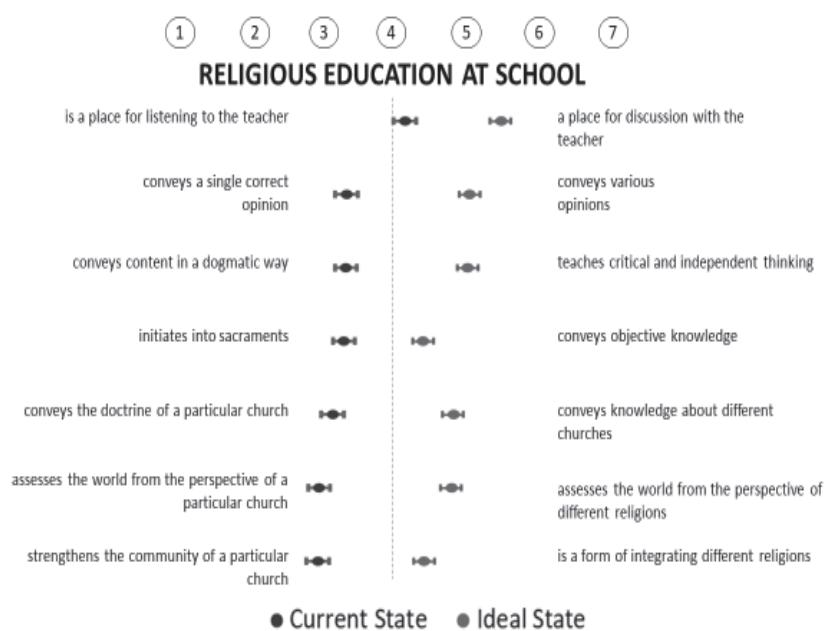


Figure 3: Religious education at school: current vs. desired character.

The idea of *Halbbildung* is a critique of the dominance of one perspective in education. In the study of religion, this concerns the dominance of the ecclesial and apologetic perspective. A revision of this dominance is advocated by the students themselves (Figure 3).

Reducing religious education to ecclesial and apologetic subjects directly results in criticism. In the context of contemporary discussion in Poland, we can conclude that without a change in current practice, the decision to make religion/ethics a compulsory subject will be opposed by pupils and parents.

6. Conclusion

The concept of half-education or *Halbbildung* grows out of critical theory and at the same time has a hermeneutic dimension. It addresses the essence of pedagogical discourse and the concept of general education. Religious education as part of the curriculum of school education should be confronted with the challenge posed by *Halbbildung*. This is all the more relevant if religious education/ethics were to become a compulsory subject. In this case, religious education should be recognised as part of general education and at the same time reduce its praxeological and utilitarian aspirations. Overcoming utilitarian thinking represents an opportunity for the legitimacy of religion as a subject of school education.

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