



Hanna Stępniewska-Gębik

Uniwersytet Pedagogiczny im. Komisji Edukacji Narodowej w Krakowie

ORCID 0000-0003-1213-8827

The goal of education: spirituality or an intellectualism? An alternative to care of the self

Człowiek duchowy czy intelektualista celem edukacji? Alternatywa troski o siebie

Abstract. W artykule został podjęty dylemat związany z celem wychowania. Koncepcja troski o siebie M. Foucaulta oraz prace J. Patočki pozwalają na postawienie pytania dotyczącego celu wychowania. Czy owym celem ma być intelektualista czy człowiek duchowy? Możliwość takiego rozróżnienia osadzona jest w etyce troski o siebie, starożytnej tradycji, która obecnie, min. za sprawą P. Sloterdijka, czy samego M. Foucaulta pojawia się jako kategoria istotna również współcześnie. Etyczna postawa wobec siebie otwiera drogę do duchowości poprzez zespół odpowiednich praktyk. Staje się ona podstawą relacji z innymi i ze światem.

Keywords: pedagogika, człowiek duchowy, intelektualista, prawda, troska o siebie, wychowanie.

Introduction

The ethics of care of the self focus not only on the attitude or practice of caring, but also on making a care-based relationship the basis of ethical reflection. In the area of ethics of care of the self, there is an understanding of the human being that includes their subjectivity in relation to the self as well as to the other, contrary to a purely individualistic understanding. In its content, it overshadows the concept of man as an individual isolating themselves from others, whose development consists solely in the pursuit of full autonomy, i.e. maximum independence. Instead, the ethics of care of the self presents how autonomy, self-fulfillment, self-finalization are exercised in the subject's relations with others and with the world. Arguments supporting the

assumptions of the ethics of care of the self are provided by the functioning of man from the first years of life as a being dependent on others, and the inability to completely free oneself from this dependence until death, because satisfying human needs is largely linked to the activity of others. The ethics of care of the self seem to combine an individualistic approach with an antagonistic relational perspective, concerning the formation of an ethical attitude towards the self, while this „self“ is rooted in social and cultural relations. It seems impossible to care for the self without the other, whether understood as a human being or a cultural and social context, regardless of whether attention is devoted to its effects in social relations (while caring for oneself, one cares for others), or the accumulation of relations with others and the world on the way to individual self-finalization.

The ethics of care of the self refer to the spiritual dimension of human existence, indicating at the same time what life becomes without spirituality. The main aim of this article is to draw attention to the attitude of care of the self with regard to the problem of spirituality in the works of Foucault and Patočka. The concepts of these philosophers generate a question about the purpose of modern upbringing, on the basis of differences that exist between an intellectual and a spiritual person. The dilemma of how to achieve such a purpose remains unanswered. Can the ancient methodology of Hadot's or Sloterdijk's contemporary proposal be considered sufficient?

Ancient *paideia*

In his works, Foucault analyses relationship to the self in a historical perspective while referring to the contemporary culture of the subject. Thus, care for the self can be understood as a certain principle of rational functioning of an individual under the influence of a certain cultural reality. This means that in taking care of the self, an individual is subject to various understandings of the term and focuses on different areas of their activity. Foucault, in *The History of Sexuality and The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, by describing the history of care of the self, shows how the meaning of the term has changed. However, it has always been related to the work of the subject. According to the French philosopher, care of the self began with Socrates, and had its heyday at the beginning of our era, reaching another milestone at the turn of the 4th and 5th centuries. Care of the self became the basis of *paideia* at that time, defining the path to becoming an ethical subject of one's behavior as a citizen, husband, wife, mother, father, etc. Initially, care of the self referred to the way power was exercised and was based on the assumption that self-control could lead to the control of others. Emerging

from a political and social context, it is also embedded in education. The educational context is connected with critical or crisis moments: the first is the realization of one's insufficient knowledge, or ignorance, which generates the need to take care of the self; the second is the moment of passing subsequent development stages along with moving from the influence of educators to political activity, i.e. leaving adolescence.

Care of the self is very different from various self-focused activities, such as caring for one's body or nutrition, because care of the self concerns the soul as its subject. The second characteristic of care of the self is a kind of mediation, which appears through a relationship with someone else - a master who has an honorable place in the development of care. According to Foucault, concern is connected with getting to know oneself, but also with experiencing oneself and the subject's lifestyle.

It can be said that care of the self comes from education, from the relationship with the master whose aim is to be oneself, or from crises in the life of an individual. The first example shows the formative, liberating and corrective functions of care of the self, emphasizing its importance in development. The second source of care of the self, represented by crisis situations, mainly emphasizes its protective importance by referring to the corrective function. Of course, in crisis situations, the subject works on themselves from a development perspective, but the primary task is to protect the resources at their disposal in order to be able to increase them accordingly. As long as care of the self remains beyond *paideia*, educational and cultural discourse, the most common catalysts and triggers to work on the self will be the critical situations that appear in human life.

Hermeneutical recognition inscribed in care of the self is always closely related to the relationship to the other. Foucault refers to the example of Alcibiades, who, in order to govern a *polis*, must govern himself effectively. He must direct his attention towards himself, reflect on himself, get to know himself. "Dealing with oneself" presupposes and results from the individual's will to exercise political power over others (Foucault, 2012). Alcibiades also reveals deficiencies in upbringing, which, at this stage of the deliberations, allow for the care of the self to be embedded on the axis of education - knowledge. The French philosopher also refers to Seneca, saying: evil does not come from outside, it is inside us. When an individual is in a state of discomfort, or suffering, the other becomes a source of support, just like Seneca did for Lucilius. The common element of care of the self is the presence of the other, without whom this practice would not be possible. The other is a teacher, a master, etc. Another axis on which one can describe the care of self is the

subject and the other. On one hand, care for the self, closely connected with care for others in Plato's works, later becomes an intrinsic goal that does not lead to the other or others. A man can take care of himself for himself. When practicing care of the self, one deals with a certain degree of absolutization of self as a subject of care and its „self-finalization” (Foucault, 2012). Thus, different ways of practicing self in relation to the different role of the other become apparent. However, in Foucault's opinion, care for the self should lead to care for the other and at the same time the latter is not possible without the former. In the *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, he refers to the advice Epictetus gives to a father who has left his sick daughter. He did it because he loved his daughter very much and was devastated by her condition. According to Epictetus, he made a mistake because he only took care of his daughter, only thought about her and finally could not stand the pressure of the situation. But in striving to take care of his daughter, he should take care of himself. Working on himself would require him to understand the meaning of his feelings towards his daughter, the sense of his role towards her and her meaning towards him as a father. Foucault concludes that if a father learns to take care of himself properly, his daughter's illness will not put him off balance and he will stay to take care of her (Foucault, 2012).

Spirituality and truth in care for the self

Foucault understands care for the self as taking care of oneself, nurturing oneself, as a virtue. It is also the principle from which the recommendation stems: know thyself. It provides the framework, the basis for justifying this imperative. The French philosopher also describes care for the self as a kind of *spiritus movens*, the principle of movement, the constant anxiety felt by the individual, the „sting of human existence”.

Foucault defines care for the self as an attitude towards perceiving things and finding oneself in the world, acting and establishing relationships with others, that is, an attitude towards oneself and others. It requires a distraction from the outside, from others, from the world and directing it towards the „self”. Therefore, care for the self implies a kind of attention directed to what one thinks, what comes to mind. Care for the self always refers to certain actions that one carries out on oneself, through which one takes possession of oneself, purifies oneself and transforms oneself, changes oneself. Hence the whole series of practices: meditation, examination of conscience, verification of representations appearing in the mind. Thus, we are dealing with an attitude towards the world, others and the self, in which

a kind of introspection plays an important role, allowing one to undertake practices leading to the transformation of the subject.

Foucault's care of the self is the basis of the *gnothi seauton* imperative, thus occupying a unique place in the subject's relationship to the truth about the self. Access to truth is mediated by spirituality understood as the research, practice and experience through which the subject makes necessary transformations on the self (Foucault, 2012). Spirituality understood this way has three characteristics. First of all, the truth never belongs to the subject; the subject has no access to it. Spirituality assumes that truth is not made available to the subject in a simple act of cognition. In order to gain access to the truth, the subject must transform, change, shift and „become, to some extent and in some sense, different from the self” (Foucault, 2012). The first feature implies the next one - achieving the truth is not possible without the transformation of the subject, without a conversion that is achievable in different ways. Foucault refers here to the movement of the eros, which denies the current status of the subject and makes the subject rise to the truth or the truth descend upon the subject themselves to enlighten them. The second way of transforming the subject is work on the self, shaping the self for which one is responsible - the long-term work of asceticism.

The third characteristic of spirituality is related to the effect of truth, which is the result of the subject's effort to get to the truth and to the reverse influence of truth on the subject.

In other words, there is something in access to the truth that changes the subject themselves, complements them in their own being. Care of the self is defined by a set of spiritual conditions, transformations of the self that are necessary for access to the truth.

In the modern way of thinking about the subject's access to the truth, there is one condition: cognition itself and nothing else. According to Foucault, it was the „Cartesian moment” that changed the history of truth, which can be reached by cognitive acts without the necessity of changing the subject themselves, i.e. without additional conditions related to spirituality. Other conditions have arisen - internal and external conditions concerning the cognitive act. The former include rules, formal and objective conditions, methods and the structure of the object, allowing access to the truth. The latter conditions are, e.g. beliefs that in order to have access to truth one needs to study, have an education, fit into a certain scientific consensus, not pretend anything or allow career considerations to contradict the norms of objective research, etc. Access to the truth is possible through the fulfillment by the subject of culturally specified conditions. However, this method, not

connected with the subject's own work or effort, does not cause a change, but only becomes an opportunity to verify ways of achieving the truth and a possible incentive to broaden one's possibilities to meet as many conditions as possible. This reminds us of the need to increase one's capacity to know oneself and take care of oneself. The question then arises as to whether a subject that does not meet these conditions has a chance to know the truth about themselves? Is this cognition unconditional?

Foucault argues that the modern era is characterized by the assumption that the subject as it is is not capable of the truth, while the truth itself is not capable of redeeming the subject. The principle of access to truth has dissociated itself from the spiritual practices of work on the self, carried out by the changing subject expecting the truth of enlightenment and transformation. Of course, this is not about truth in the form of scientific knowledge, whose achievement is not connected with spirituality and ethics of care of the self. According to Foucault, however, there is a kind of knowledge that is not scientific in nature and yet there are some elements of spirituality present – Lacan's psychoanalysis. Of course, there are some external conditions here as well, so that the subject can be transposed in access to the truth, but the fundamental issue that Lacan took up is related to spirituality. His question concerned the price that a person has to pay in order to be able to speak the truth, as well as the effect on that person of being able to speak the truth about himself. The subject's striving for truth is not only an effort that ends when they learn it, but continues with the effort of confronting the effect of the truth. It can be said that the subject, in order to know the truth, must be capable of such work. Capable of making a certain effort, which becomes a condition for cognition and transformation.

Spirituality and intellectualism

The spiritual man became the central theme in Patočka's paper entitled *Spiritual man and the intellectual* (Patočka, 1998) and can be understood from the perspective of the care for the soul that Patočka presented in *Péče o duši* (1999). The Czech philosopher wonders who the spiritual man is, what are the differences between him and the intellectual, what is their situation in the world. According to Patočka, an intellectual is a man with some education or skills, on the basis of which he works and receives gratification (Patočka, 1998). He can be a cultural activist, an employee or a creator who, by performing his work, enters into economic dependencies, which qualify his activity among other types of human work. It is also worth adding that it is possible to define and analyze the intellectual in an objective way from

a sociological perspective. The situation is different for a spiritual person, who cannot be described on the basis of external observations, because „on the outside” these people function in the same way as intellectuals. They are also teachers, writers, lawyers, etc. To explain the difference, Patočka turns to Plato, pointing out that for the Greek philosopher it was the spiritual man who was a transparent and clear figure, but who for him “represents a huge problem”. Patočka brings closer the essence of the spiritual man by referring to a certain type of spiritual life which is a philosophy of „the inverted world”. It is the philosopher who inverts the world for non-spiritual people, because for a philosopher „the world is not something obvious”¹ (Patočka, 1998, p. 214). In general, we live in a world that is given to us and obvious, a fact that is the basis of our life. We have learned how to react, how to function in social life, thanks to education we have learned various theories, mechanisms, rules. Even when doubts arise, one refers to what one already knows, and “life, somehow taken over, does not encounter any obstacles” (Patočka, 1998, p. 214). Sometimes, however, one’s experiences show something different from the accepted obviousness of this world. The people one knows, the people one works with are inconsistent, abandon their faith, their life plans. One experiences the deaths of people close to them, suffering, the breakdown of societies. Such events show that „life, which seemed so obvious, is in fact somehow problematic, that something is wrong with it, something is not right” (Patočka, 1998, p. 215). First, it seems that these minor inconveniences, unpleasant events and contradictions do not matter and it is possible to live life as one always has. After all, the world constantly speaks, gives one meanings. According to Patočka, if one consistently followed the negative, one would reach a vacuum in which nothing would hint at a certain reaction, but this is where spiritual life begins. Using the example of Socrates, who tries to examine in an interview whether people in different situations could maintain their identity and be consistent. The conclusion is that it is extremely difficult to find such a strong person. Even Socrates himself is not convinced that his attitude is fully consistent, but he tries - he is on the path. It is worth noting that a spiritual man is someone who finds themselves on the path in just this way (Patočka, 1998). The spiritual man does not avoid confronting life-threatening, negative experiences. Unlike an ordinary person, he does not try to forget about them, he does not set out to bear life in any way. A spiritual person is a person exposed to the negative, drawing from these experiences by questioning apparent safety. The experiences

¹ Translations of quotes from Czech.

one lives are mainly those that show us the specificity of one's life, in which nothing is obvious, even the fact that one is alive. They contain a certain „strangeness” which, according to Patočka, makes one stop, unable to go on and function, and encounter a blockade that changes lives forever. In what sense? A critical moment does not change the world, people, or things. The world is as it was, but something appears that is neither a thing nor a fact. „The new way of life is that we live by accepting life not only as such, but by accepting its problematic nature” (Patočka, 1998, p. 218). The need to be embedded in negative experiences creates new opportunities, opens up a new sphere - active life expressed through responsibility, fidelity, generosity, etc., and creating specific social institutions.

The modern world in which Patočka lived seems completely non-spiritual and in a way reconciled with this lack of spirituality. It is filled with various kinds of nihilism, from joyful nihilism that recognizes that reality does not make sense, so it can be shaped freely, through nihilism of self-subordination to a certain power, to the nihilism of resignation consisting in the total rejection of everything and in internal paralysis. It has experienced wars, revolutions, cruelty in various forms. But can this reality be a reason for withdrawal for a spiritual man? Patočka answers unequivocally - the spiritual man must stop being afraid in a way that prevents him from acting. A spiritual man is able to defend his position which is in conflict with what is common, and act consistently and in accordance with his agenda of spiritual life.

A spiritual man as a leader of his life – in the end

The ethical attitude, which is care for the soul, leads to confrontation of the subject with the most difficult, often negative reality to which he is not indifferent, with the impossibilities that cause a stir. A man cannot simply live - he has to lead his life towards the good, towards what is better.

According to Sloterdijk, what leads towards the impossible is asceticism, which the philosopher compares to acrobatics in the sense that the latter appears wherever something is impossible, although it seems easy. It is becoming possible. This is how a person takes up asceticism as part of taking care of the self, starting from the intuitive pursuit of the better. In this way they get into the middle of a whole series of exercises that change the person's „nature“ in order to fulfill it. It is then that he becomes the animal that is doomed to lead, exercise, think (Sloterdijk, 2014). The postulated pedagogical goal, referring to a medieval maxim, would therefore be *non scholae sed vitae discimus*. Learning for life would mean, in this case, that what matters is not adaptation to the existing order but an expedition to the summits.

Referring to acrobatics on the tightrope, Sloterdijk explains that walking on the rope represents the accumulation of everything that has been in the present. Only in this way can the imperative „you have to change your life” be transformed into a daily series of exercises.

Acrobatic existence detrializes life, putting repetition at the service of the unique. It transforms all the steps into first steps, because each of them can be the last one. There is only one ethical action for these acrobatics: to undercut all relationships by conquering the improbable.² (Sloterdijk, 2014, p. 287)

Acrobatic existence requires giving up one’s life, thanks to involvement in the practice of exercises. Both Foucault and Sloterdijk refer to ancient practices that make existential acrobatics a reality. Of course, the modern times do not eliminate such practices; they create other opportunities. Examples include the psychotherapeutic systems that developed during the 20th century, which stimulated the ancient practice of practicing introspection without being generally aware of their kinship with the old models. When around 1980 Foucault brought back to the contemporary narrative the ancient discourse on the „care for the self”, it was a signal to expand the consciously applied techniques. From then on, the generalized consciousness of exercise was restored from sources of ancient philosophy, and modern practice of art and body. It began to be noticed that „the 20th century therapeutism was, for its part, only a phenomenon covering an epochal turn in trend” (Sloterdijk, 2014, p. 294). What is the practice of *homo repetitivus*? It can be said to primarily consist in „uprooting from the first life”, a departure from ordinary reality. In the creation of heterotopia, i.e. spatial creations of „different places” that are inscribed in social structures at the same time oppose the logic of the whole. Such a *hereotopia* is for Sloterdijk the other bank of Heraclitus’ river. It is a place where practitioners reach, coming out of the customary current, creating the first bridgeheads of eccentricity” (Sloterdijk, 2014). The mission of shaping one’s own existence requires the separation of what is one’s own from what is connected with the world. Such a „basic subject-forming exercise” is a retreat from common situations we call life or the world. From now on, to be in the world means “*suum tantum curare*: to take care of the self, against all distraction in the non-self - and only that” (Sloterdijk, 2014, p. 287). Working on the self consists in what the Stoics described as distinguishing between what is dependent and independent. It starts by ridding the inner space of

² Translations of quotations from the polish version

the non-self. This „withdrawn subjectivity comes closest to the truth of its situation when it questions the reasons for its embarrassment in relation to the whole, frozen as a complex of external facts” (Sloterdijk, 2014, p. 314). In such an enclave, the subject, using loneliness techniques, experiences self-doubling. A second self appears, which, in a symmetrical or asymmetrical relationship, is a participant in the internal dialog. In the ancient tradition of care for the self, many techniques were used, such as mindfulness, meditation, examination of conscience, etc., to help shape ethical attitudes (Hadot, 1992,2018). Life in an exercise, moved by the image of the goal, is about existence oriented towards the purpose, towards perfection. This kind of goal-orientation, by moving, implies the activation of an ideal or a promise of reward.

All ancient philosophical schools had a similar goal - to improve and fulfill themselves through conversion (Hadot, 1992, 2018). Spiritual exercises helped to free oneself from excruciating passions and worries, helped to access real life, to improve oneself. They were an essential area of *paideia*, which teaches living according to human nature understood as reasoning.

All of *paideia* and contemporary applications of spiritual practice are based on a basic assumption - only a free person has the possibility of self-modification, improvement, self-fulfillment. By working on the self, reaching the truth, indicating problems, exercising, the subject becomes an ethical, spiritual person, participating in socio-cultural life and being in relation to the other and to the world.

References:

- Foucault, M. (2010). *Historia seksualności*. Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Słowo/obraz terytoria.
- Foucault, M. (2012). *Hermeneutyka podmiotu*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Hadot, P. (1992). *Filozofia jako ćwiczenie duchowe*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo PAN IFiS.
- Hadot, P. (2018). *Czym jest filozofia starożytna?* Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Aletheia.
- Patočka, J. (1998). *Eseje heretyckie z filozofii dziejów*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Aletheia.
- Patočka, J. (1999). *Péče o duši*. Praha: Wydawnictwo OIKOYMENH.
- Sloterdijk, P. (2014). *Musisz życie swe odmienić: o antropotechnice*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo PWN.