The Place of Education in an Emancipatory Struggle of Man

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Abstract:
Introduction: In the paper, the author maps the ways leading to human freedom. He sets out the criteria that should be taken into account in their selection. He also delineates the space where education could productively enter into the human emancipation process.

Purpose: The aim of the paper is to thematize competences that need to be developed in order to enable the adepts of education to participate in human emancipatory process.

Methods: The author uses explanatory method to expose the issue.

Conclusions: The paper summarizes the assumptions and limits that need to be respected in order to make education a space for the cultivation of human sense for freedom.

Key words: freedom, education, creativity, will, subversion of goals.

Freedom presupposes that there are always things and circumstances in play that are contrary to freedom, things we must overcome in order to achieve it. From this perspective, freedom can be seen as overcoming itself. However, the struggle with the obstacles that stand in the way of freedom cannot be carried to a victorious conclusion. It is not possible to win freedom once and for all. Nor can it be won for everyone, since one of the obstacles in the way of my, or our, freedom are often other people seeking to maximize their own freedom. One of the frequent ideas that resonate in Friedrich Nietzsche’s work (2020) is the

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1 As Karl Jaspers (1991) observes, "where freedom is, it struggles with unfreedom, and if unfreedom is completely overcome as a result of the removal of all obstacles, freedom itself will come to an end."
statement that “people value things according to how much they expend for them, what price they pay for them.” Karl Jaspers (1991) applies this to freedom as well. Freedom, too, must constantly be risked, and it is the magnitude of that risk that determines its value. The value of freedom, then, lies not in its achievement, but in the act of achieving. As Gandhi says satisfaction lies in the effort, not in the attainment. It is that effort (the will to freedom) that makes freedom real. An unearned (merely granted, bestowed) freedom, a freedom without overpowering and “duties”, would be slavery rather than real freedom. As Goethe put it in his Faust poetically, “... freedom and life are earned by those alone who conquer them each day anew.” (2018) This struggle, according to Nietzsche (1993), also has an educational aspect, “the struggle educates to freedom.”

The decline of education, which we often speak of today, can be partly attributed to the fact that its acquisition no longer requires any effort. Today we are accustomed and taught that if someone or something puts up a certain resistance, we go elsewhere to get it without a fight. Even marketing strategists have come to understand that the most effective advertising is that which offers something requiring no effort to consume, which puts no resistance in the consumer’s path, and which places no obstacles in the way of affirmation. Today, not only is everything that enters our lives required to be light, seamless or easy to consume. Today it must also be “fun”. As Nietzsche (2020) observes “we would hardly have any interest in knowledge if we were to be bored on the way to it.” It was therefore only a matter of time before schools and teachers would adapt and begin to catch up with these expectations.

Freedom is also associated with choice. Freedom presupposes that one has the possibility of alternative action and response. However, the choice of alternatives should not be an arbitrary choice or simply a choice of any option. This choice should take into account the following fundamental criteria: We should be choosing a genuine alternative, that is, an alternative to what provoked the choice, an alternative to the given and existing, the dissatisfaction with which motivated us to seek a substitute for it.

When we decide between options, priority should be given to those that require more effort to implement. We should prioritize the paths to our goals that enable us to grow, that make us whole and affirm us in our humanity. The easy way is not the way of man. At least not the path leading to his freedom. A common saying attributed to the writer Arthur C. Clarke states that when you find a path without obstacles, it certainly leads nowhere.

A truly free man chooses the impossible. The range of possibilities that are the object of his free choice is never just a gift from someone else (chance, nature, the state, God or other actors involved in arranging the situation of choice). It is he who gives them to himself as a gift. Man is also a being who can grant reality
to the unreal and thus expand the range of choices beyond the possibilities currently given. Man has freedom not only in that he has the chance to choose from pre-given possibilities, but he is also free to create these possibilities and opportunities for his own decision and action. It is also true that the range of possibilities which we are able to create for ourselves, unlike those which fate has assigned to us, is in principle limitless. Jaspers (1991) therefore defines freedom in relation to man as “inexhaustible possibility”. The purpose of education\(^2\) is to protect and develop this gift (the ability to not only find but also to invent new possibilities) in man. Even in this endeavour, however, one must be very cautious. Man can choose the impossible because he is able to create the currently absent possibility or possibilities de novo as a creative being. However, even this path to freedom can, in certain circumstances, turn out to be a dead end. When everything is possible and everything possible can become real, we cease to be free because freedom loses its value when everything is at our fingertips.

Human choices are a step towards freedom only if they also meet another condition: they must also be choices that allow man to transcend himself. He should therefore choose not only what affirms him in his bare existence, but also what elevates him above himself. The true man, as Patočka (1990) says, does not live merely to live, but to seek deeper, truer forms of his life. Man’s freedom differs from the freedom possessed to one degree or another by some other living beings in that his choices do not merely serve his biological survival. Of course, human life can also fall into its decadent mode, which, according to Patočka (1990), is characterized by “life for life’s sake.” But man should also live for something else that transcends this life. Patočka (1990) calls the above mode of human life the life of rise and initiative.

Yet again, the situation is not that simple. For a man to rise above his simple life he has lead so far, he would have to “see” and understand the difference between what his life in its present mode is and what it could be (Patočka, 1990). That means that he must be able to take a certain distance from his life. And the only way to achieve that is to retreat into the imaginary plane of conceptual thinking. Conceptual thinking enables him to imagine his life in other forms and positions than the current one.

It is also true that these choices, by which man transcends his bare life, should also lift him morally out of that state. In other words, said choices should also be axiologically dimensioned. That is to say, this choice, or choices of his should simultaneously be a choice for the good. Therefore, when deciding between the options offered, the students of education should also be guided to recognise the

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\(^2\) Individual, commonly marginalised aspects of the ethical dimension of the educational process are dealt with by M. Zaviš (2017).
option that is not only the most appropriate at a given moment and in relation to the life situation they are facing (one that offers the most effective or least painful solution, or the one that promises more benefits), but also the one most appropriate from a moral point of view. The path to freedom is arduous because there are disproportionately more ways to be bad than to be good. This is because the choices on the side of evil are so much richer and more varied than those on the side of good. Being good (moral) therefore brings more restraints related to this narrowed range of options for our choices and actions. On the other hand, being good does not necessarily mean being less free. For the path of goodness usually guarantees freedom for a wider range of people and also freedom for the future, i.e. freedom with an open perspective. Evil brings only immediate advantage, profit or release, but in the long run it is (also in the question of freedom) a loss.

For education, then, in relation to the human emancipatory struggle an opportunity opens up in the following areas:

Education can contribute to the expansion of the range of human freedom by fostering the competence\(^3\) to make use of the available opportunities that life itself offers. That is to say, their mere availability, however realistic, is not in itself sufficient for human emancipation. The obstacles to the emancipatory process do not lie only outside man, but also within himself - for example, in his inability to recognize the opportunities that would take his life out of its current limitations, in his lack of competence to respond adequately to them, etc.

Education also opens the way to freedom by making available to its adepts the aggregate of humanity’s collective experience acquired so far. Thus it gives them access to and expands the range of possible and impossible paths to achieving their life goals that have been known and tested before. Since this knowledge is largely encoded in a special language, one must first acquire the appropriate type of literacy without which this knowledge is not legible and therefore not accessible and usable.

Inner obstacles to the expansion of the scope of human freedom include indecisiveness and lack of will. Education should therefore include not only its direct development and strengthening, but also the cultivation of a kind of asceticism - the will not to react immediately to a given offer of options, but to reflect on them or delay one’s choice to a more opportune moment, when the effects of a particular decision will become more productive in relation to human freedom. For self-restraint is, as Nietzsche (2020) puts it, the best “gymnastics of the will”. The act of choice requires a strong will and determination also because every emancipatory act (and the choice that goes with it) requires embarking on something that may, in addition to its expected effects, bring unintended

\(^3\) In this context, we also note the analysis of pedagogical competences according to M. Zaviš (2013).
consequences and the hardships that result from them. The decision to be free must therefore go hand-in-hand with the knowledge that the person who has embarked on this path has also embarked on a very arduous and never-ending journey with an uncertain outcome. Will and perseverance, then, are the necessary conditions to remain on this path, to be able to permanently overcome the constantly renewed constraints that limit one’s freedom. For the above reasons, adepts of education should also be guided to have the will to overcome their inclinations towards comfort. There are simply no straight, broad, and beaten paths to freedom, but only narrow, winding, and rocky ones. Nor do we find any signposts to guide us safely along these roads. They are therefore also adventurous and risky. No one will walk this road for us; we must actively contribute to our own freedom. In the process of education, therefore, its adepts should be inspired to make the move from a passive spectator’s approach to the world and to their lives, to an active participatory approach, from the desire “I would like it.” to the volitional act “I want it! I will achieve it!” The aim of education is to encourage pupils and students to become social actors, not just passive spectators, actors, but also authors of their own life story. To live their own lives and not just act as extras in other people’s stories, or stories directed by someone else. Among other equally important aims of education is to awaken in its adepts the will towards free will. This includes the ethical dimension of the task: to set boundaries for the course of free will so that freedom does not ultimately mar its own achievements. As the philosopher Georg Henrik von Wright (2001) observes, “A man freed from his bonds is like a wild animal that must be tamed in order to endure this freedom. To tame the beast is to educate, to educate man.” Even according to the well-known educational reformer Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, the mission of education is to lead man to the proper use of free will. Hegel (1957) attributes such a pedagogical effect to history. According to him, world history is education progressing from “unbridled subjective will to universal and subjective freedom.”

The mission of education is also to cultivate a sense of measure. For freedom is also a matter of measure. It is an art to estimate the limit beyond which the expansion of freedom becomes counterproductive. For example, if it happens at the expense of nature, if its use turns into its abuse. It is also important to find the optimal balance between personal freedom and the freedom of others (freedom and social equality), which is a prerequisite for social justice.

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4 In other words - in order to prevent these limiting circumstances of his life from becoming permanent, a person must be persistent in overcoming them.
5 Although von Wright adopted this idea from the ideological background of German enlightenment humanism, it has undeniably a more general validity.
For the above reasons, it is also important, in relation to human emancipatory efforts, to teach the adepts of education creativity. This, in turn, is not possible without the development of abstract thinking. Only well-developed eidetic imagination, the ability to imagine world differently in the conceptual plane, allows us to detach ourselves from the world as it is currently presented to us. Students must be encouraged to be creative, to be inventive and to discover not only new things but also alternatives to the status quo. In doing so, the semantic distinction between these terms must also be taken into account, for instance, inventing means more than discovering. Discovery is not necessarily some fundamental innovation (as is ‘invention’). Discovery is not about inventing new things, but only about discovering things that already exist. It is not, therefore, something completely new. Rather man has been able to reproduce in thought what nature, for example, has already created before. Most often, however, what qualifies as novelty is neither a discovery nor an invention, but merely a variation of the old (already discovered or invented). Inventiveness, on the other hand, is the ability to apply what has already been discovered or invented to some other field of application. In the case of each of these processes, however, they are always activities that help expand the range of human freedom.

The opposite of creativity (and therefore a certain antagonist of freedom) is consumerism. From the point of view of human emancipatory endeavour, therefore, creation should take precedence over consumerism. It should also not be forgotten that a contemporary consumer society primarily prefers the choices that encourage and satiate consumption. For this reason, the choices that are most widely represented and preferred are those that affirm man in his mode of ‘having’. As for the choices and options that support the second of Fromm’s (1992) thematized modalities of human being, ‘being’, here the range is much narrower. Democratic society seeks to extend the options on the side of ‘being’, for example by the possibilities that would enable a person to become different. The school should also play its part in reorienting the human being towards that modality of human being (‘being’).

Future educators also need to be prepared to be able to detect and then confront certain implicit constraints that limit their freedom in “a behind the scenes” manner. One of these is what we used to call symbolic power. In this case, it is a depersonalised form of violence, which takes an implicit and therefore less recognizable form. In the name of widening the range of our freedom, it is therefore necessary to shed this skin as well. The only way to do this is to constantly change our positionality and thus the perspective from which we view and judge things and processes. This is the only way to reflect what was unreflected from the previous perspective. Another strategy for bringing these ‘blind spots’ into our field of vision is to take a position ‘on the border’, or a
position ‘in between’ (so that we cease to merge with either of these positions), or to assume a position ‘outside’.\footnote{See, for example, excentric positionality, which has an important place in Helmuth Plessner's philosophical concept.}

Since the obstacles that stand in the way of man and mankind’s attainment of freedom change over time, and since there is always a new antagonist on the historical scene that stands in the way of man and mankind in their emancipatory struggle\footnote{In addition to nature, society, the limiting factors for human freedom today include economics, technology and artificial intelligence.}, the virtues of vigilance, fortitude and caution must definitely be cultivated in the framework of education. The cultivation of these virtues is also required in order that man should not, as a result of his inattention, dullness or resignation, become stuck in a new impasse. Vigilance must also be developed in education because emancipatory efforts are often marked by counterfinality. The use of emancipatory tools can very easily get out of control when vigilance is lost, and an emancipatory tool can become an instrument of enslavement. We can only free (emancipate) ourselves from something by taking control of that which previously had an enslaving power over us. However, the effort to dominate nature through technology has not eliminated the problem of human freedom, but only reproduced it on a new level. Although today we are no longer directly threatened by nature (the “natural jungle”), our freedom is becoming more and more limited by the new “manufactured jungle” (Giddens, 1998). With the help of modern technology, we may have mastered nature, but ultimately we have lost control over these technologies. Jean-Jacques Salomon (1997), however, views this situation as even more dire: in trying to control nature through technology, we have ultimately lost control over each of these spheres - nature and technology. It must also be taken into account that the tendency to emancipate oneself from the servitude to man and his needs and interests is shared by all the systems that man has engaged in his service - from the economy, bureaucratic apparatuses to technology. The great challenge to human freedom is therefore the process that Robert Merton (2007) termed “goal displacement”, by which he meant the transformation of the means of achieving certain human goals into an end in itself. We understand it as a situation in which man becomes the instrument of the tools he originally mobilised for his emancipation. The term nonhuman has been coined for such social actors emancipated from man. Their discovery is also problematic in that their autonomous functioning is preferentially oriented towards their own self-affirmation. The writer Hermann Broch (2016) commented on the process of their autonomization in the following words: “One value area after another inexorably proclaimed its own autonomy: economic value took on the slogan...
‘business is business’; artistic value became ‘art for art’s sake’; industrial development became a process of ‘production for production’s sake’ that no longer had anything to do with satisfying human needs; the state became an institution for ‘the sake of the state’; and each value area itself aspired to its own infinity.” In other words, each of these mutually alienated spheres claims absolute validity, which brings it into conflict with the claims of the other spheres and also into conflict with human emancipatory demands. As Broch (2016) notes, the result of their antagonism is “war, which is a manifestation of militarism itself, war for war’s sake...” At this point we can revisit the beginning of our paper, where we pointed out the close links between struggle and freedom by defining freedom as “the struggle for emancipation”. However, the struggle itself should never become the goal of man’s emancipatory struggle, but should always play only the role of a mediator in it. Where the struggle becomes an end, or even an end in itself, freedom itself becomes its first victim. For a struggle defined in this way (struggle, war - war for war’s sake) is the total negation of freedom. In it, freedom is not simply negated (overturned) into a state of slavery, but is completely annihilated by the fact that its counterpart (slavery) without which freedom is inconceivable, loses its significance in this self-serving struggle. For the desire for freedom can only be ignited where one becomes aware of one’s limits. After all, even freedom itself should not be the end result of human endeavours. Nor should the human emancipatory struggle be about freedom itself - freedom for freedom’s sake. Even freedom should only be a means of our self-realisation and of the fulfilment of our human mission. Man wants to be free above all in order to be able to determine himself. Only in the second place should he invest the acquired freedom in determining the course of the external world. Even here, however, the determination and shaping of the world should always be at the service of man’s self-determination. This means that man’s shaping of the world should never become an end in itself or a matter of human arbitrariness. The mastery of nature should be preceded by the mastery of oneself. According to Albert Schweitzer, man’s failure is that he had mastered nature before he mastered himself. To prevent such failure we consider one of the most important aims of education.

References