

Personal autonomy development in activities: historical-didactical aspect

R. Popov

Department of Romance and Germanic Languages and Translation, National University of Life and Environmental Sciences of Ukraine,
Kyiv, Ukraine

Corresponding author. E-mail: popov@kmu.gov.ua

Paper received 06.03.19; Accepted for publication 20.03.19.

<https://doi.org/10.31174/SEND-PP2019-196VII78-07>

Abstract. The relevance of our study lies in the scientific reasoning and theoretical coverage of the problem of the formation and development of personal autonomy in activities. We can see the scientific understanding of the category of autonomy in activities in the fact that social processes in the society put to the educational system the requirement to form a personality able for autonomy and personal responsibility under the conditions of a volatile and dynamic world. The concept of autonomy by its scientifically-categorical definition is a relative new one for the higher school didactics, though the very phenomenon of autonomy can be considered to be fully studied in the spheres of philosophy, pedagogics and psychology.

Keywords: *autonomy, self-efficacy, development, student, self-regulation, higher educational institution, individual educational activities.*

Problem statement. Introduction of modern innovative approaches and ways of presenting information that updates very quickly requires from the future teachers the capacity for individual and resilient making various decisions in respect of a considerable number of unconventional pedagogical tasks which they may face in their pedagogical activities. To feel comfortably, future teachers have to gain sustainable abilities for self-actualization and self-fulfillment back at the times of their studying at a higher educational institution, which will later become the indices of self-efficacy on the way of their personal self-improvement. We will commence our own analysis of the formation and development of the scientific phenomenon of personal autonomy in activities from looking into the historical-didactical context of this problem.

Recent researches and publications analysis. Personal autonomy as a subject of research is to a certain extent represented in the works by O. Dergachova, E. Desi, D. Leontiev, Zh. Pyzhykova, G. Prygin, T. Partiko, R. Ryan, O. Sergeeva; in particular within the context of subjectivity (I. Kotik, A. Maricheva, etc.); arbitrary self-regulation (Zh. Virna, V. Ilychuk, S. Malazonia, Yu. Myslvskiy); personal sovereignty (A. Klochko, S. Nartova-Bochaver); authenticity (N. Kogutiak, M. Ragulina); juvenile personal identity (L. Klochek, Yu. Lanovenko, I. Serednytska, etc.).

The aim of the research paper is to describe the results of studying psychologically-pedagogical problem of personal autonomy development on a generalizing level.

Basic material presentation. We can find the initial attempts of the purposeful formation of persons with self-sufficient traits in the in the practices of organized teaching and upbringing in the ancient East Asian states (Ancient India and China). At the sources of the Buddhist upbringing there is the figure of Buddha Shakyamuni; as the legends tell, Buddha started his teaching as a teacher of a forest school near Benares. According to his teaching, the major aim of the upbringing is the perfection of human soul that shall be set free from the cravings by means of self-cognition and self-improvement. Such persons are able to secure their self-sufficient existence in the world and achieve outer and inner harmony. Confucius describes the ways to achieve autonomy in the imperfect social environment. According to his teaching program, a person shall possess such qualities as honor, strive for the truth, honesty, respect to the others and spiritual culture.

Of great interest are the attempts to comprehend the prob-

lem of correlation of the self-sufficient and collective, which were developed during the Classical Antiquity times. According to Heraclitus, the key trait of a person is the ability for individual thinking, understanding and acting in consort with nature and social interests: “Abundance of knowledge doesn't teach men to be wise, wisdom is the oneness of mind that guides and permeates all things”, “It is therefore wise to remember that all is one”. Heraclitus paid special importance to the development of people's abilities for individual thinking, and thus – to act self-sufficiently in their searches for the truth. From this he made a conclusion about the importance of self-education in personalities' formation.

An eminent example of self-sufficient being and following one's own worldview independently from its perception or imperception by the others can be seen in the figure of Socrates. For him virtue is equal to knowledge. According to him, people don't adhere to moral norms because they don't know and don't realize the consequences of their violation for themselves and for the society. It was Socrates who has introduced the explicit ethical concepts (goodness, fairness, valor, etc.); and knowing them, as he thought, can allow people to choose the correct way in the society and a model of behavior that can be characterized as self-sufficient.

From the text of Aristotle's “Politics” we can see that for a free person the testament of autonomy is the establishment of smart households, “for in all things which form a composite whole and which are made up of parts, whether continuous or discrete, a distinction between the ruling and the subject element comes to fight”. In the opinion of one of the greatest philosophers of the Classical Antiquity times, a free person “attends more to men than to the acquisition of inanimate things”. The autonomy of a free person at a Greek polis is the consequence of a cleverly organized will.

The idea of autonomy in the ancient world has been most fully reflected in one of the most prominent philosophical school of the Greco-Roman culture – Stoicism. The Stoics (A. Losev [1]) put forward their aim: the elaboration of an ironclad and independent character of a person; a subject's autonomy was considered as a way to achieve this aim. “Stoicism has assumed the duty to maintain an individual's inner tranquility in front of the global empire, which was uncontrollably growing. It was necessary to make individuals internally ironclad... in order to protect them from public miseries and inconstancies, resulting from social gains and organization of the empire” [1, p. 80]. Individual autonomy was seen as a way of upbringing an internally unprejudiced

personality, which will have a comprehensive outlook and an ironclad behavior.

The pedagogics of the Ancient Rome in its content has been considerably different from the Greek classic period since it was growing upon the synthesis of “universalism and subjectivism” [1]. According to O. Losev’s definition, “the Roman philosophy is often treated as an utterly practical, moral and utilitarian one [1, p. 187]”. We can say the same about the pedagogics which has been gradually gaining an independent significance and was considered from the point of practical application, rather than as an expression of philosophical theories. Even though the latter ones were most closely related to the real life (including education), suffice it to recall the example about the exile of the Stoic Diogenes, Academic Carneades and the Peripatetic Critolaus from Rome for their “trivial” analytical speech on a very practical issue about the cancellation of fines for the Athenians, and it was exactly this kind of “practical philosophy” with its impact upon society that caused persecutions [2].

Christian thinkers of the Early Middle Ages, considering a person as a “vessel for soul”, and the paramount quality of the soul – the mind, “spiritual insight”, which opens the way to the understanding of the God. The spiritual abilities shall not simply be fostered, but also guided to the achievement of the genuine, supreme values, since, according to Basil of Caesarea, in real life a person’s abilities become “either blessing or villainy” depending on their application in a certain situation [2, p. 68].

The existence of people at the time of the European Middle Ages was determined by their integration into a certain stratum of society, comprehending the orders of the Christian religious doctrine, and the way to the personal virtues was attributed to the individual realization of the Christian truth. Spiritual autonomy, independence from material values in the mortal life were interpreted as the harbinger of the eternal life in the Kingdom come. Thomas Aquinas and Alcuin could combine their personal beliefs with rational explanation of the fundamental principles of Christianity.

The Modern and Contemporary Ages have changed the point of view upon the sense of people’s existence. The ideals of practicability, achievement of individual and public success have favored the reinterpretation of the individual inception and private initiative role. In the XVII century J. Locke in his work “An Essay concerning Human understanding” has figuratively and laconically defined the rule of people’s self-sufficient behavior in a democratic society: a gentleman (an individual) shall be able to attain personal happiness in the society in a way that would not hinder other gentlemen’s happiness [3].

Theoretical comprehension of the idea of subjects’ autonomy in activities goes back to the philosophically-sociological concepts of the French philosopher, writer and enlightener of the mid-XVIII century J.-J. Rousseau. It was he who set forth and justified the idea that personal freedom is observing the laws, which a person has set for him or herself. In his works “Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality Among Men” (1755) and “Lettres morales (1758)” the French philosopher criticizes history, society and even questions the sense of people’s personalities: a person is gifted with the freedom of will – to follow the nature or act contrary; he stipulates his worldview in the motto “back to nature”, meaning self-sufficient existence of people beyond the limits of the “artificial culture”. Reconstructing the pro-

cess of the humanity development from the primitive society as a society of “happy community” to the existing inequality, marked by the appearance of private property, Rousseau sets the requirement of equality and individual autonomy, freedom of everyone. J.-J. Rousseau continues to idealize self-sufficient existence in his later works. Thus, in the text “Du contrat social” (1762) he promotes the ideas about the appearance and sense of the state, people’s sovereignty, social and natural conditions of personal becoming [3].

As scholars stress, autonomy can be formed only within the humanistic pedagogics. According to G. Kornetov, in the Western European humanistic pedagogics appeared and developed the traditions of practical implementation of individual freedom, autonomy and personal individuality, acknowledgement of the right for individualism, independence and self-activity. It was in the Western European pedagogics that the idea of free upbringing, free school, and in the XX century – the idea of humanistic education (E. Key, M. Montessori) was born. Its appearance was caused by the general comprehension that a person is the highest value, the key factor of progress, its aim, content and final result [4].

This has become the impetus for the change of the aim of education from the socially-oriented (formation of a personality according to the social interests) to the anthropocentric one (development of a person for the sake of the person and vicariously – for the sake of the society). If under the traditional educational paradigm the individual peculiarities of pupils had no vital importance and were hardly taken into account, then the humanistic pedagogics focuses its attention on the inner world and distinctive peculiarities of every pupil. Such an approach requires the subordination of the content of education to the interests, capacities, individual peculiarities and life experience of the students.

The democratically-oriented pedagogical paradigm envisages transition from the subject-object relations to the subject-subject ones. Modern educational systems (general schools, colleges, institutes and universities) can be characterized with a certain degree of unilateralism: the predominating position there is given to mastering the basic concepts of sciences, while other personal activities only have insignificant importance.

The personal self-sufficient element has always been distinctively seen on the Slavic educational field even at the times, when individual initiative was suppressed in political and social life. A bright example of the efficacy of the individualism is the creation of probably the first didactic (Greek διδακτικός – educational) text – the “Instruction” by Volodymyr Monomakh [5], which was a part of the Laurentian Codex (dated around 1117) and addressed to the youth. The Codex covers a wide range of different historical phenomena and events and thus reflects a proper level of the public opinion development at the times of the Kyivan Rus. “The credibility of the information (of the Laurentian Codex) leaves no room for doubt” [5, p. 520], – mentions M. Lavrovskiy, one of its first researchers. As it is known, the author of the “Instruction” is a prominent figure, Prince of Chernihiv, Pereyaslav and Kyiv Volodymyr Monomakh, an outstanding individual, which would today be characterized by the set expression as a man with the European level of education and thinking (for the Western European rulers of the XI-XII centuries command of foreign languages was an exceptional quality: the European writers saw that as a distinctive merit and three centuries later were proud of the knowledge of the

German Emperor Charles IV, who had mastered several foreign languages). Momomakh's father Vsevolod Yaroslavovich could fluently speak five European languages "...just as my father had learned, staying at home, five languages,[4] for this makes one honored in other lands" [5, p. 154]. For the author of the "Instruction" his father's example is the most significant determining factor of personal priorities. The humanistic concept of education and interpretation of the upbringing major aim was deduced by Monomakh from a person's attitude to the God, whom he considered to be eternal personal inception and the key to understanding each person's sense of life: "According to the word of the Gospel, learn to govern your eyes, to curb your tongue, to moderate your temper, to subdue your body, to restrain your wrath; and to cherish pure thoughts, exerting yourself in good works for the Lord's sake. When robbed, avenge not; when hated or persecuted, endure; when affronted, pray. Destroy sin" [5, p. 150]. The efficacy of the pedagogical instructions is strengthened by referring to the author's life experience: "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread" [5, p. 148]. We consider as absolutely justified the statement that the Prince Volodymyr Monomakh as a national leader was the first one in the Eastern Slavic area, who could unite humanistic, Christian ideals with people's daily needs, to unite self-sufficient, individual, personal and public, community-oriented, since according to him, for the salvation of soul it is not enough just to believe, one also has to make good deeds (for the society) and work daily.

In his days the researcher of the culture of the Kyivan Rus D. Lihachov had all the grounds to state that in the Old Russian literature, and not only in it, "the author's identity was subdued" [5], "the bright effects of genius" were absent: "... a choir with no or very few singers and mostly sounding unisonous" [5, p.6]. Nevertheless, the following remark is fair: it is "subdued", since the audience that was listening or rather "hearing" was not very big. Still, there have always been some personalities, who due to the proper upbringing and education were dealing with the most urgent problems of their time, had civil courage and responsibility, their personal autonomy.

The philosophical heritage of G. Skovoroda is the summit of comprehension of the problem of individual autonomy in the society. For him autonomy is the harmonization of one's personal will with the Christian duty, existence in the environment beyond institutional regulations, a way of behavior that correlates with the "moral law inside us". By his works the Ukrainian enlightener was striving to deliver to the consciousness of everyone the pivotal principles of happy living as a panhuman aim and thus he has enriched domestic humanistics with his teaching: from passive perception of happiness to its active affirmation in the ideal of self-cognition, "affined" work. In his interpretation, based upon the traditions of the Ancient philosophy, self-cognition consists of comprehension of the truth, according to which everything in the world is composed of two contradicting natures: eternal and perishable, matter and spirit, seen and unseen. To his mind, the first step on the way towards happiness is the implementation of the idea, expressed in the Ancient philosophy – "Know thyself". This was the motto of Thales of Miletus, which was later caught up by Socrates and Plato and continued by G. Skovoroda. The Ukrainian enlightener in his dialogues addresses the readers with Oedipus's words:

"Your happiness is inside thyself, here is its center: know thyself, know everything, if you don't know thyself, you will walk in the shadows afraid of fear, where there is none. To know thyself fully, cognize and befriend with thyself is the integral world, true happiness and absolute wisdom" [6]. Though, from the philosophically-theoretical heritage of G. Skovoroda we can trace the trend for the Ukrainian intellectuals to submerge into their own worlds which didn't encourage the occurrence of leadership skills in the social and political life. And this side of autonomy we consider to be a negative one.

In the Slavic educational space at the very source of the higher school didactics we can see the personality of an outstanding Russian scholar, an organizer of the schooling, M. Lomonosov. It was he who insisted upon the necessity to organize such kind of educational process that would foster the versatile education of the youth and would "lead" students to conducting individual researches of phenomena, objects and items. To his mind, universities had to put into life the ideals of a democratic higher school, open for all the strata of the society. A notable fact is that M. Lomonosov was one of the first to start lecturing in the Russian language at the time, when Latin was still dominating at European universities. Wishing "the sciences to flourish", the scholar was willing to organize the educational process using the best ideas of the Western European lecturers, he introduced new methods and patterns of educational activities, including individual education as a part of the general educational process.

In the text of the "Rules of the St. Volodymyr University" dated 1864 (now – Taras Shevchenko National University) was mentioned the obligatory practice of students' writing research papers (course papers and thesis researches) starting with the first year of studies. The task of the students' academic research work was to "form the ability to freely express ideas in Latin" and "profoundly master the basics of sciences". Students of the historic and philological faculties of the St. Volodymyr and Kharkiv universities participated in the colloquiums ("critically reviewing the primary sources"), conducted written assignments in comparative grammar, Slavic philology, performed parsing of ancient texts and thus learned to conduct self-sufficient educational activities.

Preparation for the classes involved not only the reduplication of the summarized material, but also contemplation over the read additional literature. Practical classes were aimed to "develop, sharpen" the minds of the audience: students read, analyzed, contemplated over the texts of the Russian, Greek and Latin literature, thus forming as true personalities of their time.

The choice of the conducted scientific researches was significantly influencing by the literary soirees, where students were having scientific debates about history, local literature traditions and art. In 1817 was published a collected book "Compositions of regular and irregular students of the Kharkiv University", later the "Ukrainian Journal", where students published their scientific literary works.

The higher school cared about raising scientific successors. Among those who considered scientific researches as the major precondition of the future specialists' training, an efficient way of future scholars' preparation, taught the methods of scientific inquiries, were well-known theorists of literature, language experts, ethnographers I. Galiatovskiy, I. Gizel, P. Gulak-Artemovskiy, G. Kvitka-Osnovianenko, M.