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MATERIALISM, RATIONALISM, AND UTOPIANISM. SPASOWSKI'S PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF EDUCATION

Materializm, racjonalizm i utopianizm. Filozoficzne podstawy edukacji Spasowskiego

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Abstract

This paper analyses the philosophical foundations of education in the thought of Władysław Spasowski. It proceeds from the assumption that pedagogy arises from a particular vision of the human being and the world. Therefore, reconstructing the views of the author of *Zasady Samokształcenia* [*Principles of Self-Education*] makes it possible to better understand his concept of education. The aim of the text is to demonstrate the relationships between materialism, rationalism, and utopianism in Spasowski's thought, as well as to assess their significance for his educational theory. The author conducts a historical-philosophical and problem-oriented analysis of his writings, supplemented by biographical context and references to selected contemporary interpretations. The article shows that Spasowski's philosophy of education was eclectic in nature, combining Marxist, naturalist, evolutionist, and Nietzschean inspirations, while at the same time emphasising the importance of work, critical thinking, independence, and responsible freedom. This project remained ideologically conditioned, revealing a reductionist anthropology, a strong anti-religious stance, and a utopian belief in the possibility of forming a "new human being." The author argues that Spasowski's thought constitutes an important contribution to the history of Polish pedagogy. However, it requires critical reading, as it exposes the close relationship between a philosophy of the human being and a concept of education.

Keywords: philosophy of education; materialism; rationalism; utopianism.

Streszczenie

Artykuł podejmuje analizę filozoficznych podstaw wychowania w ujęciu Władysława Spasowskiego. Punktem wyjścia jest założenie, że pedagogika wyrasta z określonej wizji człowieka i świata, dlatego rekonstrukcja tych poglądów autora *Zasad samokształcenia* pozwala lepiej zrozumieć jego wizję wychowania. Celem tekstu jest ukazanie związków między materializmem, racjonalizmem i utopizmem w myśli W. Spasowskiego oraz ocena ich znaczenia dla jego koncepcji wychowania. Umożliwia to analiza historyczno-filozoficzna i problemowa jego pism, uzupełniona o kontekst biograficzny oraz odniesienia do wybranych interpretacji współczesnych. Tekst pokazuje, że filozofia wychowania W. Spasowskiego miała charakter eklektyczny: łączyła inspiracje marksistowskie, naturalistyczne, ewolucjonistyczne i nietzscheańskie,

a zarazem eksponowała znaczenie pracy, krytycyzmu, samodzielności i odpowiedzialnej wolności. Projekt ten pozostawał uwikłany ideologicznie, ujawniał redukcjonistyczną antropologię, silny antyreligijny rys i utopijną wiarę w możliwość ukształtowania „nowego człowieka". Autor uważa, że myśl W. Spasowskiego jest ważnym świadectwem dziejów polskiej pedagogiki, ale wymaga lektury krytycznej, odsłaniając ścisły związek między filozofią człowieka a koncepcją wychowania.

Słowa kluczowe: filozofia wychowania; materializm; racjonalizm; utopizm.

Introduction

The author is convinced that philosophy, as an attempt to understand reality, constitutes an essential foundation for pedagogical reflection and the educational process. He shares Gaston Mialaret's position that there is no education without philosophy, as well as Kazimierz Sośnicki's view that philosophical thinking, particularly philosophical anthropology, precedes educational questions (cf. Mialaret, 1968, p. 23; Sośnicki, 1967, pp. 172–173). Without entering into a discussion of the distinctions among the terms philosophy of education, educational philosophy, and philosophical pedagogy, it is assumed here that specific philosophical contents, including those belonging to the philosophy of education, are historically and contextually conditioned. As a result, these conditions shape particular understandings of both the essence of education and the nature of the human being. The author regards philosophy as the foundation of reflection on education and treats it as one of its essential components. Within this framework, philosophical anthropology plays a central role. Its questions precede those concerning education itself. This approach indicates the philosophical foundations of pedagogy not only as reflection on education but also as a set of theoretical possibilities for its grounding, enabling the development of non-ideological theories and systems of education.[1] The author notes that this approach refers to the classical tradition. It takes into account the contributions of numerous thinkers, from Plato and Aristotle to Herbart. It links education with a specific vision of the human being and the good. At the same time, it rejects any claim of the full ideological neutrality of pedagogy, explicitly advocating philosophical pluralism as the foundation of education.

In the context of these considerations, the question arises as to whether Spasowski's philosophical views formed the foundation of such a system of education. Did their rationalist and mystical overtones – resulting from a form of utopianism and a belief in a better future inspired by Marxism, and perhaps also from a tense and partly

[1] In Poland, strong links between education and philosophy have been emphasized, among others, by S. Hessen, K. Kotłowski, Z. Mysłakowski, B. Nawroczyński, H. Rowid, K. Sośnicki, and B. Suchodolski, and more recently by J. Gnitecki, T. Hejnicka-Bezwińska, Z. Kwieciński, M. Nowak, S. Palka, T. Szkudlarek, S. Sztobryn, B. Śliwerski, S. Wołoszyn, L. Witkowski, and many others, including the present author (see Kojkoł, 2023). Most quotations from Spasowski's writings have been partially adapted to contemporary orthographic conventions. All quotations have been translated by the author unless otherwise indicated.

contradictory relationship with personalism – constitute the basis of a particular yet simultaneously universalist conception of the philosophy of education? These questions stem from the author's conviction that Spasowski's theoretical trajectory, although primarily shaped by ideological Marxism, engaged with various philosophical currents. Moreover, he may be regarded as one of the representatives of the idea of the creative work school, promoting the "self-deification of the human being."[2] However, it should be borne in mind that Kołakowski wrote: "The human being's self-deification, to which Marxism gave philosophical expression, ends in the same way as all individual and collective attempts at self-deification: it reveals itself as the farcical aspect of human misery" (Kołakowski, 1988, pp. 1211–1212).

How to live? How to die?

The author supports the concept of limited determinism and the relationship between freedom and responsibility. He therefore regards the conditions in which Spasowski lived and worked as one of the factors that influenced his creative output. Spasowski's biography is significant not only from a factual perspective. It also demonstrates how the socio-political context contributed to the radicalisation of his philosophical stance and, consequently, to the radicalisation of his views on education.

[2] Few authors currently address Spasowski's works. The author is not aware of any comprehensive studies analysing his philosophy of education. Moreover, the views of the author of *Zasady Samokształcenia* [*Principles of Self-Education*] are often interpreted in a one-sided manner. In the past, he was discussed, among others, by L. Chmaj (*Prądy i Kierunki w Pedagogice XX wieku* [*Trends and Directions in 20th-Century Pedagogy*], Warsaw, 1962); W. Czerniewski (*Rozwój Dydaktyki Polskiej w Latach 1918–1954* [*The Development of Polish Didactics in 1918–1954*], Warsaw, 1964); S. Dobrowolski and T. Nowacki (*Szkoły Eksperymentalne w Polsce 1900–1964* [*Experimental Schools in Poland 1900–1964*], Warsaw, 1966); D. Drynda (*Pedagogika Drugiej Rzeczpospolitej. Warunki, Orientacje, Kontrowersje* [*Pedagogy of the Second Polish Republic: Conditions, Orientations, Controversies*], Katowice, 1987); L. Grochowski (*Studia z Dziejów Polskiej Szkoły i Pedagogiki Lat Międzywojennych* [*Studies in the History of Polish Schooling and Pedagogy in the Interwar Period*], Warsaw, 1996); J. Kulpa (*Kształtowanie Nauczycieli Szkół Powszechnych w Polsce w Latach 1918–1939* [*The Formation of Teachers in Primary Schools in Poland 1918–1939*], Wrocław, 1963); M. Lipowska, „Koncepcje Wychowania w Polskich Programach Okresu Międzywojennego", *Rozprawy z Dziejów Oświaty* [Concepts of Education in Polish Curricula of the Interwar Period, *Studies in the History of Education*], 1969, vol. 12; J. Miąso (*History of Education in the 20th Century*, vols. 1–2, Warsaw, 1980); S. Możdżeń (*Zarys Historii Wychowania od 1918 do 1939* [*Outline of the History of Education from 1918 to 1939*], Kielce, 1995); B. Nawroczyński (*Polska Myśl Pedagogiczna. Jej Główne Linie Rozwojowe i Cechy Charakterystyczne* [*Polish Pedagogical Thought: Its Main Lines of Development and Characteristics*], Lviv–Warsaw, 1938); S. Wołoszyn (*Nauki o Wychowaniu w Polsce w XX Wieku. Próba Zarysu Encyklopedycznego* [*Educational Sciences in Poland in the 20th Century: An Encyclopedic Outline Attempt*], Warsaw, 1993); and R. Wroczyński (*Dzieje Oświaty Polskiej 1795-1945* [*The History of Polish Education 1795–1945*], Warsaw, 1980).

Spasowski was born on 28 December 1877, in Belarus, in the Vitebsk Governorate. He graduated from a classical gymnasium in 1897. He then left to pursue higher education in St. Petersburg, but ultimately began his studies in Lviv and continued them at the Faculty of Natural Sciences at the University of Warsaw. He participated in efforts to preserve the Polish character of higher education institutions and was a member of the radical academic youth organization *Spójnia*.

In clandestine self-education circles, he established contact with members of the Polish intellectual elite, including Ludwik Krzywicki, Piotr Chmielowski, and Wacław Nałkowski. It appears that Spasowski's intellectual formation was influenced primarily by the philosophical and psychological lectures of Adam Mahrburg. In 1901, under Mahrburg's supervision, Spasowski published a translation of Émile Boutroux's *Natural Law in Science and Philosophy*. He later devoted a study to his mentor entitled *Adam Mahrburg i jego poglądy na naukę i filozofię. Analiza porównawcza* [*Adam Mahrburg and His Views on Science and Philosophy: A Comparative Analysis*], as well as a monograph titled *Adam Mahrburg, życie i praca filozofa* [*Adam Mahrburg: The Life and Work of a Philosopher*]. For Spasowski, this Polish positivist, who gave the intellectual movement a critical orientation, served as a model of a scholar who defended the independence of his own ideas and challenged established views.

In 1901, Spasowski went to Switzerland to continue his studies. There, he wrote his doctoral dissertation entitled *Les bases du système de la philosophie morale de Guyau* [*The Foundations of the System of Guyau's Moral Philosophy*]. In 1908, he was awarded a doctoral degree at the University of Bern. An examination of the works of this Polish educator suggests that Spasowski appreciated the richness of Guyau's thought. The ideas of this French philosopher may have constituted an important source in the formation of Spasowski's moral concepts. In Guyau's writings, Spasowski was particularly interested in the role of moral instinct, consciousness, and egoism in human life.

After returning to Poland, he worked with Antoni Bolesław Dobrowolski at the model school in Wożuczyn. Beginning in 1908, he served as form teacher at Wojciech Górski's gymnasium, Zofia Matusek's girls' gymnasium, and the Stanisław Konarski Teachers' Seminar. Between 1919 and 1928, he served as director of the Wacław Nałkowski State Teacher Training Courses in Warsaw. During this period, he actively participated in the Congress (Sejm) of Polish Teachers.[3]

[3] The events in question took place in Warsaw between 14 and 17 April 1919 and are most commonly referred to in primary sources and scholarly literature as the Teachers' Sejm. Although its resolutions did not possess legal force, they outlined the general direction for the development of the Polish educational system. In accordance with the demands formulated during the deliberations, primary education was to be compulsory, free of charge, and uniform. A seven-year primary school was adopted as the foundation of the educational system. Secondary and vocational schools were to be organized on the basis of its completion. It was recognized that the structure of education should be uniform throughout the state, but at the same time should take local conditions into account. Education was to remain under state

The author of *Zasady samokształcenia* [*Principles of Self-Education*] was deeply convinced that liberated Poland would heal the wounds inflicted by war, hunger, and social deprivation, and would establish enduring foundations for the future. He believed that the entire nation should unite around Józef Piłsudski. However, the May Coup and the subsequent political developments led to a transformation of his views. Consequently, for political reasons, he retired in 1930. Following this decision, he departed to Paris, where he studied the works of the classical theorists of Marxism. It was there that he ultimately clarified the views he later presented in 1933 in his most important book, *Wyzwolenie człowieka w świetle filozofii, socjologii pracy i wychowania ludzkości* [*The Liberation of the Human Being in the Light of Philosophy, the Sociology of Labour, and the Education of Humanity*]. The work received ambivalent evaluations, depending on the ideological orientation of its reviewers (Uziembło, 1934; Jasiński, 1938; Dobrzyńska-Rybicka, 1935).[4]

The outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 and the preceding political developments affected Spasowski's psychological condition. Cut off from his friends, preoccupied with Poland's defeat, deprived of the possibility of travelling to the Soviet Union, and living in fear for his son's fate, he felt "driven into a situation with no way out." Ultimately, he decided to take his own life on 6 July 1941.[5]

Philosophy, Science, Religion, Education

According to Stanisław Borzym, Spasowski represented views grounded in Marxism, specifically in dialectical and historical materialism. He wrote that the starting point of his philosophical reflections was Marx's social ideals (cf. Borzym, 1991, p. 163). At the

supervision and receive social support. The separation of pedagogical supervision from school administration was advocated. Teachers were to constitute 45% of the membership of school councils. In religious matters, a compromise solution was proposed. Within the primary school, the "national and religious-moral element" was to be accorded its proper place. Religious authorities were to supervise the conformity of religious instruction with the doctrinal principles of a given denomination (see Spasowski, 1920, p. 17).

[4] Further discussion of this topic can be found in L. Chmaj, *Kierunki i prądy pedagogiki współczesnej* [*Directions and Trends in Contemporary Pedagogy*], Warsaw: Nasza Księgarnia, 1938, pp. 227–229; W. Jasiński, *O katolicką pedagogikę w Polsce* [*On Catholic Pedagogy in Poland*], Katowice: Księgarnia Katolicka, 1938, pp. 14–15; J. Kuchta, *Nowe kierunki i dążenia współczesnej katolickiej pedagogiki* [*New Directions and Aims of Contemporary Catholic Pedagogy*], Lviv, 1939, pp. 18–19; and B. Nawroczyński, *Współczesne prądy pedagogiczne* [*Contemporary Pedagogical Trends*], Warsaw: Nasza Księgarnia, 1936, pp. 17–19.

[5] In a letter dated 5 July 1941, written in Piastów, Spasowski addressed to his friend K. Batorski: "I, unfortunately, having already been hunted down in fascist Poland and now pursued by Hitler's dogs, have been driven into a situation with no way out. In order to save my beloved son, I must throw my own body to these jackals as prey. Before they satisfy their bloody, vile snouts, my son must disappear somewhere far away and thoroughly" (see Chylińska, 1961; Spasowski, 2025).

same time, an analysis of his overall body of work suggests that the Polish educator also drew inspiration from the philosophy of life, as well as from the works of Nietzsche and Guyau. It may further be noted that Spasowski was interested in themes associated with evolutionism. He also appears to have been a historian of philosophy concerned with the meaning of historical processes. Some scholars point to his personalist inclinations, although others reject such interpretations (cf. Legutko, 2017, pp. 91–112). This eclecticism appears to be one of the reasons for inconsistencies in his work, including the philosophical foundations of his conception of education. Moreover, one should take into account the evolution of his views, including their radicalisation.

Spasowski believed that philosophy originated in tales and myths, "from incidental observations and experiences," which gave rise to scientific and metaphysical reflection. It was myths and various hypotheses concerning the supernatural world, as well as the concept of the soul, "materialistically formed on the basis of dreams, dissociation of personality, ecstasy, death, hallucinations, etc.," that, over time, led to the emergence of notions, such as pure reason, the mind-body problem, apriorism in cognition, and other related concepts, which, in his view, were marked by crude atavism (cf. Spasowski, 1933, p. 94). This thesis was relatively widespread in the late nineteenth century in both European and Polish philosophy. However, it is excessively reductionist. Consequently, it simplifies the classical account of the origins of philosophy.

Nevertheless, Spasowski acknowledged the diversity of philosophy:

> Finally, it should not be forgotten that there is no single philosophy, but rather that there are many kinds of philosophy, both in the contemporary world and throughout history, and that the best introduction to each of them is undoubtedly a sound knowledge of psychology, logic, epistemology, and ethics, as they encompass the most important aspects of cognition and action. (Spasowski, 1923, p. 86)

This approach makes it possible to develop a particular worldview of human existence and nature, which, in his view, should constitute a synthesis of humanism and naturalism. It enables an attempt to address a range of questions concerning cognition, being, life, nature, humanity, the universe, culture, and creativity.

> These questions concerning the most important aspects of being and the eternal problems that trouble the human soul, ought to form a coherent complex, a system, and lead to the creation of a harmonious, unified, and non-contradictory worldview of life and the world. General ideas and general conceptions are both necessary and useful, for they economise the efforts of the mind, serving as a kind of scaffolding that facilitates our access to various domains of reality and the grasping of the loose mass of facts and experiences. (Spasowski, 1923, p. 56)

Spasowski rightly emphasises the pluralistic character of philosophy and its connection with a comprehensive conception of the world and the human being. His attempt to synthesise humanism and naturalism recalls the long-standing dispute between the

Aristotelian tradition, which regarded the human being as a rational and social creature, and modern forms of naturalism, which have tended to reduce culture to natural processes.

In responding to the questions identified by Spasowski, philosophy must draw upon scientific research and develop an understanding of the nature of science, including its content, its history, and the intellectual struggles associated with the pursuit of truth. It is essential to uncover the connections between particular doctrines and the broader intellectual currents that preceded them, to identify their affinities, and to recognise the guiding ideas that define the character, limits, and aims of scientific inquiry, as well as of philosophical reflection. According to Spasowski, in his discussion of the views of Mahrburg, this task is made possible by the historical-comparative method. He writes:

> The same applies to every philosophy, for example to the philosophy of Kant. The transcendental idealism of the sage of Königsberg can be understood only when it is unraveled upon the broad canvas of the history of philosophy, when we uncover the threads connecting it with the dogmatism and formalism of Wolff's system, with the skeptical empiricism of Hume, and even when we reach back to the philosophy of Socrates and the inquiries of Protagoras. (Spasowski, 1913, p. 2)

The origin of science lies in "common knowledge," once certain of its subjective elements have been discarded, including the indulgence of desire and the pursuit of purely practical ends. Spasowski emphasised that

> mythological views and beliefs, together with a small number of primitive opinions and judgements, gave rise to science. Since the cardinal driving force of the entire history of science is the fact that any given body of knowledge gradually ceases to satisfy, and new conditions and experiences generate the need for its renewed adaptation, there comes a period in the development of human thought when a conscious striving to secure universal validity for knowledge begins to emerge: this marks the birth of science. (Spasowski, 1913, p. 2).

Spasowski shares Mahrburg's view that all scientific propositions must correspond with accumulated facts. He distinguishes between two forms of empiricism. The first, naïve empiricism, disregards finer distinctions, accumulates facts, and on this basis infers the laws of nature. The second, critical empiricism, defines what constitutes a fact, investigates the certainty of its existence, the forms of its manifestation, and the limits of knowledge. However, science cannot be satisfied with a mere description of facts. Spasowski accepts that there is no science without philosophical assumptions. Consequently, facts alone are insufficient for science. The guarantee of scientific character must lie in the method of acquiring and constructing knowledge. This view is close to Karl Pearson's postulate that science is not built on facts alone but also on methods, procedural principles, and theories. Accepting the validity of Mahrburg's statement, Spasowski writes:

> Experience and method constitute the everyday bread of science, while doubt and criticism are the beacons which illuminate its paths and secure retreat in case it strays onto false

> tracks. Science deals with empirical material. Unable to grasp at once the entire diversity of experience, it analyses it, decomposes it into elements, and seeks the most stable coexistences and successions of the identified components. It creates abstract concepts, general notions, and finally laws, and by means of these ideal products, this symbolic alphabet, it theoretically attempts to construct experience. (Spasowski, 1913, p. 52)

Spasowski accepts Mahrburg's view that scientific activity seeks to discover general and abstract laws. This is the principle of logical grounds. The laws of nature are reducible to the principle of causality. These laws are real and confirm the existing relations. Logical laws, by contrast, are formal in character. This means that when we explain something causally, we demonstrate an intelligible connection between our thoughts rather than a necessary connection between phenomena. Logical and mathematical laws are therefore distinct from the laws of nature. Consequently, as the Polish educator maintains, causal determinism must not be identified with formal determinism. Every formal law is, in fact, an approximation to an ideal law of nature. This process consists in an increasingly precise specification of the manner in which phenomena occur. It does not, however, establish that a given phenomenon must occur. Discussing Mahrburg's views, Spasowski writes:

> The laws of nature, however, never assert that phenomena must always occur in a determinate order; they merely state how events have occurred when certain effects are given, or how they will occur if certain conditions are given. The human mind cannot foresee all the factors that may intervene in the world-process accessible to inquiry; thus, it is right to maintain that scientific determinism is imperfect, but this in no way proves indeterminism. Such a claim would decidedly exceed the limits of human knowledge, since ignorance of conditions, or even the impossibility of knowing them, does not yet prove their non-existence. (Spasowski, 1913, p. 55)

It may readily be agreed that method, experience, and criticism are important indicators of scientific validity. This view brings Spasowski closer to the classical empiricism of Francis Bacon and to critical positivism. At the same time, it distances him from positions that are critical of the scientistic paradigm of knowledge. In Author's view, science is not based exclusively on facts but also on knowledge of causes and principles, or a deeper dimension of understanding. I likewise share and positively evaluate the position concerning partial determinism, which Spasowski presents more cautiously than do radically mechanistic versions. I contend, however, that partial conditions and their recognition do not abolish human agency; on the contrary, prudence presupposes action within a world of conditions rather than within a world of pure necessity.

From these considerations, it can be concluded that scientific knowledge is a form of knowledge that has a dual guarantee of truth: empirical verifiability and rational justification. On the one hand, it must be empirically verifiable; on the other, it must conform to the laws determined by our thought, that is, to the meaning of accepted concepts and judgements, insofar as they are regarded as true and refer to the same object of inquiry. However, no body of knowledge can be sanctified; its truth is not determined

either by the formal sanction of reason or by the "impulses of the heart," but by the "universe" as a whole or by its constituent parts. Referring in this context to the views of Mahrburg, Spasowski writes:

> The object of all cognition is one and the same: the universe as a whole or some part of it. Knowledge that seeks its warrant in sanctified traditions and the impulses of the heart is religion; knowledge that, as a matter of principle, relies solely on the formal sanction of reason, that is satisfied when it is consistent with itself, rational and coherent, is rationalist metaphysics; finally, knowledge that recognises as true only those theses which correspond to reality, whether directly or indirectly known, and which are internally consistent, and accepts them only insofar as they remain in agreement with both of these respects, is science. (Spasowski, 1913, p. 56)

According to both thinkers, science aims at knowing the world as it is rather than as it might be. Consequently, it does not attempt to know the "thing-in-itself," since this cannot be known. Science recognises the totality of inner and outer experiences, identifies coexistence and succession, and reduces all experience to a limited number of concepts corresponding to these processes. In this sense, to know something means to establish a correspondence between thought and the object of cognition. This is a philosophical understanding. But what does understanding mean in this context? According to Spasowski and Mahrburg, it amounts to nothing other than the possibility of analysing a given concept and breaking it down into its constituent elements, that is, into simpler and better-known concepts. Science is therefore concerned with relative truth. In this connection, Spasowski writes:

> We do not possess a perfect, finished science. As one of the products of the human being, it is not only a completed fact but also an effort to achieve ever more perfect guarantees of truth. Science develops both in terms of content and form; that is, the fundamental character of the relationship between the knowing mind and the surrounding phenomena is subject to development. Scientific knowledge is not dogmatic by its nature; on the contrary, it is critical and must itself be subject to criticism. (Spasowski, 1913, p. 68)

There is no ideal science, because in reality it is only an approximation:

> It is created by people, not by pure, perfect minds detached from reality. It makes mistakes and corrects itself, rushes ahead and then retreats, slows down and accelerates its progress, but it constantly moves forward ever since it became a conscious theory of experience. New experiences often lead to changes in concepts and new theories, which must nevertheless encompass earlier ones as necessary stages of development (...). Scientific work, insofar as it is conscious and purposeful, should be guided by an ideal which would have value for us; otherwise we would not know why we are working, and we would lack a standard for our efforts. The ideal of science should be formed on the basis of an assessment of what it has been and is, and what it ought to be in order to acquire universal value. (Spasowski, 1913, p. 70)

Thus understood, science describes, explains, systematises, informs, and predicts.

A significant observation made by Spasowski in his discussion of Mahrburg's views concerns the aims of science, the norms of conduct, and the possible sanctions associated with a given type of behaviour on the part of a researcher engaged in scientific inquiry. Science investigates phenomena by treating them as facts and seeks to discover the conditions of their emergence and development. Ideals, goals, and sanctions are not theoretical norms. Science recognises that emotions lying at the foundation of human behaviour and its ideals. It therefore studies these phenomena, identifying the conditions under which ideals and norms shaping human behaviour arise, "but it systematically excludes emotional evaluation from its system, because it cannot assign it universal validity." Science merely indicates the conditions under which social relations develop and predicts their transformations. However, it does not replace ethical norms or religious beliefs with their commands and prohibitions. It does not formulate goals, let alone impose them; instead, it broadens the scope of social relations and thereby deepens morality.

This view corresponds to the proposed classification of the sciences. Fundamental sciences are divided into formal sciences (logic and mathematics) and empirical sciences (physics, chemistry, biology, psychology, history, sociology, ethics, and aesthetics). Empirical sciences are divided into natural sciences (physics, chemistry, biology, and psychology), which are characterised by consistency, testability, and systematicity, and the humanities.

It is difficult to determine unequivocally whether the reflections concerning the humanities are solely a presentation of Mahrburg's views or also those of Spasowski. Nevertheless, due to the subject of the article, it is worth quoting them directly:

> On the other hand, we have the humanities, whose object of study is everything that the human being produces as a value assessed from any point of view or as an aim of striving. The humanistic standpoint by no means frees these sciences from the requirements of consistency, testability, and systematicity; they acquire their distinct character by taking into account evaluation and human goals, by classifying facts according to their value for human beings and, as far as possible, according to their universally human value. The character and task of the humanities are understood in various ways, since they are in general less developed theoretically; therefore, they present more difficulties when it comes to dividing the humanities into particular disciplines. (Spasowski, 1913, p. 79)

Such a science is philosophy, since it investigates one domain of culture – science itself. In a certain sense, it assumes a universal, all-encompassing character, but not because it is meant to be a universal science or a science of the universe. Its object is the entire system of scientific knowledge, and its main task is to develop a theory of science, or, in principle, a "theory of all sciences."

The eclecticism of Spasowski's philosophy results in a conception of the humanities as disciplines concerned with the study of values and goals, thereby situating it within the classical tradition of modern humanities, from Dilthey to Windelband and

Rickert. This important insight shows that the humanities are not a poorer imitation of the natural sciences, but a distinct way of understanding the meaning of human actions.

Philosophy, understood in this way, examines how science is possible and what it ought to be in order to possess universal value. An important role in this process is played by logic and epistemology which serve as standards of all thought and determine its correctness. According to Spasowski, logic protects against hasty judgements and allows for the formulation of precise conclusions. It is the science of the principles of correct thinking and inquiry. It analyses all logical errors. However, for Spasowski, philosophical errors are even more important; hence his attention to epistemology. He holds that, in identifying such errors, the views of Bacon are useful, especially the concept of "idols." This approach makes it possible to analyse the content and meaning of errors such as intellectualism, understood as an unjustified overestimation of rational factors in the process of cognition and in human and natural existence; animism, i.e. the uncritical attribution of a role to spiritual forces and the soul within the universe; hypostasis, meaning the objectification and reification of concepts created by the human mind; anthropomorphism, i.e. the projection of human form onto higher beings; and anthropocentrism, i.e. the tendency to see the human being as the agent and purpose of the universe (cf. Spasowski, 1923, p. 96).

Undoubtedly, Spasowski valued the work of Bacon, who, in his theory of knowledge, sought to identify the forms of the properties of a given object of cognition. By the concept of "form," Bacon understood the mode in which a subjective property manifests itself, to which a corresponding objective property is strictly related. In his view, the tables of presence, absence, and degrees enabled the identification of the real properties of objects. It appears, however, that Spasowski only partially shared this position, particularly the conviction that such an approach to the construction of science necessitates the creation of a new philosophy. While he acknowledged the need for a critical approach to philosophical traditions, he also recognized the importance of tradition. He agreed with Bacon that the purpose of philosophy is to function as an applied science. Accordingly, through the reform of knowledge, the formation of a general worldview, and its role as "universal knowledge," philosophy ought to stimulate the development of science and thus transform human living conditions. As Spasowski observed, we now understand that wherever human thought generalizes, abstracts, analyses, synthesises, infers, induces, deduces, determines, and idealizes, science consists in generalizations and abstractions, while philosophy represents the highest synthesis of scientific thought, the theoretical conscience of science, understood as a theory of knowledge in general, and in particular as a theory of scientific cognition, or epistemology, concerning the foundations, limits, and meaning of all scientific creativity (cf. Spasowski, 1933, p. 86).

An important element further defining Spasowski's philosophical views is his interpretation of Nietzsche's work, which, for the Polish educator, served as evidence of

critical thinking. In his view, the German philosopher initiated the dismantling of "apodictic and categorical moral commands and prohibitions," thereby compelling a search for paths leading toward new ideals. This process is associated with a revaluation of all values, or rather an "inversion of all values," aimed at fostering awareness of the possibility of "shaking off all habits and prejudices." According to Spasowski, this act of shaking off constituted the beginning of a new, higher morality. He regarded the breakthrough significance of Nietzsche's philosophy as lying in its challenge to established ideals.

> Amid the ruins of the ideals of the past, he wrote, amid the ruins of moral, social, and religious dogmas, he calls loudly for a search. His prophetic thought awakens the mind from intellectual slumber, shakes it, astonishes it, and causes new ways of seeing and evaluating to arise within us, revealing unknown horizons. Nietzsche was a prophet who hated falsehood and hypocrisy, and who loved a rich and beautiful life. (Spasowski 1904, pp. 1201, 1226)

It seems that Spasowski accepted the view of the necessity of an elite morality, referred to as natural morality. Its basis was the Darwinian observation that, in nature, the stronger prevails over the weaker. He emphasised that, in Nietzsche's philosophy, this morality is extended to the entire universe. It is not merely about the "struggle for existence," but about the attainment of a higher mode of being; not only about the instinct of self-preservation, but above all about the expansion of one's own being; not about competition, but about victory. Natural morality is thus characterized by a striving to rule over the world. The path to this is open to those who are capable of revaluating everything traditional within themselves. It is therefore primarily a matter of spiritual selection, of producing an aristocracy of the spirit, an elite that would govern the world in the name of its salvation, a salvation accomplished within the existing world, dominated by the will to power (cf. Spasowski, 1904, pp. 1201, 1226). It is possible that Spasowski shared the view of Nietzsche, who wrote:

> Your educators can be nothing but your liberators. And that is the secret of all culture (...), it is a liberation, a removal of all weeds, rubbish, and vermin that attack the delicate shoots of plants, the streaming forth of light and warmth, the tender dropping of the night rain; it is the following and veneration of nature where she is maternal and compassionate in disposition; it is the completion of nature when it prevents her cruel and ruthless blasts and turns them to good, when it draws a veil over the manifestations of her step-motherly sentiment and tragic unreason. (Nietzsche, 1912, pp. 207–208)

Appreciating Nietzsche as a critic of established forms of morality possesses a certain heuristic value. It presupposes that ineffective norms and hypocrisy require replacement – destruction. Yet the question arises whether the mere destruction of former ideals suffices to construct an ethics, and whether such a process is capable of indicating both good and evil. This possibility is excluded by the tradition extending from Socrates and Aristotle to Kant. Equally striking are the theses concerning a higher morality, conceived as an elitist morality grounded in the superiority of stronger individuals, not

necessarily in the physical sense. In the eugenics of the early twentieth century, such a vision readily leads to the justification of contempt for the weak and to an educational model based on selection rather than on the cultivation the person.

An important element in Spasowski's views is also his distinction among three kinds of knowledge: scientific, metaphysical, and religious. The source of science is the empirical world, which the mind cannot transcend; its instrument is method and methodically constructed concepts; and its aim is truth accessible to the human intellect, "answerable to logic and experience." Metaphysical knowledge results from the formal sanctions of reason, that is, from consistency and rationality. The final type of knowledge derives its significance from tradition and from feeling, the "impulses of the heart" (cf. Spasowski, 1923, p. 97). The author also perceives a difference between religion and science. He sees religion as the "logic of the heart," addressing and arising from the emotions, whereas science is the "logic of reason", born of reason itself, which alone determines its value.

In his book *Wyzwolenie człowieka w świetle filozofii, socjologii pracy i wychowania ludzkości* [*The Liberation of the Human Being in the Light of Philosophy, the Sociology of Labour, and the Education of Humanity*], Spasowski offers a highly critical analysis of religious phenomena. Undoubtedly, most of his views in this work are ideologically burdened. Prior to writing this book, however, he made an interesting distinction between positive religion and religiosity. Positive religion is based on myths, dogmas, and cult, whereas religiosity, "in its ultimate foundations," is reduced to cosmic feelings and the perpetual search for the ideal of moral perfection.

> Religiosity is the striving of the heart, common to all thinking and feeling human beings, towards the boundless realm of unfathomable mysteries and unrealised ideals. Religiosity, [as he wrote] is reduced to indeterminate relations of the self to infinity, and it becomes all the deeper and richer in each individual case the more developed a person's individuality is (Spasowski, 1923, p. 97).

This reveals an ambivalence between the critique of positive religion and the effort to understand religiosity as an experience of meaning and moral perfection. This distinction between positive religion and religiosity is intellectually engaging. It recalls earlier efforts to distinguish the institutional form of religion from the inner experience of faith. Already in the tradition of Augustine, Pascal, and Schleiermacher, it was recognized that religion is not exhausted by doctrine, worship, and organization, but extends toward questions of meaning, truth, and the ultimate good.

According to Spasowski, the value of religion lies in its function as a theory of knowledge. It reduces all thinking "to a childlike pattern," it provides simple answers to troubling existential questions and readily resolves the riddles of the universe. It mechanises cognition and thus becomes a practical guide for human existence. In his view, the origin of religion is fully comprehensible. Human beings frequently find themselves helpless in the face of nature, which appears filled with mysterious and threatening

phenomena, such as fires, storms, floods, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, or solar eclipses. To these are added illusions, hallucinations, madness, and, ultimately, death.

According to Spasowski, every religion, especially in its primitive stage, is marked by "animism, anthropomorphism, and sociomorphism." From these emerge fetishism, totemism, shamanism, the concept of taboo, and magic. Later there develops natural religion, that is folk belief, and subsequently positive religion, understood as a "rationalistic system of beliefs combined with cult, a priestly class, a church, sacred books, etc., as an expression of the worldview of the ruling social class and of its methods of governance" (Spasowski 1933, p. 37). In this way, according to the Polish educator, religion was the first philosophy and thus the first science. "It was science in its infancy, a paraphysics before it became metaphysics, codified in sacred books and developed in various theological and metaphysical systems" (Spasowski, 1933, p.38). These claims are frequently accompanied by negative evaluations of religious phenomena. They sometimes assume an offensive and biased tone. An example of such an assessment is the following statement: "Moreover, religious natures are very often characterized by particular sexual deviations, psychological injuries, and morbid imagination; they are shattered nervous systems, prone to hallucinations, illusions, apparitions, and the like" (Spasowski 1933, p. 40).

For Spasowski, the most humanistic religion is Buddhism. He adopts the thesis that this religion does not presuppose the existence of either god or an immortal soul – an idea still popular today. It regards self-control, wisdom, and compassion as the foundation of happiness. It further demands renunciation of the material world, strengthening belief in the power of the human heart, the spiritualisation of human nature, the cultivation of love for one's neighbour, and ultimately the attainment of a peaceful refuge for human beings in nirvana, which, he writes, "is a state of peace and happiness, unattainable for a person subject to the senses and passions, and which can only be reached through inner moral refinement" (Spasowski 1933, p. 42).

Spasowski's statements are highly critical, and at times openly hostile, toward Islam, Confucianism, Lamaism, and Christianity. In his view, Christianity initially exerted a positive influence only in its primitive form, as it spread among slaves, the poor, and the persecuted, and was directed against the elites of declining Rome. However, it quickly adapted to the world and became a dominant religion, subordinating philosophy, art, and, more importantly, science. He writes:

> The democratic primitive religion, a religion of love and forgiveness, humility and gentleness, eventually degenerated in the Church into an institution full of intolerance, pride, greed, and crimes of every kind: falsification, injustice, persecution, the Inquisition, greed for earthly goods, and debauchery. (Spasowski 1933, p. 46)

Undoubtedly, the assessment of Christianity has a clearly ideological character. It is one-sided and polemical. Many thinkers at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, although critically analysing the history of Christianity, nevertheless recognised the positive effects of the emergence of this religion. It is impossible to overlook the fact that

Christianity contributed to the European conception of the person, conscience, compassion, the dignity of the poor, and also fostered the development of education.

Referring to religion in general, Spasowski argues that human beings, and especially human consciousness, have always sought in it a refuge and consolation linked to the unknowability of the world and its unresolved mysteries. For many, religion became an escape from "thought and inquiry." In his view, this state of affairs is reinforced by theology. Theology is not a science, since, by employing a dogmatic method, it constrains thought and produces religious dogmas. Drawing on the views of Bacon, he writes:

> For the critical philosopher, all religions are ultimately only a set of systematised superstitions, and the entire religious worldview is a childish play of the imagination, ridiculous and boundlessly naive, a motif fit only for a puppet theatre. The religious worldview immediately proposes final solutions to every problem; it knows neither hypotheses nor approximations; it imposes its judgements as absolute certainties and divine verdicts; it is, in essence, the embodiment of intellectual laziness and a negation of the creative spirit of science. (Spasowski 1933, p. 55)

Human being, society, education

The philosophical point of departure for Spasowski's analyses was the assumption of the objective existence of the material world, the eternity and infinity of the cosmos, the constant motion of matter, the primacy of experience as the foundation of knowledge, and the mental life as a function of the brain that developed in the course of evolution. He wrote:

> We adopt the standpoint of a clear, consistent, experience- and practice-based creative monism of cognition, opening up infinite creative perspectives, understood as materialist monism, the fundamental unity of the world and the uniformity of the cosmic and developmental process: there exists only one world, one development, one reason, one science, one truth. (Spasowski, 1933, p. 131)

In these views, the author drew upon Marx's dialectical materialism, understood, on the one hand, as a materialist conception of the world and of the eternal motion of matter, which, as he wrote, "creates, constructs, and destroys all objects, continuously transforming them, either gradually or through revolutionary means," and, on the other hand, as a Hegelian logic of movement, understood in materialist terms, which is simultaneously a logic of contradiction. Everything that exists passes away and is transformed into something else, often into its own opposite or negation.

> This is, furthermore, an evolutionary way of considering things and concepts in their mutual relations, in their emergence, development, and disappearance; it is, according to Engels, a view of the constant variability of human nature itself, dependent on a person's age and life experience; finally, it is a view of society as a living, active organism subject to evolution, understood as a natural and historical process. (Spasowski, 1933, p. 157)

These assumptions were reflected in Spasowski's conception of the human being, who was to be educated in such a way as to develop a strong personality and the capacity both to hate and to love. According to Borzym, Spasowski's aim was moral courage in the defence of ideals, freedom enabling the spiritual development of every individual, dignity expressed through a life consistent with one's conscience, creative labour, and social justice. Spasowski understood moral courage as the courage to defend one's convictions and ideals even in the face of social adversity. This could be achieved through the active participation of the human being of the future in a society integrated through democratic culture, the aim of which should be the formation of as autonomous, original, and creative personalities as possible (cf. Borzym, 1991, p. 164; Borzym, 1983, p. 526). In practice, Spasowski's postulates could lead to educational reforms promoting students' independent thinking and creativity.

A new society requires the emergence, through education, of an individual with an "open mind" and a strong foundation of ethical and social convictions. The emphasis is placed primarily on the development of intellectual capacities, the cultivation of all abilities, and the suppression of instincts and tendencies capable of disturbing the balance of a developed and educated personality, one that is complete, active, empathetic, and as creative as possible. Such an individual is expected to be aware of the meaning of existence, to engage in ideological cooperation, to participate in cultural life, and to act selflessly in the name of truth and justice, as well as for the good of all people. In essence, this is no longer an ordinary, imperfect human being, but rather a Nietzschean *Übermensch* or, in Znaniecki's terms, a "positive deviant" – a creator of a new culture and of a future society of "complete happiness." Dogmatic thinking will be eliminated, as the "new human being" will possess not only a righteous character and a noble heart but above all deep knowledge and an understanding of the methods of acquiring it. This will enable them to become a skeptical, critical, and questioning subject within the new society. Such reflections, and there are many of them, clearly reveal the utopian and normative character of Spasowski's project, which links education with labour.

For Spasowski, labour is a fundamental element of the new society and of education. In his view, every individual in the new culture must work, create, and produce. To live means to act. Labour thus becomes not only a necessity but also the foundation of human dignity. The future society appears, therefore, as an association of "free producers" acting for the good of the entire community. This constitutes a critique of both an extreme liberal conception of the world based solely on market principles and the Christian view of labour as a punishment for original sin. For the author of *Wyzwolenie człowieka* [*The Liberation of the Human Being*], the obligation to work is the foundation of a new culture and civilisation in which the human being is transformed from a galley slave into the master and creator of life, who, as he writes, "with the progress of technology and the organisation of labour will work ever more lightly, ever more creatively, and will have increasingly more time to enjoy life" (Spasowski, 1933, p. 249).

The concept of the "new human being" thus clearly reveals the utopian dimension of Spasowski's thought. The author maintains that education can perfect human beings, but it cannot entirely eliminate their weaknesses, internal conflicts, or the tragic dimension of history. At the same time, the Author shares Spasowski's high evaluation of work as a source of individual dignity. His rejection of the devaluation of manual labour is justified. This view brings him closer both to Marx and to the Christian social tradition, which emphasises that work co-constitutes the person and the community, provided it does not become an instrument of enslavement.

Spasowski's philosophical views concerning the human being and the world are relatively close to naturalism. Today, they could also be classified within broadly understood ecophilosophy. The Author sees in them an attempt to educate the human being through the integration of culture and nature, naturalism and humanism, evolutionism and Marxism, and perhaps even personalism. The Author argues that human beings, together with their culture, are part of nature, which has shaped them in such a way that they require happiness for their existence. Happiness, in turn, along with satisfaction, pleasure, serenity, joy of life, and creativity, constitutes a beneficial factor that "raises the human being to a higher ethical level," awakening in them the noblest values (cf. Spasowski, 1933, pp. 297, 310–317).

One of these values is freedom. According to Spasowski, freedom does not consist in doing, thinking, and working whatever one wishes. True freedom is moral freedom. It consists in "liberation from prejudices, dogmas, myths, and all forms of intellectual domination and subordination." It entails the development of critical thinking and self-criticism, as well as awareness of the limits and possibilities of autonomous thought and one's choices in life. Defining freedom as liberation from "prejudices and spiritual subjugation" possesses considerable philosophical value. It refers both to the Socratic practice of self-examination and to the Kantian understanding of autonomy. At the same time, it lacks the classical conception of political freedom as a sphere of specific action and is therefore incomplete.

Spasowski maintained that education should consist in indicating the path towards great things. A life devoted solely to career and financial gain, a life oriented exclusively towards material satisfaction, was for him not a true life but rather "a miserable vegetation, nothingness, and baseness." It is indeed good to possess practical skills, "to have a trade and even to be a master in one's craft," yet above all one must be a person with an open mind and a stable system of ethical and social convictions. One should have a goal in life, an ideal that must never be sacrificed "to the Moloch of circumstances, opportunism, and convenience," and whose banner should be held high as an essential guidepost in life and a powerful stimulus to actions that are as perfect and socially fruitful as possible (cf. Spasowski, 1933, p. 367).

For Spasowski, the ultimate aim of education should be the liberation of the mind and heart from hatred and from all forms of racial or religious prejudice; respect for the

free development of every individual; recognition of the child as a human being; and the cultivation of a complete, active, compassionate, and highly creative personality. Such a person should become aware of their role in the human world as a member of society and of humanity, and should feel the need for selfless cooperation in the name of truth and justice, as well as for the good of all working people (cf. Spasowski, 1933, p. 368).

If one were to assess only this fragment of Spasowski's views, one might conclude that he formulates a humanistic and anti-dogmatic aim of education. His thought is close both to the Kantian principle of treating humanity as an end in itself and to the personalist principle of the dignity of the person. However, an analysis of Spasowski's views as a whole reveals him to be a utopian materialist who subordinates education to his vision of social reconstruction modelled on the USSR (Spasowski, 1936).

Conclusion

In Spasowski's conception, one can discern a visionary, utopian, and perhaps even quasi-religious fascination with an idealised society of free and happy people, educated in the spirit of brotherhood grounded in universal human values. I also see in it the idea of self-formation through self-education, understood as the development of a liberated personality in a world regarded as "our own." This is a clear sacralisation of society, education, and the world. Treating them as a kind of sanctuary leads to their spiritualisation and their integration into the full personal order of the human being. However, society and the world can be regarded as sacred only by a liberated individual functioning within a community based on autonomy, originality, and creativity. At the same time, this may be merely a utopian vision of future education and culture that does not yet exist as an empirical reality. This does not mean, however, that it does not play an important social role. Societies, cultures, civilisations, and education cannot exist without illusions, dreams, and utopia; without them, even their partial realisation would be impossible. For the sake of the future, therefore, we should preserve illusions, dreams, and utopias; otherwise the future will be different and, it seems, worse.[6]

According to Spasowski, this is evidenced by pedagogy itself, which is in an essential sense a social philosophy - a practical, applied, normative, and technical philosophy, and at the same time a specific form of art. It is the ability to comprehensively educate young people in accordance with social needs and requirements in their "historical-dialectical development." Pedagogy encompasses part of value theory,

[6] For a broader discussion of this issue, see J. Kojkoł, *Samodzielność, oryginalność i twórczość jako podstawy integracji społecznej w koncepcji wychowania Władysława Spasowskiego* [*Autonomy, Originality and Creativity as the Foundations of Social Integration in Władysław Spasowski's educational concept*], in: Wschód – Zachód. Płaszczyzny Integracji [East–West. Dimensions of Integration], ed. J. Kojkoł, Gdynia 2001, pp. 35–40.

"concerned in particular with ideals, norms, laws, duties, and goals of pedagogical action." It is therefore a science of educational practice, dependent on "emotion, love, and desire," which determine the fundamental directions and aims of pedagogical work. This science should describe various norms and goals and justify their legitimacy (cf. Spasowski, 1933, pp. 337–340).

Returning to the questions posed in the introduction, it may be concluded that Spasowski's philosophical views did indeed constitute the foundation of a specific system of education. It was not, however, a worldview-neutral system, nor was it free from tensions. It emerged from a synthesis of materialism, rationalism, evolutionism, the ethos of labour, and a utopian faith in the possibility of shaping a "new human being." It frequently drew upon Marxism, including its ideologized form. For this reason, his philosophy of education was at once universalistic in its aspirations and particularistic in its ideological entanglements. Its value lay in its affirmation of critical thinking, autonomy, creative work, and responsible freedom; its limitations, however, became evident in its anthropological reductionism, its pronounced anti-religious stance, and its belief in the possibility of almost entirely overcoming the tragic dimension of the human condition through education and social reconstruction.

Spasowski's legacy may be read, on the one hand, as an important contribution to the history of Polish pedagogical thought, and, on the other, as a project that calls for critical distance. One may recover from it what remains inspiring: the conviction that education requires strong philosophical foundations and cannot abandon fundamental questions concerning the human being, the meaning of freedom, the value of work, and the shape of community. In this sense, analysing Spasowski does not lead to a straightforward acceptance of his proposals, but rather to a deeper awareness of how profoundly every pedagogical system is rooted in a specific vision of the human being and the world.

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