

WELLSO 2016 - III International Scientific Symposium on Lifelong Wellbeing in the World

“The Care of the Self” Practice in a Contemporary Culture

Galina I. Petrova^{a,b}, Anton K. Gural^a, Irina V. Brylina^c, Alla A. Kornienko^c,
Olga B. Stupnikova^{c*}

* Corresponding author: Olga B. Stupnikova, stupnikova@tpu.ru

^a National Research Tomsk State University, 634050, Tomsk, Lenin Avenue, 36, Russia

^b Tomsk State Pedagogical University, 634061, Tomsk, Kievskaya Street, 60

^c National Research Tomsk Polytechnic University, 634050, Tomsk, Lenin Avenue, 30, Russia

Abstract

<http://dx.doi.org/10.15405/epsbs.2017.01.88>

The current reference to the ancient practice of “the care of the self” is caused by its methodological saturation that makes it possible and necessary to use this practice nowadays. The specificity of the contemporary culture is determined primarily by its loss of limiting and general principles in the area of various cultural forms - in morality, aesthetics, law and etc. Stating this cultural condition, the authors have high hopes for the pedagogical culture, which in its new orientation is able to perceive those methodological approaches to human formations that were discovered by ancient Greek philosophers. As a research method it was decided to take sociocultural and historical comparativism that gives an opportunity to compare authentic state of “the care of the self” (as it was in the antiquity) and demonstration of this practice nowadays. The philosophical approach to the research of the problem allowed us to see in the style of philosophical thinking (different at different history stages) the fundamental cause of changes of ancient “the care of the self”. The style of philosophical thinking creates the type of rationality that at different historical stages varies and thus determines the different character and content of all cultural practices including the practice of “the care of the self”.

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Keywords: The care of the self; anthropology; Greek philosophers, pedagogical culture.

1. Introduction

The modern research focus is not accidentally drawn to the ancient anthropological practice of “the care of the self”. Actualization is connected not only with a purely theoretical interest to the ancient Greek philosophy, but also with the possibility to find here methodological approaches answering the question about the modern specifics of man’s education (in the broadest sense - the development,

socialization, individualization) as “taking care of oneself”. It can be stated as an empirically obvious fact that over the last twenty-five years in the anthropological portrait of the Russian society there occurred serious and inexplicable (in terms of preceding social state and philosophizing style) changes. The task of this paper is to see these changes in a way of modern, different from the classic content of “the care of the self” paradigm. It is also necessary to find the form of implementation it into practice. The search for new approaches to research and forms of “the care of the self” may represent interest in connection with the actual question posed today: “What has happened to a human being that he differs so dramatically from himself former? And why?”

The problem raised in this paper is linked with the noticed contradiction, which consists of the following. On the one hand, the modern culture, abandoning the power of unified and recognized limits and the true beginnings, has caused chaos, elimination of all sorts of canons, rules and ideals, and that initiated a cultural deviation, crime, corruption, and so on. On the other hand, the absence of power pressure has stimulated human activity and the freedom of self-determination as a really actual “the care of the self”. The problematic issue is to suggest the possibility of its resolution, after having considered and justified the specifics and consequences of both poles of this contradiction.

The object of the research in the paper is the “the care of the self” practice in its ancient origins and its contemporary consequences.

The subject of the research is methodological significance of the ancient “the care of the self” culture for contemporary cultural practices (especially for pedagogical practice).

2. “The care of the self” as a way of man’s existence in the history of cultures.

The most common thesis in terms of “the care of the self” is “care” as the result of human reflexive position in the world, when he becomes “his own performance spectator”, “looking around” and taking care of himself and asks: “Who am I?” (Scheler, 1994). “The care of the self” becomes the way of man’s existence. The ways of asking and the forms of answers on the asked questions in the history of philosophy were different and they always changed, but they always characterized the specifics of its reflexive existence.

Methodological potential of “the care of the self” for a long time has expressed a general metaphysical setting of classical philosophy – to raise everything to the general concept through the search for the essence (“Arche”), the limit of any reality fragment. The determination if this fragment was a *limitation* that is the explaining of it within certain frames, borders – limits. In this regard a man whose “care” was ascension to his essence, common to everybody, and that *limited* him, was not an exception. A man was understood essentially with all the consequences that entail – regardless time and place – stationary. This was a metaphysical man. It is important to emphasize, that a metaphysical man was understood within a gnoseology – epistemological answer to the question “Who am I?”, that caused well-known Socrates thesis “Know thyself”.

Gnosiological mindset and identification of thinking with existence in the philosophical-anthropological views have found themselves in the identification of the Person with the Mind, Logos, who set his parameters and limits. The ancient Greek had to find the answer to the question: “What

man is the truth opened to?”, to know this truth under the conditions of United, dominated and awesome existence was extremely important. Practices or techniques of “oneself” helped in this search.

“The care of the self” began to be understood in a rational, reasonable, logical way as the ascension, climbing up of a man to such limit/essence as mind. In the subsequent history the “Arche” (as the essence of man) has taken various forms. Descartes’ “Cogito”, “pure reason” by I. Kant, Absolute Idealism by Hegel, relations of production by K. Marx – all these were modifications of the mind as the human essence that defines the boundaries of his existence.

Therefore, Greek specificity of “the care of the self”¹ was in its connection with the “Arche” – essence-truth of a man, with those limits to achievement of which techniques of “care” were oriented. Ancient Greek Paideia – this is the way of the ascension (and then the ascension of the prisoners that were left in the cave. See “The Allegory of the Cave” by Plato - Alcibiades 1. 119.) (Plato, 1955) from the cave knowledge to the essence that is timeless, everlasting, standard and exemplary. Education, as Hegel writes, rises a man to his essential basics, in order the absolute spirit can get realization inside of him/her. (Hegel, 1977)

In the so understood “care” the free self-creation was out of the question, “the care of the self” was possible only in specific and common borders excepted by all. To “know yourself” in one’s limited essence in order to know the essence of the Other and to be possible to efficiently manage it – that was the task of the ancient “the care of the self”. The power of Arche (the power of essence) is principle of classic metaphysical philosophizing. Its autocratic power didn’t allow free and individual self-creating. The “care” was in identification of an individual with his essential, everlasting and unchanging basis. This tradition was kept until the twentieth century.

3. Modern techniques of “the care of the self” as a new way of human identification.

Today the content and the potential of “the care of the self” have acquired new connotations, while it was initiated by an unprecedented type of cultural development and a new way of identifying a person. Conceptually the unprecedented cultural and connotative novelty of the issue is explained by the general demetaphysical process of philosophical thinking that makes new accents on asking about ourselves and the truth. The question about the person specified by the Greeks on the epistemological level (the need to know yourself), and that hints at the possibility of absolute (for it was associated with finding the essence) answer today if admits epistemology form, and then suggests the possibility of pluralism response. But the basic plan of the modern question and the answer is not so much in their epistemological preferences but in their ontological intent to see the specifics of the method of human being in the world, which is now different from the Greek, and presents itself without the metaphysical power of “Arche” and “outside”.

What does education/formation/socialization as a way of existence of a man, who “takes care of himself” today within a demetaphysical culture construction mean? And what is important - what the

¹ It should be noted that this “the care of the self” is in reference to Plato’s understanding and paradigm focused on the fact that a man should live in the truth. Seneca and Epicurus had another paradigm – living in the happiness. So the “the care of the self” content was different.

modern techniques of oneself could be? These issues can be understood in the context of the Greek and the modern practice of “the care of the self”.

Post-metaphysical philosophy, considering the possibility of constructing the ontologies in their new features (time, formation, historicity) and removing the traditional forms of metaphysical constructions, legitimizes the possibility of free reality construction. It is created free from external authority as an artificial and technical. In the reality of culture it has found itself in the representation of their (inthingness) “transitions” and moving boundary “between” – between what was just and what has already transformed into another. Culture appears dynamic, staying in the continuity of the movement, which had lost the present and is always finding itself with the prefix “post”.

Thus, a man, who is considered within the new ontological construction principles, adopts these characteristics as anthropological a priori. Existing in such a culture, it appears in the same categories of “moving boundaries” and “transitions”, erasing all of its stable essential characteristics. It is no accident, therefore, that in modern philosophical literature there appeared a new notion “technological subjectivity”. So, introducing this notion, the authors of the paper “University as a center of culture generative education” say about the removal from the modern philosophy the obligations of tough goal-setting, about purposeful determination of the philosophy to metaphysical limits. They write that mentioned “teleological attitude crisis concerning the education leads to the crisis of educative subjectiveness, or more exactly, to the crisis of ideology of its purposeful formation in the form of invariable and autonomous essence” (Gusakovskiy and etc., 2004). The subject this is the shift of attention from “I” as an essence to the construction methods of “I”. So modernity updates and changes the content and the form of “oneself technique” manifestation. “The care of the self” is carried out in a new paradigm. “Educational subjectivity, if we understand it in such a way, appears not as something requiring opening and substantializing, but as a product of a series of self-transformation efforts” (Gusakovskiy and etc., 2004). Such statements indicate the refocusing of the modern philosophical attention to a man from the factors of external influence (whether from the social environment, or transcendental subject, God or something else) to his self-modification. Man’s education becomes “changing of human potential”, “continuous process of self-transformation”, reflection and understanding, technique of actions and communications, the possibility of interpretation and thinking, the ability of self-determination concerning culture and society, targeting and sociocultural personification, the ability of organization and self-organization of knowledge systems (Popov, 2008).

Technologically constructed reality and “technological subjectivity” – this is a product of modern thought, proposed the continuity of oneself creation as a “the care of the self”. The absence of metaphysical power of “limits” allowed to see the person in the authenticity of his existence – in freedom.

It may seem paradoxical the statement that culture, that is characterized in chaos, normlessness, endlessness, deconstruction of general ideals, is nevertheless relevant to the specifics of man’s existence – his freedom. Since namely man’s plan of existence consists of transcendence of different borders and frames, and individuation doesn’t give a man the possibility of being included into certain essential limits, since a man – this is freedom, constant moving and endless search for himself. Therefore, chaos and crisis is not heterogeneous to a man, on the contrary, they reflect his cultural and

anthropological authenticity. A man nowhere and never can find a ground to stop. The thingness being a strong ground could create limits and bounders for a man and restrict his freedom. On the contrary, a man always finds himself in a no-base and “transition”, in the “post-himself”. A man is confined within the unilinearity of the predicted direction, he is “not-in-the-project”, not in the motion vector transparence, in the constancy of a crisis and chaos.

These ontological characteristics, testifying the existence of human freedom, only in the modern “chaos” culture are not deviations from the specific method of its existence, but, on the contrary, an expression of his ever-changing “nonessence essence”. They are themselves this specific. Modern “chaos” is a cultural “order”, which has established itself as an adequate to the human freedom. But what forms may then “the care of the self” have?

In response to this question a number of cultural and historical, cultural and anthropological situations appear. On the one hand, the specificity of the modern existence of a man imposes the need of instability, dynamics, “disorder”, “chaos” and endlessness, on the other - a culture in its history has always appealed to a man to “take care of himself” so that he could “regulate” himself, accustom himself to an order and norm. On the one hand, the modern philosophical thinking liberated a man from the power of essential, limiting principles, but on the other – the cultural practices in their objectivity have shown the human inability to live without the power of limits.

The solution to these problematic contradictions has the task of finding new forms of “the care of the self”. The modern “the care of the self” is the adoption of the powerless culture, “chaos” that in its permanence manifests a modern “order”. Learning to live in the “chaos” as in the “order” means to show the permanent “the care of the self”, to look for place in the world individually – to seek one’s own inner core.

That this is the philosophical foundation of the modern pedagogical “techniques of oneself”. Modern pedagogical “techniques of oneself”, being based on understanding a man as “no-project” and directed to “chaos” as a way of a man’s existence, transform pedagogics from engineering disciplines into a truly humanitarian field of knowledge – in anthropology. But pedagogics, as a science that organizes an education, sets a really anthropological problem – to teach a man how to live without any dominant power, except his own power over himself. The authenticity of a human life – the power of a “the care of the self” with the aim to fully realize one’s own unique personality. Thus, it is possible to say that only demetaphisation of a man’s thinking style has liberated a man, has given him a possibility of new forms of “the care of the self” the essence of which could not be generalized and that provide new conditions of living in a singleness form – “to create oneself”.

However, today there is a series of questions showing the tension in cultural, philosophical and pedagogical situations. Can the motive of cultural-anthropological and educational emancipation testify about the authenticity of human freedom? What is the reaction of education as a social institute on that changes that has happened in education as way of man’s existence oriented on “technique of oneself” freedom?

The answer to these questions could be short and be in the spirit of recent deconstructivist theses: we are witnessing a “pedagogy death” as that classical science, which has always associated itself with the formation of human anthropological strategies - forming it.

The concept of “guidance” inherent in the root of the word “pedagogy” does not operate in situations of modern information flows and in confusing mazes of communications. Where to guide? To what ideal, form, norm and canon? The answer is in the negation of any “leading”. It seems that modern teacher is transformed into an escort, conductor, stalker. His task is to rely on the “led” and release his human potential, not to show the essence but to show that there are a lot of essences, and to teach to freely choose one of them. The ability to choose can be seen as a leading modern form of “the care of the self”. Classic pedagogical professions become a thing of the past. There appear new professions like “humanitarian technologist”, “coach”, “individual education program developer”, “manager in education”, “special education teacher”, tutor and so on. The specifics of these transformations is that they allow to see a man not in a narrow way, but in a versatility and entirety of his existence way. Pedagogy as anthropology this is the ability to independently and freely define oneself in streams, flashing in the constancy of changings. Self-determination is another practice of “the care of the self”.

It seems that namely Ancient Greece foresaw the specifics of the modern culture saying about the possibility of organizing an education as “the care of the self”. And namely Plato, opening up the idea of education as a Paideia (Jaeger, 1947), does not limit it only to the truth expressed in the dialogue “The State” in “The Myth of the Cave” – the introduction to the truth. The Greek philosopher foresaw in education as a way of ascension to ikon the time of violence, and at this point, noting the inconsistency, he has developed his own idea of Paideia. He gave the education an anthropological characteristic, said about it as a “the care of the self”, that is the possibility and necessity of the learner in the presence of his tutor (according to Plato - philosopher) freely find himself and his potential (Plato, 1955). But for Plato this practices was caused by politics (here the Greeks saw a free citizen), because to have a power over others one should be able to rule himself. However, as M. Foucault (Foucault, 1991) has noticed referring to this Plato’s idea, though the Greek philosopher says about politics as a preferable sphere of “the care of the self”, still his main idea is not to fix the specific area where a man dominates, but in a statement of the necessity of using the power, first of all over oneself. As such, continues Foucault, the principle of "self-education" is taken from the politics and is applies to all others spheres. Power over oneself should also be considered as relevant to the modern forms of “the care of the self”. In this regard M. Foucault considers the activity of the physician Galen who built his methodology on the base of man’s ability to rule his impulses of the heart and rule his body (Foucault, 1998).

4. Anthropology versus technology.

The prerogative of a man – the freedom of independent choice of his development directions. Anthropology rises against technology. “The care of the self” opposes technology.

Only with the knowledge of this transformation and with the study of its certain steps, orientations and results it would be possible to make researches in the field of contemporary forms of human formation and education, adequate to the specifics of his existence – freedom. In this sense, says J. Vattimo, it is paradoxical, but the fact that in the challenges of the information society as a society of advanced communications and “chaos” our hopes for emancipation are rooted. (Vattimo, 2002)

Complexity and difficulty, intricacy and rhizome, interwovenness of different communicative connections and their coupling (Nordstrom, 2003) create that situation in which the idea of education and pedagogy as an anthropological institute is made actual and active. Modern teachers-tutors – stalkers work as anthropologists.

What directions of such transformations are already visible? These directions are suggested by ancient Greeks who by introducing the “the care of the self” practice guessed its anthropological value - emphasis on human freedom, independence in self-educating and his high degree of responsibility. He carried out this process for the other response - to be responsible for it. Methodological resonance of this practice is affected in possible prompts of realization of modern pedagogy transformation, that operates as anthropological practice of “the care of the self”.

The first question that arises before modern pedagogy (anthropology) is associated with the instability and dynamics of modern ontological cultural schemes. What's in this sense can mean the modern pedagogy - pedagogy as anthropology? In the new culture ontology the well-established concept of personality philosophy as the integrity and stability of the human plane of existence has been changing. On the contrary, personal marginality becomes the norm of human existence. A man is now takes a form of a continuous personal identification crisis, constant “death” of himself as a “single” and the constant reproduction of himself as another. “Plural subjectivity”, “multi-facial I”, “escaping subjectivity”, and finally “subject death” – all these is from the sphere of new ontologies and modern modes of existence of a man disappearing in the traffic as a certainty. (Heidegger, 1993). Pedagogy as anthropology will have to solve the question how to keep personal identity? Keeping personal identity in a situation of uncertainty and instability is the practice of “the care of the self”.

Secondly, the contemporary question to the education and pedagogy arises due to the fact that the new personality characteristics reflect the human emancipation, his freedom as a rejection of all kinds of essential and core fundamentals. Whether it is possible? What search direction can modern pedagogy suggest? Whether it is possible to have a question about the subject of pedagogical reflections as a core essence? In response to this kind of questions pedagogy loses its classic mission – to lead to a known in advance sample. The pedagogy itself is in a constant search while in contextual complexities of the contemporary world a core is marginal, constantly changing its shapes and forms.

Thirdly, the freedom understood beyond the personality existence core, eliminates the need of any borders – cultural, social, moral, professional and so on. It seems to offer permissiveness, legitimizes culture desecration, justifies the lack of boundaries, limits, pleading its own nondominancy and chaos. In this context, pedagogical reflection on a man's existence in the culture, is itself in a border state where the dominant point is the crisis, destruction and instability.

In the pathos of deconstruction the positive, creative sense horizons and their possible negation are barely visible. But does it give the right to doubt in their existence? Traditional pedagogy accepts losses of one kind of ideals and can ideologically accept other ideals in order to lead to these ideals. Pedagogy as anthropology has the purpose of “the care of the self” and searches for them.

5. Conclusion

In the revaluation of the metaphysical classic heritage it is important to find the philosophical foundations of the current cultural status, strategies, techniques, and methods of their using in the study of the strategic guidelines for the creation of a new anthropological project of modern education. Carried out nowadays the regeneration of cultural grounds is generated by an extremely deep knowledge of the crisis and the need to update all the cultural practices on the anthropological level. In this respect, the ancient practice of “the care of the self” takes on methodological significance in the search for modern teaching methods and ways of personality socialization and education.

Acknowledgements

This research was financially supported by National Research Tomsk State University and National Research Tomsk Polytechnic University.

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