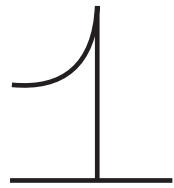




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S Reality as a Basis of Education to the Good in Josef Pieper's Works¹

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Abstract The contemporary educational system is oriented on performance and productivity. German philosopher and sociologist Josef Pieper (1904–1997) was one of the big critics of this orientation and a defender of holistic education. The aim of this study is to analyse two of Pieper's essays dedicated to education to the good – *Total Education* and *Reality and the Good* (both 1935) – and to present his concept of the “holistic education” that is based on them. In these two essays, Pieper analyses education as a formation of the spiritual soul in its ability to know and to act: knowledge is born as a result of our openness to reality in its divine root, and action is a response to this known good. Pieper identifies the educated man as being constantly open to the totality of reality, questioning unilateral, normative, performance-oriented and “specialized” education.

Keywords reality, good, Josef Pieper, upbringing, education, mensura, virtue

Introduction

This article first and foremost focuses on the question of the education and formation of man in the selected works of Josef Pieper. He explored

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the question of education, at least partially, in his entire work. Education and erudition represented a firm point of reference in his work, which he often interweaved with the issue of the university educational system. On the other hand, there is lack of works that deal with this question explicitly. However, there are two exceptions – the short essay *Total Education* (1933/35) and the work *Reality and the Good* (1935)², both written around the same time, which may be why they complement one another in such a comprehensive way. This is why we would like to base our study on both essays and analyse the problem of education/pedagogy³ through Pieper's fundamental frameworks, also adding remarks, references and quotations from other articles by this author.

The question of education in the works of Josef Pieper will be explored through the prism of reality and its role within this formation. First we'll pay attention to the basic contours of Pieper's perception of the term education/pedagogy, which is crucial for the unique formation of a person. An important task in this part will be to point

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- 2 Josef Pieper (1904–1997) was a catholic philosopher, student of Romano Guardini, expert on the works of Plato and Thomas Aquinas. He is known for his defence of the Western culture built on the pillar of leisure time and philosophic style of life. He also focused on the question of virtue and education to virtue. Essay *Total Education* (orig. *Totale Bildung*, 1935) and *Reality and the Good* (*Die Wirklichkeit und das Gute*, 1935) belong to Pieper's early works, written after the commentary to the encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* (*Systematische Einführung in die Enzyklika Quadragesimo anno*, 1932) and *Rules of the Game in Social Relationships* (orig. *Grundformen sozialer Spielregeln*, 1933) or chapter *Fortitude* in *The Four Cardinal Virtues* (orig. *Vom Sinn der Tapferkeit*, 1934), where he corrects the Nazi interpretation of heroism. In this period, Pieper focuses on the issue of education and writes certain parts with H. Raskop, which get banned practically immediately by Nazi chieftains. This is why *Total Education*, written in 1933 and published in 1935, has been preserved only in the form of a typescript, while *Reality and the Good* was published also by Jacob Hegner's publishing house. However, Hegner subsequently had to emigrate, which made it difficult for Pieper to find a publisher for his further books (Pieper, 2003, pp. 130–131).
- 3 In the first remark of his essay *Total Education* Pieper himself distinguishes the term "education" (*Bildung*) from term "upbringing" (*Erziehung*). He sees upbringing as a much wider area that also includes education, i.e. formation of the fundamental creative power of a person. In this article we will view education and upbringing as synonyms.

out to some of his anthropological resources, mainly the category of “spirituality” or “interior” that he highlights. Our second goal will be to analyse the impact of reality in the sense of “thingness” (*Sachlichkeit*) on spirituality and what role is played by “the whole” (*totum*) and a “holistic grasping of reality”. In this area Pieper also indicates the problem of education as a specific question of “measure” (*mensura*), which knowledge – both theoretical and practical – draws from reality. In the third part we will explore the relation between knowledge and action, education and improvement. We will demonstrate that according to Pieper, the bridge between knowledge and action is actually a practical reason, which imprints a measure of action in the will, while measuring itself by material reality. Finally, we will outline particular stages of the realization of the good, through which a person as a whole remains in harmony with reality as a whole. A person thus realizes the task of becoming himself, thanks to which he grows into the fullness of being.

Education/Upbringing as a Way to “Cultivate our Receptivity”

Pieper understands education/upbringing mainly on the background of his own anthropological basis. This can be seen in the perspective of previous philosophical teaching and thomistic postulates. What Pieper adds to these commentaries as his particularity are his clever observations of the current social perception of man. He mentions several times in his essays that the man of today is “functionally” integrated into a cycle of the world of total work⁴, which does not allow him to catch his breath; his perception is literally derived from practical aspects and calculus of utility, and the culture of that time “overestimates” the

4 The term “world of total work” or “totale Arbeitswelt” is typical for Pieper (Pieper, 1963, p. 21, 24, 34, 36, 58, 60, 71). Pieper draws inspiration from his favourite E. Jünger (and his book *Der Arbeiter*), according to whom the modern cultural ideal and prototype of future man will be represented by the “worker”. In the context of Jünger’s thinking Pieper affirms that “work becomes everything”, capturing “total” place, which means that it replaces “the openness toward the whole” (*totum*).

phenomenon of effort (Pieper, 1963, p. 31), which is celebrated as the ultimate social ideal (Pieper, 1990, p. 32). Apart from this, the general aspect of “activity”, strain or “performance” presented by a man to “satisfy” the omnipresent system is overrated.

This state, according to Pieper, results in man’s tendency to fill his leisure time after work with various expressions of the “entertainment industry”, to kill his feeling of boredom (Pieper, 2017, pp. 118–119, 128). He fears the “horror vacui”, so he jumps into “pseudocelebrations”, from which he hopes to get a feeling of intensity. Subsequently, he enters the vortex of new work, so-called “work from despair” (Baudelaire in Pieper, 1963, p. 59), “dull activity” and “strained happiness”, which is a result of constant activism and is as incredible as the “shining eye of a tractorist who struggles to achieve the planned goal” (Pieper, 2012, p. 220). Such a picture of a Stakhanovist – as Pieper calls him – lacks “an unobstructed flow of life” (Pieper, 2012, p. 221), not being able to see or hear at all (Pieper, 1990, p. 32) or notice signs pointing at inauspicious changes within society. “It is specifically the man thus impoverished who inevitably falls prey to the demagogical spells of any powers that be” (Pieper, 1990, p. 34). And in the perspective of the social setting he is freely manipulable.

In the spirit of a similar social setting, “education” is also understood as something associated with striving, huge effort, normative evaluation and progress, with a firm educational framework. And somewhere here Pieper connects this analysis with perception of reality, with something that he calls “simplex intuitus” (Pieper, 2004a, pp. 3–4; Pieper, 2008, pp. 534–535). What role does reality play in the process of education, upbringing? In the context of the already mentioned situation we could immediately state that education in its primary and most universal sense is seen by Pieper as a sharpening of one’s sight, hearing and general perception of reality (Pieper, 1990, pp. 31–36). We often overlook, ignore things that surround us. We see them as some sort of “obstacle”, “brake” for our activity. Even a strictly scientific, specific or analytic way of seeing reality does not help us perceive it more intensely.

Thus, Pieper believes that the goal of education is actually the formation of something deeper, something that is “truly human” (*das eigentlich Menschliche*). In the spirit of this enigmatic connection we could “read author’s lips” for the two most significant things that represent the basis of human life: Pieper calls the first one the “spiritual soul”. To him this means a substitutive sign of the reason and the will. In fact, not only knowledge but also the realization of these goods (either for one’s own survival or the survival of others) has a crucial position in relation to both our environment and the world. The privilege of the spiritual soul lies in what Thomas Aquinas called ability “*convenire cum omni ente*” (Aquinas, 1970, q. 1, a. 1). This is why man is capable of “entering a relationship with everything”. Its substance thus lies literally in “the connection to the whole reality of the world”.

Pieper, however, states another important thing, which is the subject of an education and upbringing *par excellence*. This is the phenomenon of the “interior”, without which there would be no exterior, whether in the world or in our environment (Pieper, 2004, pp. 314–315). Pieper thinks that only thanks to our “interior” does some sort of counterpart standing against us (*Gegen-stand*) actually exist. It is the “interior” of man that helps us break free from hierarchical structures of the anorganic (static) and organic (sensual) life of things.

Pieper understands the term “interior” (or “inner man”) as the “reality of the dynamic centre of being”; dynamic because of its prompt ability to adapt and react. This dynamic centre – the reference point of everything we perceive – does not enable (in contrast to animals) only our physical change and growth, but also mental and spiritual development⁵. Thanks to this, our moments and experience, our knowledge and deeds, are sealed in the walls of our life in a unique way. And even more – thanks to this, man needs new horizons and new goals. This is why the “interior” provokes him to come out of himself, to make progress, to

5 Spiritual development (spiritual knowledge) understands Pieper as “our capacity for establishing relations with the whole of reality and being able to transcend all these relations such that we can relate or identify with the totality of being itself” (Trepanier, 2009, p. 124).

search and discover (Ambrozy & Šagát, 2019, p. 218). And this is why our ways of education are always determined in the relation to “the image of man currently valid among people” (Pieper, 2004, p. 325).

Let us try to get back for a moment to the already mentioned statements from Pieper. If education of man is possible at all, Pieper believes it to be possible thanks to the spiritual soul that makes him “open to the entirety of being”. But what does this openness mean? What is the way of its expression? What is the more concrete basis of this “relationship towards the world” and how does it reflect in the topic of education, where Pieper puts it?

Education by the Means of a Forming “Touch” with Reality

Before we get to the answers to this question, let us recall that Pieper demands radical realism in the field of education/upbringing. True education must be achieved primarily in the sphere of knowledge. However, we cannot dwell solely on knowledge – education must be holistic, “total” (Pieper, 2004b, p. 310). This is why knowledge is consequently seen as a prerequisite of action, an answer, cooperativeness.

However, in the area of knowledge and reality two options are available. The first one says that we obtain knowledge thanks to things that surround us. Without them there would be no content, basis, justification. But there is also another option in the spirit of modern heritage: our knowledge can be reached exclusively by the means of a man’s mind. Thus, the primary reason is either a thing (*res*) or knowledge of the subject (*mens*), which would chronologically precede the existence of the things around us (Rajský, 2019, pp. 20–21).

However, if any content of our knowledge would be rooted solely in our mind, solely in our will, such knowledge would not be “based” on things and would be determined only by the will of a person who obtains the knowledge. In such case, it would be impossible for Pieper to call such a “relation” toward the world that surrounds us “openness”.

Both prerequisites are necessary for this “openness” – reality (*res*) in the first place, but also mind (*mens*). In this sense, the moment of encounter between the spirit obtaining knowledge and reality is called “touch”. Touch reveals a certain kind of “relationship”

(*In-Beziehung-sein* – Pieper, 2007, p. 64), through which one acquires the other and awakens his interest. Reality as a living instance also longs to “touch” us by presenting, demonstrating, giving itself, “reporting” to us. This “reporting” also requires “listening to reality” (Pieper, 2017, p. 60). Listening, sensing, noticing – because through all this we accept from reality what Pieper calls “measure”.

Pieper takes the term “measure” from Thomas Aquinas, according to whom “things are the measure of our knowledge” – *causa et mensura scientiae nostrae* (Aquinas, 1953, q. 7, a. 10 ad 5). “Measure”, however, is not something quantitative, but qualitative. Something that represents the thing itself and its essential feature. The Latin term for “measure” – *mensura* – provokes the impression that everything is created by our mind (*mens*), as if everything depended on us, but the opposite is true. Measure that can be found in things (*mensura*) constitutes our mind (*mens*), is imprinted in our knowledge in the form of “order”.

Pieper explains this in the spirit of traditional theory of knowledge. Every single thing that we get to know has its image (for Thomas Aquinas so-called *species*). Our spirit is the first to perceive this image. “The image of a recognized thing, through which we get acquainted with it, represents by its nature the essence of reality (Caietanus)” (Pieper, 2007, p. 60). According to Pieper, this means that before we get to know a thing, our spirit is “nothing when it comes to reality” (Aristotle, 1995, III, 4, 429 and 24). It is not active, only passive. Its cognitive abilities are not realized. However, as soon as our spirit gets acquainted with it or with its image, this image becomes imprinted in our spirit.

In this regard Pieper quotes Dominican superior general Francisco Sylvestris, who developed this thought in his commentary to *Summa against the gentiles*: “The essence of what exists in the objective world, is absorbed by the cognizant spirit, leading it to the perfection of being [...] The spirit itself represents such recognized reality...” (Pieper, 2007, pp. 61–62). It is realized in regard to options/possibilities but also by reality. It is capable of getting to know itself (considering the fact that it is real). When cognitive options are united and realized in the cognitive act, our openness, expectation and desire for the world that

surrounds us becomes fulfilled and completed. Thus, the dialogue of knowledge is something that recalls unsimulated unity.

And the “response” of reality, according to Pieper, has an inevitably formative character. It moves man forward, awakening and intensifying his interest in the world. What is more, this internally accepted “order of universe” helps him improve the order within himself and see himself in the new light. Pieper believes that this dialogue of knowledge has a very beneficial and healing contribution. He sees the spontaneity with which we indulge the view of rose and enjoy it. Such a small but healing contribution does not remain solely on theoretical level; it must be reflected in our deeds.

Education – Living and Acting Out of the Truth

Getting to know the causes that move our will and motivate our deeds is a part of getting to know the world (Pieper, 2004b, p. 323).⁶ A person chooses among them on the basis of the judgement of his practical reason. Pieper, however, warns against understanding the adjective “practical” as tactical or technical. A person should not motivate his judgement on future action by the effort to defend “his own”, as a sophist who uses the power of rational argumentation and rhetoric to get what he wants. Practical reason does not turn away from the reason contemplating the truth. It more likely broadens theoretical cognition of the truth by a new reality, which is living out of the truth. “[...] *intellectus speculativus per extensionem fit practicus*” (Aquinas, 1889, I, q. 79, a. 11, s. c.). In other words, “knowing of what should be done” is rooted in “knowing of what exists” (Pieper, 2004b, p. 322). The good of person is “to see things the way they are, if possible, and to live and act out of the truth understood this way” (Pieper, 2021, p. 164). Only a person who perceives and gets to know reality without any prejudice is capable of valuing and living it in the right way. “He alone can

6 A purpose which motivates human activity also represents the good, i.e. something that is demanded (Chabada, 2022, p. 45).

do good who knows what things are like and what their situation is” (Pieper, 1965, p. 10).

A person who perceives reality without prejudice (contemplatively), gets to know harmonic interaction and the given goal of reality. He also understands that a man moves toward this goal when he harmonizes his action with the direction of movement of the entire reality. Hence, the contemplation of reality awakens the practical attitude of a person, well-wishing love, acknowledgement of particular form of realization of each human being and the desire to achieve it (Pieper, 2007, p. 56).⁷

A person whose practical reason is not used to enforce subjective interests but takes the truth of real things as his measure lives in unity with himself and the world. His action emerges from the celebration of the highest Reality and from his willingness to be in unity with the foundation of everything. Whether this is based on ethical and political self-creation (*agere*) or the artistic and technical transformation of the world (*facere*), he always follows the measure given by reality in his creative activity. Through the analysis of practical reason Pieper arrives at a more precise definition of integral education: “An educated person is one who is capable of finding orientation in total reality in a cognitive and evaluating way on the basis of holistic perception; one who knows what reality as a whole is like, and who on the basis of this (theoretical) holistic knowledge also has valid information about what can be affirmed and what can be denied, what should be done and what should be left behind (Pieper, 2004b, p. 322).

Reality – Touch – Imprint: Maturing to the Fullness of Being

Pieper believes that education that would lead to knowledge but not to following the known (*agere, facere*) would be not only incomplete and insufficient, but also prone to misuse and degradation to contentless

7 According to James Schall, whose works have developed the thinking of Josef Pieper, the problem of contemporary education is the fact that it lacks any meta-physical rooting in reality. Practical reason creates the truth by producing it. Human existence is understood as total formability – the decision on what a person becomes depends solely on himself (Schall, 2010, pp. 1043–53).

rhetoric and manipulation (Pieper, 1992, pp. 20–21). Education to the good thus does not include only the formation of practical reason for estimating the measure of action, but also the formation of moral virtue for choosing and realizing the known good. It means being faithful to reality in knowledge as well as action. It starts with the touch of reality and continues with an imprint of reality in the diligent ability of a person. It is performed as a pendulum movement of departure and return between the acts of reason and will, with consideration of reality. The touch of reality and its imprint on the will acquires a more concrete form in every stage of this movement.

The first stage of education to good, according to Pieper, is relaxation, silence and listening. Modern man, used to an active projection of himself and his desire, must undergo a transformation (Pieper, 1989, p. 5).⁸

He must be quiet, and put his plans and ideals on hold, to see what is real. Otherwise, he will not be able to notice that he is driven by a wrong conscience, thus realizing only projected, false goals. Silenced and listening, he must look into reality in its depth (*simplex intuitus*) and open his will to reality by embracing “yes” with love (*simplex voluntas*) (Pieper, 1989, p. 4). Only a person who lets his view dwell naturally in the reality of being unveils the divine foundation of reality. Pieper affirms that this is a gift reserved for those who do not hinder their viewing by the desire to see what in reality they can use for themselves.⁹

A person who quietly and with devotion immerses himself into reality recognizes love for the good as an imperative: “The good should be

8 This turn to listening can also be philosophically understood as a rejection to base ethics and education on the Enlightenment project of an autonomous and self-sufficient “I” (Austenfeld, 2000, p. 377). Despite the fact that some authors keep the thought on the importance of listening silence in school education alive (Steel, 2014), contemporary school education is marked by a turn to a subject and its activity. Emphasis is put on the student, on his competencies for activity, on the activity of his reason and will, even in the subjects like religious or ethical education (Reimer, 2022, p. 79).

9 At this point Pieper’s concept of education intersects with Maritain’s “joyful existence” (Rajský, 2018, p. 60).

loved and realized". This second stage of the dialogue of reality, reason and will brings out the already mentioned broadening of the theoretical, i.e. the respectful and astonished perception of reality, by aiming at the good (Pieper, 2007, pp. 52–53). The good, which is recognized by man as a motive of action, is the objective good (Lat. *res*, German *sachlich*), i.e. the good of justice, bravery and meekness, the good of existence, in accordance with reason. The opposite would be selfishness, a calculated, unobjective good, which is the preference of those who have not passed the basic stage of transformation. All subsequent stages of education are a mere self-delusion for such a person. An educated person moves to the next phase only if the will agrees with basic imperative of the conscience and if true good becomes its aim and firm intention (*intentio finis*). Approval of the will represents the fundamental attitude of a virtuous person who accepted his essential orientation and decided to realize it. This objective approval of the existing distinguishes a wise person from a foolish person who weaves his own plans of self-realization.

A subsequent stage integrates human self-realization into unique historical moments that represent concrete and unrepeatable opportunities for growth. A person in various situations of his life focuses on stable goals determined by divine Logos and recognized in the touch of reality. He accepts these goals, finds fulfilment and directs his inventiveness to them in order to realize them under the unique circumstances of his life (Pieper, 2004b, p. 324). Thus, he stands face to face with a task to see the heart of the good due to be realized in reality of the world influenced by a variety of circumstances. His inclination to reality does not only mean the acceptance of stable goals, but also the acceptance of historical conditions, events, and wide-open opportunities. It is crucial that a person in a specific situation learns what real paths toward realization of the good are offered to him. The blessing for realization of the good is hidden in the presence of a moment, and this is why a person should draw the measure of his action from it. It shows that only a person who has embraced reality in his heart will be able to resist temptation to avoid historical reality and adjust it according to his own wish.

Objective perception of the context and circumstances of a concrete situation, the work of memory and previous experience with decisions, as well as ability to accept other people's advice are important prerequisites of being able to see real ways of growth. All these living parts of practical wisdom are necessary for a person to participate at a deep dimension of reality in his physical and historical existence and to remain oriented toward fullness. The human ability of objective listening to reality and unveiling its possibilities can never be replaced by the rules of casuistry (Pieper, 1965, p. 26) or by formalized procedures of education. After found resources are approved by the will, practical reason can move to the phase of identification of the most appropriate and suitable way and the subsequent selection. This selection does not concern the goals of action and happening; it concerns the means used for achieving those goals in a unique situation. It is not free thanks to the adaptation of reality to one's own wish, but thanks to breaking free from any possible tactics and egotistical calculus when touching reality. The selection of action excludes other opportunities for realization of the good, and reason subsequently tells striving abilities to "implement" the adopted judgement regarding the action. Knowledge of practical reason thus becomes a full and effective measure of realization of the good and education within one's own interior (Pieper, 2007, p. 75).

Conclusion

Is Pieper's work still topical for the modern man of performance and productivity? We think that the main reason why Pieper is translated, studied and worth reading even today, lies in the fact that his works revive the most precious content of great philosophical traditions. Readers find in his essays something that brings astonishment to their lives, the desire to search for the truth and hope for meaningfulness. In contemporary culture, the direction of which is broadly determined by pseudoreality of sophists and which erases the difference between yes and no, between truth and lie, between the good and the bad, Pieper's works can all of a sudden reveal the pretence and manipulation (Svobodová, 2022, p. 47). The reader realizes that wisdom can be

faked as well and starts to believe that his soul can be educated only in the spirit of faithfulness to reality and openness toward its depth.

Pieper is convinced that the relation of a person toward reality represents the basis of education and culture. To focus on reality, learn to see and to act in accordance with what we see, is the beginning and the journey of education. Education to the good does not begin with implantation of principles and norms, neither with systematic influencing of the soul. On the contrary, education starts with the loosening, abating and cultivation of sensibility toward everything that exists.

It enables a person to enter into relation with everything through his potencies – through reason and will. Such an education is a true “formation of the spiritual soul”, “formation of spirit” (Lichner, 2022, p. 42). It opens the person’s eyes and ears, so that he can be touched by reality and let it form him. The spirit is connected with the cognized thing, the image of which he accepts internally, through this touch. He recognizes himself, his incompleteness and the desire for fullness. He understands that he cannot realize it by tenacious effort to reach self-realization. Education means to accept the gift of historical opportunities and challenges. Under unrepeatable and unique circumstances of time a person can and should see the essence of the good and imprint this touch with the good into the reality of self-realization and transformation of the world.

The study has shown that Pieper is not “just” a philosopher of leisure time and “unuseful contemplation”. He is a defender of leisure, celebration and contemplation not because this dimension represents the basis of education of the spiritual soul, but because there is no true activity without it. Without silence, the action of a man would lack its basis. It would be reduced to an empty activism or “killing of time”. Only observation and love for the truth allow a person to find the measure, according to which his external activity should be directed to let him participate in the harmony of the world.

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