

Pedagogical implications of Josef Seifert's adequate personalism

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I. Introduction

The problems I am going to deal with in the present paper belong to the field of the philosophy of education, which is situated on the borderline of philosophy and pedagogy. The close connection between philosophy and pedagogy is deeply rooted in the tradition of education and may be traced back as far as the ancient Greek ideal of *paideia*.

According to Stanisław Gałkowski all the issues of philosophy of education boil down to the single question: "Who is man?"¹. I would agree with this statement to the extent that a proper grasp of the reality of man—which is arguably provided by the adequate personalism—is the first and fundamental task of the philosophy of education upon which only further considerations can be developed. Therefore, the anthropological question will be given due consideration in the first part of the paper. In this regard Seifert's position can be extremely illuminating, as he puts the person in the center of his entire metaphysics. Furthermore, the criteria for differentiating between adequate, incomplete and false personalisms formulated by Seifert in his article *Personalism and Personalisms*² are also of utmost relevance for our subject. One of the tenets of adequate personalism he

Artículo recibido el día 13 de septiembre de 2016 y aceptado para su publicación el 8 de octubre de 2016.

¹ S. GAŁKOWSKI, *Rozwój i odpowiedzialność. Antropologiczne podstawy koncepcji wychowania moralnego*, 12.

² J. SEIFERT, *Personalism and Personalisms*, 155-187.

proposes is the proper balance and relationship between intellect, will and human heart understood as the seat of spiritual affections. I will also propose a small contribution to the controversy between realist phenomenology and Thomism.

The second question discussed in the paper, closely related to the first, will be: “What is education?” This question refers to the dynamic aspect of the human person, as education presupposes process and change. The consideration of human dynamism raises in its turn an issue of regarding the person as transentelechy. The transentelechial character of the human person is apparent in all her three above-mentioned dimensions: intellectual, volitional and affective. It is therefore also reflected in the corresponding aspects of education: as transcendence in knowledge by reaching out to “things themselves”, as transcendence and self-possession in value-response in moral action and in affective responses.

In the third step of our investigations we will take into consideration the relational character of education, focusing on the teacher-student relationship and expanding the picture into a triad: teacher-student-subject matter³. And, last but not least, the absolute point of reference will be discussed: The Supreme Being as identical with the Supreme Person, who is always present in education, either in an explicit or an implicit way.

In conclusion it will be argued that Seifert’s personalist metaphysics offers a sound foundation for the comprehensive philosophy of education.

II. Metaphysics of the person as the foundation of the personalist philosophy of education

The concept of the human person lies at the heart of the philosophy of education. Therefore, particularly in the context of dehumanizing contemporary culture, it is crucial to search for an adequate personalism. Josef Seifert undertakes this effort in his numerable works, so looking through the extensive corpus of his philosophical inquiries in search for pedagogical inspiration is a promising task. However, due to the scope of this article, which does not by any means claim to be exhaustive, only a limited number of Seifert’s works, particularly relevant to our subject, will be analyzed.

³ J. PASSMORE, *The Philosophy of Teaching*, 22. Cfr. N. J. SHUDAK, *The Need for Philosophical Frameworks in Teacher Education*, 26. Shudak refers to John Passmore and Kurt Vonnegut’s protagonist George Helmholtz.

II.1. Mind-body relationship

His early anthropological studies concern the mind-body relationship⁴. The problem of this relationship, as Seifert mentions, is closely connected with the issue of the substantial character of man. The two main contending positions in this respect are dualist and monist anthropological perspectives⁵. Seifert demonstrates that soul is a spiritual, simple substance since it is a subject of spiritual realities, such as conscious life, knowledge, freedom, free command of the body, self-reflection⁶. Another evidence of the substantial character of human soul is the direct givenness of the substantial subject of consciousness as a permanent foundation of experiences. Moreover, the subject of consciousness realizes the essential features of the substance in a more perfect way than material substances. The spiritual soul is characterized by privacy, individuality and irreplaceability⁷.

According to Seifert, man can be most accurately depicted as a composite, as a substance composed of two substantially different parts: body and soul. The exact nature of the relationship between the two elements, however, remains aporetic⁸. The Aristotelian-Thomistic hylemorphic proposal (soul as the form the body) contains a lot of valuable insights, though even it is not free from ambiguities, concerning e.g. the precise meaning of „matter” and „form”⁹. Discussing the hylemorphic interpretation of body-soul relationship Seifert observes that man's spiritual soul is much more than *forma corporis*, as it is the seat of man's spiritual personality, and still it is a form of the body in a deeper sense¹⁰.

⁴ J. SEIFERT, *Leib und Seele*; idem, *Das Leib-Seele Problem und die gegenwärtige philosophische Diskussion. Eine kritisch-systematische Analyse*.

⁵ *Ibidem*, 72.

⁶ *Ibidem*, 85-94.

⁷ *Ibidem*, 94-110.

⁸ *Ibidem*, 132.

⁹ *Ibidem*, 153-163.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, 161-162: “Die Geistseele des Menschen ist also einerseits unendlich viel mehr als ‘forma corporis’, nämlich Grund (Sitz) der geistigen Personalität des Menschen. Dennoch ist die Seele in einem viel tieferen Sinne ‘forma’ des Körpers als es die anderen Bedeutungen von ‘Form’ ahnen ließen.

II.2. Uniqueness and transcendence of the person

The aforementioned insights are resumed and developed in Seifert's magisterial study *Essere e persona*, arguably his most notable contribution to personalism¹¹. As Rocco Buttiglione remarks in his introductory essay to this book, Seifert's metaphysics developed in *Essere e persona* is focused on the person¹². The central chapter 9 of the book is entitled *L'essere è persona: Being is Person* and this is a revolutionary metaphysical insight, postulating metaphysics of the person instead of metaphysics of substance. Seifert resumes here the key notions of *Das Leib-Seele Problem*¹³, stressing the metaphysical superiority of the person over non-personal entities as a being that is real, self-possessing, autonomous and autarchic in a more perfect way¹⁴.

Only personal spiritual substance is unique and unrepeatable in a full sense of the word, in other words possesses haecceity, which is manifested in liberty, capacity for knowledge and responsibility¹⁵. The human person's quality of *haecceitas* has direct implications for the educational system. First of all, it stresses the need to treat every student as a unique person. It implies counteracting uniformity and constant competition in education. The goal of education should be seen much more as eliciting and supporting the unique character of each and every person. This uniqueness also puts into question the widespread tendency to promote technically-minded lifelong learning practices.

In the course of his further investigations Seifert focuses on the axiological dimension of the person's self-possession. Freedom in a deepest sense is understood not only as the power of self-determination, but as personal transcendence, value-response and self-donation, in which other persons, who become the object of donation, are considered from the point of view of their dignity. Here Seifert makes references to Wojtyła and Hildebrand, but also to Saint Thomas¹⁶.

This axiological dimension of personal dignity can be expressed as transelechy. The person is a transelechy rather than entelechy, because

¹¹ J. SEIFERT, *Essere e persona*.

¹² R. BUTTIGLIONE, "L'Essere e Persona" di Josef Seifert. *Sfondo teoretico e significato di quest'opera*, 45.

¹³ J. SEIFERT, *Essere e persona*, 327-329.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, 326ff.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, 336; the idea comes from Duns Scotus and Francis Suarez.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, 350; cf. K. WOJTYŁA, *Love and Responsibility*; D. von Hildebrand, *Ethics*.

her deepest being is transcendent and consists in conforming itself to the truth and the good for their own sake¹⁷. This concern of our Author echoes von Hildebrand's criticism of entelechial Thomism on the ground of its eudaemonism and a deficit of transcendence¹⁸.

One might compare this view with Karol Wojtyła's *The Acting Person*, where he mentions two complementary aspects of the human act, namely transcendence of the person (self-determination, self-possession), and integration (psycho-somatic unity). Wojtyła points out that moral integration is the lifelong task of the person¹⁹.

II.3. Aitiology of the person

Seifert then shows that the metaphysics of the person both fulfills and goes beyond Aristotle's doctrine of four causes (*aitiology*). With respect to the efficient cause he notes that only freedom can be the first and last explanatory principle of all efficient causality. The actualization of the most profound potentialities of the person can be accomplished only through the free acts of the person herself²⁰. The final causality needs the metaphysics of the person in a still more obvious manner. The end is identified with good, and good can be a cause only through personal consciousness and action motivated by it²¹.

Also formal causality can be understood most fully from the perspective of personalistic metaphysics. Form, as opposed to matter, is something spiritual, intelligible, meaningful; it can only be understood, conceived of and impressed upon the matter by the spirit. Only a person has the access to the intelligible world of essences and of essential laws. Finally, lots of forms, essences and essential structures find their realization only in the personal realm (moral goodness, joy, love, justice). Many of them are pure perfections²².

As for material causality Seifert criticizes Aristotle's view that matter is the principle of individuation. In his view, spiritual substances are not

¹⁷ J. SEIFERT, *Essere e persona*, 354.

¹⁸ M. WALDSTEIN, "Dietrich von Hildebrand and St. Thomas Aquinas on Goodness and Happiness", 403–464.

¹⁹ K. WOJTYŁA, *The Acting Person*.

²⁰ J. SEIFERT, *Essere e persona*, 358–361.

²¹ *Ibidem*, 362.

²² *Ibidem*, 363–366.

“pure forms” and the misunderstanding lies in identifying the spirit in the sense of a particular being with the spiritual in the sense of abstract universal forms. In fact, contrary to Aristotle’s view, spiritual, non-material beings can possess a higher individuality and uniqueness than material beings, and individuality is rooted in a more original way in the personal sphere²³.

Seifert also contends that specifically personal explanatory principles, which presuppose consciousness, go beyond Aristotle’s naturalistic model. To start with, the intentional connection between subject and object in intentional acts of the knowledge cannot be explained within the framework of Aristotle’s doctrine of four causes, as it is an irreducible metaphysical relationship. The object grasped in our consciousness is not a formal cause of the act of knowledge, nor an efficient cause: this relationship is real-intentional, it is the participation in the being as such²⁴.

Also motivation can serve as a special metaphysical explanatory principle of the real personal being and the fundamental importance of metaphysics of the person for ethics. The decisive cause of the act is, apart from the motivating object, the free person herself. Reducing the relation of motivation to the frame of Aristotelian four causes can happen either by treating object as the efficient cause, or by ascribing the full autonomy to the subject in the spirit of Kant²⁵.

Another explanatory principle of reality not contained in the doctrine of four causes is the due-relation (*Gebührensbeziehung*), which culminates in the personalistic principle: *Persona est affirmanda propter seipsam*²⁶. And finally, Seifert analyzes the metaphysical relationship of superabundance, which is found between moral good and happiness or between happiness and love. Moral life is not only a quest for happiness, happiness appears in the mode of superabundance²⁷. This ethical insight should have direct bearing on the understanding of the finality of education: it ought to be focused primarily on the value-response, rather than on the student’s own happiness, which can be expected to unfold as a by-product of striving for the good.

²³ *Ibidem*, 366.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, 369-370.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, 371.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, 374-376; D. VON HILDEBRAND, *Christian Ethics*, chapter 18. Due relation, 225-237.

²⁷ J. SEIFERT, *Essere e persona*, 376-377.

II.4. The criteria of the adequate personalism

The person is simultaneously a subject and an object, and this dual character peculiar to her must be taken into account to avoid the traps of subjectivism, relativism or transcendental idealism. As Seifert puts it, "In a sense the person is the most objective and most real of all beings; through the conscious self-possession and through liberty she exists in a more proper sense than all other beings and is a being in the proper sense"²⁸. There also exists an indissoluble bond between the person and the truth.

In the article *Personalism and personalisms* Seifert reiterates and develops many claims from *Essere e persona*, albeit in a more succinct form and in a more accessible language. He undertakes the discussion of various philosophical positions that arrogate to themselves the right to the name of personalism and provides clear distinguishing features of the adequate personalism²⁹. Let us consider at least some of the rather extensive list of criteria. The first distinguishing feature is the radical divide between persons and impersonal beings. This proposition seems to be relatively incontrovertible, at least among personalist philosophers of various persuasions. Furthermore, Seifert stresses the need to acknowledge the three dimensions of the human person: intellect, free will and affectivity, and points out—in the spirit of von Hildebrand—that heart, as well as will, is an important part of the rational nature. Finally, being a person is considered to be a pure perfection and a divine attribute, thus, the fullness of personhood can only be found in God Himself³⁰. That is a very illuminating thesis indeed, which counteracts dominant anthropocentric tendencies of late modernity.

II.5. A Thomistic interlude

I will now hint at the ongoing controversy between realist phenomenology and Thomism. Measured with the yardsticks presented in *Personalism and Personalisms*, the concept of Saint Thomas Aquinas is categorized by Josef Seifert as "imperfect personalism". What Seifert perceives as chief

²⁸ *Ibidem*, 388.

²⁹ J. SEIFERT, *Personalism and Personalisms*, 155-187. He develops there some ideas contained already in *Essere e persona*, chapter 9.9 Pericolo di un falso personalismo, 399-405.

³⁰ J. SEIFERT, *Personalism and Personalisms*, 173f.

limitations of the Thomistic outlook are eudaemonism on the one hand, and intellectualism on the other³¹. On that score Seifert criticises some—or even mainstream—versions of Thomistic philosophy. This criticism has not passed unnoticed. Paul Kucharski wrote an article defending Saint Thomas against the charge “that [his] relational account of goodness precludes intrinsic goods (or objective values)”³². I will not go here into the details of the contradictory interpretations of Saint Thomas and Thomistic thought. However, I will offer some insights deriving from the Thomist school of Barcelona, which I owe to Enrique Martinez. He drew my attention to the thought of the founder of this school, Ramón Orlandis SJ, and his two major followers: Francisco Canals Vidal and Jaime Bofill Bofill, who seem to withstand Seifert’s criticism. Orlandis namely wrote:

A moral system that would place the good of man, his essential bliss in the acquisition and intellectual possession of the truth, a moral system that would only take into account inclinations and intellectual aspirations of man—such a system would be evidently self-centered (...) And no matter how real and genuine this greatest treasure of truth were, that is, even if it were no other than the very uncreated and infinite Truth, the system, being partial, stopping half way, would be unsustainable, because God would only seem to be the good of man as a mere object of his intellectual satisfaction. The system would not, therefore, cease to be self-centered. With regard to God it would not consider the merit and the right of the divine Goodness to be loved for herself with love of benevolence; and with regard to man himself, it would not take into account the tendency innate in his heart not to lock in himself, but to go out of himself with in the mysterious gift of love; nor the universal persuasion of the perfection and nobility of man demanding of him to go out of himself”³³.

This formulation certainly does justice to the transcendent and ecstatic character of the human person. Canals in his book *On the essence of knowl-*

³¹ J. SEIFERT, *Od “Aeterni Patris” do “Fides et ratio”*. *Bezwarunkowe zobowiązanie katolickiego filozofa w stosunku do prawdy oraz wielkość i ograniczenia “epoki tomizmu” w Kościele*, 175-180.

³² P. KUCHARSKI, *Thomas Aquinas, Josef Seifert, and the Metaphysics of Respecting Persons*, 100-117.

³³ R. ORLANDIS, “Manresa” 1942-43, No. 50, 10; as cited in F. CANALS VIDAL, *Sobre la Esencia del Conocimiento*, 678-679, footnote 41, translation: P. Kazmierczak.

edge introduces the concept of “entelechiology of mental word”, which roughly means that the perfection of personal life is attained through word, that is, through relations: through contemplation, love and dialogue³⁴. I should venture the thesis that this concept is akin to Seifert’s “transentelechy”.

Bofill, in his turn, devotes his *La escala de los seres* to the refutation of Pierre Rousselot’s thesis of Saint Thomas’s intellectualism. His interpretation of Thomism is very clearly personalistic. He writes:

Unfortunately, Rousselot, with undue precision excludes from the concepts of intelligence and contemplation that which is precisely the root of this same vitality which he intends to defend: affectivity and love. He thereby does not recognize that, given the intimate, radical unity of the person, affectivity and love are not a mere result of intellectual activity, something extrinsically juxtaposed to it, but on the contrary, they are so intimate to it that precisely through them one can enjoy the features of a true Ideal-end. Intellectualism is in fact a fragmentary conception of human perfection, because it breaks up the radical, ontological unity of our psyche³⁵.

One is tempted to insert here a theological interpolation. Hans Urs von Balthasar demonstrates that the concept of person “receives its special dignity in history when it is illuminated by the unique theological meaning”³⁶, but he also suggests that philosophy can somehow “appropriate for the human person the dignity bestowed on person by trinitarian doctrine and christology”³⁷. Of the Persons of the Holy Trinity the deepest mystery veils the person of the Father. According to Josef Ratzinger, “the first person does not generate in the sense that to the complete person the act of generating a son is added, but the person *is* the act of generating, of offering oneself and flowing out the pure actuality”³⁸.

³⁴ F. CANALS VIDAL, *Sobre la Esencia del Conocimiento*, 643-688.

³⁵ J. BOFILL BOFILL, *La escala de los seres o el dinamismo de la perfeccion*, 2, translation: P. KAZMIERCZAK.

³⁶ H. U. VON BALTHASAR, *On the concept of person*, 19.

³⁷ *Ibidem*.

³⁸ J. RATZINGER, *Zum Personenverständnis in der Theologie*, 26.

III. Transentelestial education

Since philosophy of education can be conceived as a dynamic aspect of ethics³⁹ it must take into consideration the temporal aspect of human *esse* and its changeability. Time and temporality presuppose change — a transition from potency into act⁴⁰. To quote Aristotle's *Metaphysics*: „There being a distinction in each class of things between the potential and the completely real (entelechy), I call the actuality of the potential as such, movement”⁴¹. The metaphysical concepts of movement or motion applied to the field of education refer to the development of the human person.

If, however, as has been claimed above, the dynamism of the human person is best captured in the notion of transentelechy, then personalist education should foster this transentelestial character of the human person.

All the three spiritual dimensions of the human person: intellect, will and heart are encompassed within education understood broadly. Intellectual education is essentially geared at acquiring knowledge, volitional education at responding to moral and religious values, affective education means sensitizing students to the values to which a proper affective response is due. In the entirety of the education of the human person physical education also holds its proper place.

III.1. Transcendence in knowledge: back to things themselves in education

One of the main dimensions of education is transmitting and acquiring knowledge. After all, what is more central to the idea of education than ‘*Erkenntnis objektiver Wahrheit*’⁴²? As Josef Seifert stated: “The goal of philosophy is to search for the ‘truth of being,’ not just to study the opinions of philosophers”⁴³. On this point one might also refer to the pedagogy of Saint Ignatius Loyola, who insisted upon exposing the student to the immediate experience of reality/God instead of inculcating

³⁹ S. GAŁKOWSKI, *Rozwój i odpowiedzialność*, 31.

⁴⁰ Cf. J. SEIFERT, *Essere e persona*, 416.

⁴¹ ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics*, 1065b.

⁴² J. SEIFERT, *Erkenntnis objektiver Wahrheit*.

⁴³ J. SEIFERT, *Discours des Methodes, The Methods of Philosophy and Realist Phenomenology*, 11.

the teacher's concepts into his mind. Saint Ignatius thereby proves to be —like Saint Augustine— a precursor of realist phenomenology. In this regard, Seifert's programmatic slogan „back to things themselves” seems to be at the core of the process of education. Or at least it points out to what constitutes the third vertex of the educational triad or triangle: the subject matter, the reality, things themselves. The crucial tenet is the transcendence of man in knowledge. The third element of the triad, subject matter, is neither immanent to the consciousness of the student, nor is it contained in the mind of the teacher. That corresponds to the very fundamental tenet of the realist phenomenological pedagogy: exposing the students to the truth of being, enabling them to enter into immediate contact with the things themselves.

Another aspect of the importance of going “back to the things themselves” in education is the omnipresence of virtual worlds in which a large numbers of younger people spend most of their time. Although it is the world created by humans and originally intended as a space of interpersonal communication, the risk of falling into a solipsistic trap is much higher inside than outside it. Interpersonal relationships mediated by the Internet often tend to be delusive. Adopting false identities in the Internet may be an escape from the challenges of the real world and therefore can sometimes be addictive⁴⁴.

III.2. Moral education: transcendence in value-response

According to Stanisław Gałkowski, the philosophy of moral education is concerned with the dynamic aspect of ethics, namely moral development of the person⁴⁵. Josef Seifert's contribution to ethics follows the line of the phenomenological value ethics pursued by Dietrich von Hildebrand⁴⁶. Seifert postulates acknowledging the absolute primacy of moral and religious values even above the realm of the intellectual values which implies assigning moral and religious education the highest rank in the entire sphere of education. In the extended published version of his habilitation speech Seifert considers various kinds of motivation of moral action, utilitarian,

⁴⁴ P. SCHUHLER - M. VOGELGESANG, *Wyłącz zanim będzie za późno. Uzależnienie od komputera i internetu*, 60ff.

⁴⁵ S. GAŁKOWSKI, *Rozwój i odpowiedzialność. Antropologiczne podstawy koncepcji wychowania*, 31.

⁴⁶ J. SEIFERT, *Was ist und was motiviert eine sittliche Handlung*.

hedonistic and eudaemonistic among others. All the above-mentioned approaches are rightly dismissed as antipersonalistic, because they subordinate the value of the person to either utility or delight or happiness⁴⁷.

However, one's own personal development and happiness is not excluded as a motive of moral action and education⁴⁸, provided it is treated as secondary motivation, primary consisting in presenting moral values (important-in-themselves) and eliciting value-responses.

III.3. Affective dimension of education

Seifert, like Hildebrand, seeks to rehabilitate the affective dimension of the human person. He points out to the value and dignity of human heart, highlighting the existence of spiritual form of affective light and emphasizes their great importance for ethics⁴⁹. This clearly implies that affectivity must be allocated its due place in education.

IV. Relational character of the educational process

The process of education, as it has already been shown above, can be conceived as based on a triad, composed of student, teacher and subject matter. The closer examination of the educational triad corroborates the transentelechiol character of the person, and, consequently, of education.

IV.1. Teacher-student relationship

The educational triad draws our attention to the paramount importance of the figure of the educator — such as a parent or a teacher — in the educational process. The relationship between teacher and student possesses an element of efficient causality as in Aristotle's example of human generating human. Karol Wojtyła resorted to this analogy comparing education to spiritual motherhood and fatherhood⁵⁰. And we can draw the line further — to Father generating the Son.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, 23-77.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, 74-77.

⁴⁹ J. SEIFERT, *Personalism and Personalisms*, 163-164.

⁵⁰ K. WOJTYŁA, *Love and responsibility*, 258-261.

In the relation of the teacher to the student the essential tenet is the affirmation of the person for his own sake. A teacher's attitude should be marked by love and respect and the acknowledgment of the unique character of the person. To borrow the title of a recent Josef Seifert's book, *True Love*⁵¹ is what is most needed in education. Drawing on Hildebrand, Wojtyła, and Kant, Seifert speaks of love as motivated by "value" - the intrinsic, objective importance of the beloved being⁵². This value refers to the very core of the other person's being and is inseparable from it, which does not preclude loving less perfect persons, but still presupposes a certain goodness in them⁵³.

In this regard, Seifert mentions parental pride which makes parents ascribe to their children the qualities they do not possess⁵⁴. True love, on the other, while seeing both the actual and the potential values in the beloved person, discerns the former from the latter.

It is certainly correct to say that love plays a tremendous role in education and in the improvement of persons. It gives to the person who is being loved a spiritual "home" and "shelteredness"; it extends to him a credit of trust which inspires a positive self-confidence and goodness. Above all, it holds out to him an image of his better self, of his vocation, so to speak. In this sense, love is indeed creative in contributing to make the beloved person better, as Scheler especially noticed, not without the free cooperation of the beloved person, however⁵⁵.

Seifert develops further the idea of loving the contingent person in a 'pilgrim status' which means seeing in him the preciousness yet to be realized. This is the creative, visionary, or prophetic dimension of (pedagogical) love, which also can be distorted by imposing arbitrary models on the child or student⁵⁶.

These externally imposed standards are sometimes enforced by the educational system. There seems to be a very strong temptation to reduce the students to their marks, grades and to favor those whose results prove more

⁵¹ J. SEIFERT, *True Love*.

⁵² *Ibidem*, 3.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, 25-26.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, 35.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, 36-37.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, 46-47.

gratifying for the teacher. The antipersonalistic proclivity is inherent in the entire educational system based on grading and credentials, which has been amply discussed in the critical current of the philosophy of education. The domination of the economic purpose of education also obscures the value of the persons involved the process.

IV.2. Subject matter

In *Back to Things Themselves* Josef Seifert quotes Saint Augustine saying “For who is so stupidly curious as to send his son to school in order that he might learn what the teacher thinks?”⁵⁷. This sentence suggests the preeminence of reality - “things themselves” or subject matter in terms of the educational triangle and a strictly subordinate role of the teacher. What follows is that teacher’s relationship to the subject matter should be characterized by profound knowledge and reverence for the truth. His chief role towards the student consists in enabling him to enter into an immediate contact with reality through knowledge.

IV.3. The student

The concept of human freedom as self-determination means that education is impossible when conceived only as exerting an external influence on the person: to achieve its full meaning education requires a free involvement of the student, his conscious and purposeful dedication to the task, openness to reality and willingness to cooperate with the teacher. The potentiality for learning and personal growth is the characteristics of the person of the learner. Alfred Wierzbicki called my attention to yet another aspect of the dialogue *The Teacher*. Saint Augustine points out that the preeminent teacher is the internal teacher —inner truth, that is Christ, who lives in the soul of the student⁵⁸.

To round up this chapter it should be mentioned that the educational triad does not function in the vacuum, it is always embedded in the network of social relationship, as the person is related to community. The ultimate horizon of education is the relationship of the human person to God.

⁵⁷ AUGUSTINE, *The Teacher*, 14.45.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, 11.38.

This tenet is amply supported by Josef Seifert's numerous and monumental writings on the philosophy of God.

V. Conclusion

I think that Josef Seifert's profound grasp of the reality of the person can provide a rich inspiration in pursuing the philosophy of education. I believe that in the course of my analysis I have managed to point to the great potential of his personalist philosophy for streamlining and deepening pedagogical theory and practice.

The groundbreaking character of the metaphysics of the person has been put in sharp relief. The key goal of education has emerged more clearly as helping the student to become a fuller person, capable of self-possession, self-transcendence, self-gift, ultimately —of love as the fullest actualization of the person. Personalistic education involves fostering openness to reality, both personal and impersonal, both external and internal, and leading to both the fuller intellectual grasp of and to the more adequate volitional and affective response to it.

Finally, the transcendent horizon of education brings us to the very core of reality which is personal, opens us up to Being, who is Person. Education can then be seen as participation in the great „act of generating, of offering oneself and flowing out... of pure actuality”⁵⁹.

There is one more aspect in which Josef Seifert contributed to the philosophy of education. Under the pen name of Melchior Seifert, he wrote a literary collection of short stories entitled *Licht im Dunkel* (*Light in Darkness*) featuring three martyrs of the German Nazi death camps: Janusz Korczak, Edith Stein and Maximilian Kolbe⁶⁰. Janusz Korczak, a Polish-Jewish pedagogue, who voluntarily assisted the children from his orphanage in the Warsaw Ghetto to the gas chamber in Treblinka, is depicted as a model of a wise and loving teacher, up to the sacrifice of his life. It is the ultimate embodiment of the ideal of pedagogical love.

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⁵⁹ J. RATZINGER, *Zum Personenverständnis in der Theologie*, 211.

⁶⁰ M. SEIFERT, *Licht im Dunkel*.

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