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IZYDORA DĄMBSKA'S ETHICS AND THE CULTURE OF NARCISSISTIC INDIVIDUALISM

S u m m a r y: The first section of the article presents axiological ethics as seen by Izydora Dąmbska. In the second section, the interpretation of Dąmbska's moral actions and her approach to life is presented from the perspective of axiological ethics. In the third part, the specifics of the culture of narcissistic individualism are discussed as an environment that hinders the experience and understanding of emotional states that allow for the recognition of values. The last section focuses on the author's interpretation of Dąmbska's ethics. According to this view, feelings experienced and thought through in silence form the basis for learning values. This can inspire pedagogical efforts to effectively train the moral competence of people living in the culture of narcissistic individualism.

Key words: Izydora Dąmbska, narcissistic individualism, ethics, values, silence

Introduction

The main purpose of this article is to discuss the two cultural phenomena of noble individualism and narcissistic individualism. Izydora Dąmbska,² Plato's Socrates was the figure who best expressed the ideal of noble individualism: "The highest good is bravery (ἀρετή), which consists in knowing how to act. And bravery is not something relative, as the sophists taught us; it is the highest good always and

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² Izydora Dąmbska (1904–1982) was a student and an assistant of the founder of the Lviv-Warsaw School, Kazimierz Twardowski. Dąmbska conducted philosophical research mainly in the areas of semiotics, epistemology, methodology of sciences, as well as axiology, ethics and history of philosophy. Cf. Izydora Dąmbska, *Knowledge, Language and Silence. Selected Papers*, eds. Anna Brożek, Jacek Jadacki (Leiden–Boston: Brill Rodopi, 2016).

everywhere.”³ Ancient individualist ethics defines the criteria for evaluating human behavior not only in terms of its social aspect, but also considers good and bad “[...] everything that in human behavior serves or hinders the realization of the good understood as the value of the human personality.”⁴ In this view individual and social aspects are closely connected. Dąmbska says this of Plato: “According to the spirit of Greek intellectualism, he will call brave and happy the man who is able to subordinate his emotional life to the dictates of reason. Whether it is about valour, the noblest of impulses, or about sensual drives and desires. For harmony and justice prevail only in the soul governed by a clear, truth-seeking reason.”⁵ Morally high impulses fail to be an expression of noble individualism if they are not subordinated to “clear, truth-seeking reason.” From this point of view, truth is a moral value since the pursuit of it determines the bravery and inner righteousness of the individual. The moral ideal personified in the figure of Plato’s Socrates was important to Dąmbska, both conceptually and practically.

The ethics of Dąmbska as the author of *Dwa Studia o Platonie* [Two Studies on Plato] remains consistent with her personal moral stance. As Zbigniew Orbik maintains,

One can and should speak of Izydora Dąmbska’s ethics in two senses: 1) theoretical and 2) practical. As for the theoretical meaning, I am referring to Professor Dąmbska’s deliberations on scientific ethics [...]. The practical meaning is about the realization of values in her life, manifested in the approach, which is always, regardless of external circumstances, directed towards the realization of the good, the true and the beautiful.⁶

Orbik contends that Dąmbska did not create a separate ethical system but that the extraordinary value of her work lies in the fundamental consistency between her theoretical and practical ethics. In my interpretation, the decisions and deeds of the author of *Znaki i myśli* [Signs and Thoughts] are treated as a background for understanding her theoretical claims. The experience of the value of a person as a unique and irreplaceable individual, along with the experience of values as objectively and immanently existing beings, are the focal point in the formation of ‘noble individualism’ in Dąmbska’s conceptual framework. It is difficult to prove conclusively that values exist objectively and are in fact permanent, but we can find arguments in favour of this thesis in Dąmbska’s moral actions and approach to life.

³ Izydora Dąmbska, *Zarys historii filozofii greckiej* [Outline of the history of Greek philosophy] (Lublin: Daimonion Instytut Wydawniczy, 1993), 62. All citations from Izydora Dąmbska’s writing and other Polish authors have been translated for the purposes of this article by Marta Robson.

⁴ Izydora Dąmbska, “O starożytnej etyce” [On ancient ethics], *Filomata* 194 (1966), 204.

⁵ Izydora Dąmbska, *Dwa studia o Platonie* [Two studies on Plato] (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1972), 39.

⁶ Zbigniew Orbik, “O etyce Izydory Dąmbskiej” [On Izydora Dąmbska’s ethics]. *Studia z Historii Filozofii* 4/7 (2016), 142.

Moral actions⁷ are an important set of empirical premises used to justify the theses formulated within the framework of theoretical ethics. In this sense, the objective existence of values is manifested, for example, in the inner strength that enables an individual to speak the truth against the opinion and pressure of the majority. The immutability of values is manifested in the constancy of decisions and character. Dąmbska's life confirms the view that a "clear truth-seeking mind" can provide for the personal bravery that allows one to act in accordance with one's inner beliefs.

Narcissistic individualism, on the other hand, manifests itself in various ways, but one source can be identified from which all other symptoms arise. As Nancy McWilliams says "[...] the term narcissistic refers to people whose personalities are organized around maintaining their self-esteem by getting affirmation from outside themselves."⁸ The basic problem of this kind of personality belongs to the axiological domain; it consists in the inability to recognize the self as an autotelic value. Narcissistic people are unable to adequately determine the value of other people and events, as they tend to focus on the external signs of prestige and approval. In the analyses to follow, narcissism is considered in its clinical dimension, which is to say as a type of mental disorder, only as an element mentioned in support of the analysis. In the clinical environment, the intensity of symptoms is high and therefore easily identifiable. Still, in many people who have no predisposition for narcissism, narcissistic traits are still formed as a cultural phenomenon. As McWilliams asserts, narcissism is "an epidemic of our time." She says with reference to the environment conducive to the development of narcissistic traits that "In mass societies and in times of rapid change, the immediate impression one makes may be more compelling than one's integrity and sincerity [...]"⁹ The author draws attention to the role of the media in this process. It seems that this aspect, and in particular the widespread access to mobile Internet, has in recent years become a key cultural factor that determines the shape of personality development.¹⁰ Social media, which are a platform for creating virtual images or collecting "likes", become the environments that nourish and escalate narcissistic traits. The analysis to follow¹¹ will focus on the aspect of culture, which appears to be crucial to the spread of narcissistic traits.

This article is problem-oriented, which means that its main purpose is to identify the inspiration drawn from the theoretical and practical ethics of Izydora

⁷ On the etymological meaning of the terms 'ethics' and 'morality' see Ernst Tugendhat, *Wykłady o etyce* [Lectures on ethics] (Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa 2004), 29.

⁸ Nancy McWilliams, *Psychoanalytic Diagnosis: Understanding Personality* (New York: Guildford Publications, 2020), 176

⁹ *Ibid.*, 177.

¹⁰ Cf. Jean M. Twenge, *iGen* (Sopot: Smak Słowa, 2019); Manfred Spitzer, *Epidemia smartfonów* [The smartphone epidemic] (Slupsk: Dobra Literatura 2021).

¹¹ Cf. Timo Gnamb, Markus Appel, "Narcissism and Social Networking Behavior: A Meta-Analysis". *Journal of Personality* 86(2) (2018).

Dąbska, on the basis of which pedagogical methods for minimizing the intensity of narcissistic traits are suggested. The presentation of Dąbska's ethics and her life as a role model in this context is a deliberate choice.¹² The analysis of Dąbska's thoughts and deeds presented here is made precisely in support of the problem-oriented nature of this text. The main issue is the limitations posed on our ability to consciously experience and understand certain emotional states and, which follows, the process of learning values. Excessive stimulation, particularly when it comes to the various media, particularly social media, is certainly the root cause. From this point of view, the author's interpretation of Dąbska's ethics focuses on recognizing that perhaps not the most important but the most fundamental aspect of them is the ability to be aware and silent, for through the practice of silence it is possible to restore the ability to adequately recognize moral values.

Axiological ethics according to Izydora Dąbska

The author of *Dwa studia o Platonie* [Two Studies on Plato] distinguished four meanings of the term "ethics": the descriptive, practical, axiological and normative. Given the research problem, i.e., the experience of values, axiological ethics, and the theory of moral values, these will be presented in this section. Three concepts are crucial for our discussion: value, evaluation and norm. In this approach axiological ethics becomes the theoretical basis for normative ethics.¹³

According to Dąbska, the world is given to us in human consciousness as "axiologically qualified," and so every conscious action is motivated by the pursuit of values. If axiological recognition disappears, then the subject loses the sense of the meaningfulness of his actions.¹⁴ On this basis, Dąbska points out that the thesis claiming the nominal or intentional existence of values remains unfounded. Orbik captures this idea of Dąbska's by saying "The only way to justify it would be to demonstrate the illusiveness of the basic human axiological experience."¹⁵ According to this concept, the subject is naturally directed towards the world of values, and it is through the description of the individual experience that we can define the essence of values. Orbik emphasizes that although Dąbska understood value as a function of the relations taking place between person and object, value is not dependent on

¹² A full reconstruction of Izydora Dąbska's thought, including ethics, was made by Zbigniew Orbik. Cf. *Filozofia Izydory Dąbskiej* [Izydora Dąbska's philosophy] (Gliwice: Wydawnictwo Politechniki Śląskiej, 2018).

¹³ Władysław Cichoń, "O wykładach z etyki Profesor Izydory Dąbskiej" [On the lectures on ethics by Professor Izydora Dąbska], *Ruch Filozoficzny* vol. XLI, 4 (1984), 330.

¹⁴ Izydora Dąbska, *O konwencjach i konwencjonalizmie* [On conventions and conventionalism] (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1975), 131.

¹⁵ Zbigniew Orbik, "O aksjologii Izydory Dąbskiej" [On the axiology of Izydora Dąbska], *Kwartalnik Filozoficzny* vol. XXXIX, 4 (2011), 49.

the subject: "On the contrary, the judgments and valuations uttered by the subject depend on the values to which they refer."¹⁶ In this view, the values realized by a person are time-dependent and therefore changeable. What remains constant, however, is their essence, which is objective in nature, meaning that the subject cannot interfere in this sphere. Orbik concludes that "[...] values present themselves to the subject in a subjective way, but in their existence, they are independent of the subject."¹⁷ Thanks to the fact that values are objectively existing beings, and that it is possible for us to know them, we can point to normative sentences that are true.

Dąmbska writes, in *Znaki i Myśli* [Signs and Thoughts], that "A normative sentence is true when the duty, permissibility or impermissibility of behavior stated in it occurs, it is false when the denoted properties do not occur."¹⁸ Moral norms according to this view are founded on a "primary factor". It is "[...] the value of a given behavior as recognized by the subject."¹⁹ An important distinction is the division of axiological judgments into value judgments and evaluative judgments. On the subject of axiological judgments, the Polish scholar says "[...] axiological sentences in the stricter sense, i.e., sentences from the field of value theory, which establish what a value is, what are its types, their mutual relationships, etc., or evaluative sentences, i.e., sentences in which we qualify the denotations of terms as values or refuse such qualification, e.g., 'justice is a moral value' [...]"²⁰ Dąmbska also emphasized the significance of evaluative axiological judgments, which, in addition to stating that a given object is or is not attributed certain value, also contain approval or disapproval. Adam Węgrzecki stresses that this is an especially important aspect of Dąmbska's concept: "Thanks to this moment of approval or disapproval, there is a certain bridge between descriptive axiological sentences and norms, i.e., obligation sentences, based on the recognition of something as value."²¹

We can apply this distinction to the analysis of the example that Dąmbska cites in this context: "suppose someone holds a value judgment, such as 'it is a morally good thing to relate with respect to the elderly', that he uses to evaluate those who respect the elderly positively [...]"²²

Thus, a value judgment expresses a general belief that a certain kind of behavior is good, while an evaluative judgment concerns specific people or their actions. It is particularly important that, in this view, the norm that we can derive from such a value judgments state, rather than

¹⁶ Ibid., 54.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., 124. The author admits that assigning logical value to normative sentences is not universally accepted. Dąmbska cites the counterargument of Polish lawyer and philosopher Jerzy Kalinowski.

¹⁹ Ibid., 125.

²⁰ Ibid., 120.

²¹ Adam Węgrzecki, "Aksjologiczne wątki w twórczości naukowej Izydory Dąmbskiej". [Axiological threads in the scholarship of Izydora Dąmbska]. *Ruch Filozoficzny* 4 (1984), 324.

²² Ibid., 127.

establishes, an obligation. In other words, the 'ought to' does not ultimately derive from a norm or some kind of convention, but from the cognition of objectively existing moral values. The results of this cognition expressed in value judgments [...] have the power to objectify conventions.²³

The experience that finds expression in an evaluative judgment is the primary factor mentioned above. This phenomenon was expressed in poetic form by Zbigniew Herbert in his poem *The Power of Taste*, which he dedicated to Professor Dąbbska.²⁴

Orbik, presenting Dąbbska's axiological concept, stresses that the evaluation made by the subject is not actually dependent on the subject: "The evaluations and judgments made by the subject are dependent on the values that evoke positive or negative emotional states in the subject."²⁵ Axiological evaluative sentences are an important mediating element between the sphere of objectively existing values and the norms determined on their basis. The ability to read and understand the positive or negative emotional states evoked in the subject by the values present in specific objects is an important aspect of this approach.

Proposing a certain interpretation and application of Dąbbska's concept, we can conclude that the sentence "relating to the elderly with respect is a morally good thing" points to the value that a person is, in this case an elderly person, as well as the very behavior that expresses respect. Certain emotional states arise in specific situations in which respect or disrespect are shown to the elderly. Having read the meaning of the emotions arising in a certain situation and recognizing the values present in it, the subject can formulate an evaluative judgment that includes approval or disapproval of this behavior. The second aspect of the evaluative judgment is the naming of the values that occurred in the circumstances. In the normative judgment, we state that the subject should show respect to the elderly because of a recognized, objectively existing value. Culturally, on the other hand, there are different forms of showing respect to the elderly. The norm "one should show respect to the elderly" is merely a statement of an obligation occurring by virtue of an objectively existing value.

The experience of approval or disapproval has a distinct emotional component. Seeing unpleasant behavior toward an elderly person gives rise to anger, which prepares our body to stand up for the person so treated. Seeing, on the other hand, the behavior of a person who refers in words and actions with attentiveness to

²³ Ibid., 324.

²⁴ Jerzy Perzanowski confirmed that Professor Dąbbska identified with the message expressed in this poem: "In April 1980, I received from Professor Dąbbska a copy of Zbigniew Herbert's poem *The Power of Taste*. A few days later, impressed by the reading, I told her that, in my opinion, it was one of the most profound post-war ethical texts, because it contained a solution to the arch-problem of applied philosophy. I saw then how moved Professor Dąbbska was - she said that the poem hit the nail on the head, that she had always felt and acted in this way." Jerzy Perzanowski, "Głos prawdy o Profesor Izzydorze Dąbbskiej" [The voice of truth about Professor Izzydor Dąbbska]. *Znak* 1 (1986): 25.

²⁵ Orbik, *Filozofia*, 328.

an elderly person, we often feel joy, which is the emotional basis for establishing a relationship with such a person.

On the basis of this description, we can conclude that Dąmbska very thoughtfully combines the deontological concept with ethics of values. In this version of axiological ethics, feelings are also an important aspect motivating moral actions. When discussing this position, Władysław Cichoń says "A morally valuable act is one that conforms to an ethical criterion, founded motivationally on the conviction that we should perform the act, but [actually] founded in selfless, altruistic feelings [...]."²⁶ Thus, Dąmbska combines ethical intellectualism and emotionalism. We can consider the motive of a given act as noble when it stems from the right normative conviction and also from an altruistic feeling. According to Dąmbska, the subject also has "[...] moral duties towards himself and his own ideas in pursuit of the realization of moral perfection."²⁷

Contact with an object that has a certain value evokes a certain emotional state in the subject, which becomes the basis for the formulation of a sentence that expresses an axiological evaluation. The ability to realize and accurately read the content encoded in emotions is necessary here. New media environments, however, are more likely to induce a tendency toward quick expression rather than calm reflection on emotions, which means that many people cannot read into the meaning of their emotional states, thus losing the ability to know values and to formulate axiological judgments of value and evaluation. What remains then is a focus on the impression the individual makes on other people, which is the essence of narcissism.

Izydora Dąmbska's approach to life in the perspective of axiological ethics

This section will introduce an interpretation that employs axiological ethics, fragments of Dąmbska's letters and also some memories of her with the aim to present the ways in which her axiological ethics was realized through her moral actions.

Dąmbska wrote a letter to Roman Ingarden dated January 12, 1953. In this document, Dąmbska gives her response to the proposal of the author of *Spór o istnienie świata* [The Dispute on the Existence of the World] to translate one of Descartes' works into Polish. An important circumstance of this case is that Ingarden had previously proposed that the translation of this text be done by Danuta Gierulanka, but the publishers rejected this translator. Dąmbska, who was offered it next, responded to the letter from Ingarden as follows:

²⁶ Cichoń, "O wykładach", 336.

²⁷ Orbik, "O etyce", 152.

I would be extremely sorry if she felt that I had taken on this job as some kind of suggesting to myself of what she was willing to do. I don't really know how to say it, but having a lot of affection and respect for Ms. Gierulanka, and a fundamental loathing for going into a position from which someone has been removed, I don't know if I would have done the right thing by accepting this proposal.²⁸

What Dąbska is obviously suggesting is a conflict of loyalties. On the one hand, she held Ingarden in high esteem, so she wanted to take on the task he wished to entrust to her. On the other hand, however, she understood that Gierulanka had been treated badly. According to Ingarden, it was she as a person that was rejected, despite her skill as a translator. An important motive in this decision-making process is also reflected in this letter as a sense of responsibility for Polish culture, which was in an exceptionally dramatic situation at the time. Dąbska was removed from her teaching position, worked as a librarian in Gdańsk, and her financial situation was difficult. In this sense, the translation work was a significant source of income for her at the time, so we can see that her motives for rejecting the work were truly noble.

In the deontological aspect, Dąbska acted on the basis of an ethical norm, which in general terms can be put as follows: "one should not agree to perform the tasks that have been unfairly (unjustly) taken from another." Respect for this norm is based on the judgment that fair and just conduct is a moral value. The words that Dąbska used when writing about the application of the principle of loyalty, "fundamental loathing", is very characteristic of her. This is an example of an emotional state that, if properly interpreted in this context, allows for the formulation of an evaluative judgment. In addition to stating a violation of a value and the norm derived from it, we also have an expression of disapproval. Intellectual recognition can arguably constitute such an experience, as there is also in it an essential emotional component. Understanding the ethical norms grounded in the recognized values reinforces and petrifies the primary emotional response in this situation. Respect for the law, understood as the set of moral principles, and "fundamental loathing" for breaking them are like the obverse and reverse sides of the same deontological coin. The power of the law, however, does not derive from the convention itself, but from the values by which it can have an objective character. It seems that in the above-described situation, respect for a particular person is also important. The disapproval expressed in evaluative judgement is also about the infringement of the value of the person.

The analyzed excerpt from Dąbska's letter demonstrates her high ability to recognize moral values, as she was able to anticipate the emotional states that

²⁸ Izydora Dąbska, "Do Romana Witolda Ingardena, Gdańsk, 12 stycznia 1953 roku" [To Roman Witold Ingarden, Gdańsk, January 12, 1953]. In: *Korespondencja Izydory Dąbskiej z Romanem Witoldem Ingardenem* [Letters exchanges between Izydora Dąbska and Roman Witold Ingarden], eds. Radosław Kuliniak, Dorota Leszczyna, Mariusz Pandura, Łukasz Ratajczak (Kęty: Wydawnictwo Marek Derewiecki, 2018), 232.

would arise in a certain situation. She wrote that "I would be extremely sorry if she felt [...]" which is an expression of her ability to perceive and understand the emotions of others. This distinction testifies to Dąmbska's awareness that some feelings have their origin in the subject who experiences them, but also that there are other feelings that are only perceived by that person. It seems that awareness and understanding of her own emotions and the emotions of others helped Dąmbska experience individuals not only as people, but also as persons, which meant that she was able to recognize the unique value of human beings through her emotions. Dąmbska expresses the feeling that no one should or could replace Gierulanka in the performance of the task originally entrusted to her. In my interpretation, this is not about the extent of the translator's competences, but about the irreplaceability resulting from the existential uniqueness of an individual. Based on such perceptions, the belief in values as objectively existing things is consolidated in the subject's mind, since the unpleasant situation that Dąmbska wrote about points to the violation of the value of fairness and justice, and a violation of the moral norm that is founded on it.

Another example is a sense of gratitude as Dąmbska's emotional expression of the experience of loyalty to her master, Kazimierz Twardowski. After World War II, to give testimony of this loyalty was very demanding under the new communist rule, and the value of truth came to the front stage more than ever. In response to a text slandering Twardowski's memory, Dąmbska wrote that it was only fair to speak the truth about people, both living and dead, but her article was prevented from being published by censors.²⁹ The feeling of gratitude is an important sign that determines the meaning of a value. In my interpretation, the persistence of this feeling, its strength and intensity indicate a proportionally important value. Kazimierz Twardowski was respected by his students as a very demanding teacher, both intellectually and morally. What focuses these two aspects is precisely the value of truth. Relativizing this value in a cognitive or ethical sense met with strong opposition from Dąmbska and other students of Twardowski. Jan Woleński said "It should be recalled that relativism, whether epistemological or moral, was completely rejected by the Lvov-Warsaw school, and thus the rejection of the charge of relativism against a view was a matter of utmost importance for a philosopher from this intellectual formation."³⁰ Dąmbska pointed out that relativism is based on a metaphysical assumption which questions the existence of an objective, internally non-contradictory reality. In contrast to this view, in her conceptual

²⁹ Cf. Jerzy Perzanowski, "Izydora Dąmbska – filozof niezłomny" [Izydora Dąmbska - an indomitable philosopher]. In: *Izydora Dąmbska 1904-1983*, ed. Jerzy Perzanowski, (Kraków: Polska Akademia Umiejętności, 2001), 24-25.

³⁰ Jan Woleński, "Czy konwencjonalizm implikuje relatywizm?" [Does conventionalism imply relativism?]. In: *Rozum. Serce. Pamięci Profesor Izydory Dąmbskiej (1904-1983)* [Reason. Heart. Taste. In memory of Professor Izydora Dąmbska (1904-1983)], ed. Jerzy Perzanowski, (Kraków: WAM, 2009), 47.

framework conventionalism is founded on the belief in the existence of an objective, non-contradictory reality. Our access to it is always mediated by a particular conceptual convention, which is the reason why one should always remain open to honest criticism. At the same time, it is the moral duty of every human being to persistently pursue a cognitive approach to reality.³¹

In Dąbmska's personality, a characteristic feature that gives away this kind of experience of truth is unpretentiousness. Professor Andrzej Wroński, who found meeting her to be a most formative experience, defined the phenomenon of her extraordinary authority with the word "authenticity": "Her personal philosophical interests were sincere in a peculiar way, and never gave grounds for any showing-off, whether of erudition or eloquence - what mattered in her case was only the pursuit of truth."³² This is an axiological experience expressed in her attitude as a teacher, through which an authentic academic community was formed. As Wroński continues, "Professor Dąbmska knew how to make the eternal problems of philosophy seem more important than anything else, while her patient and kind encouragement was invaluable for her students' clumsy attempts to think with their own heads."³³ An experience of truth that is merely intellectual in nature makes one think of conceit and a tendency to exude erudition, yet for Dąbmska the experience of truth was not only of cognitive but also of moral value, accessible through the feelings of respect and gratitude towards a person who, without pretensions to greatness, realizes the moral obligation to strive for knowledge of the truth.

Based on the presented concept of axiological ethics, we can define noble individualism as an attitude that expresses itself in caring for one's own moral good, which consists in creating such a disposition within oneself "[...] as sympathy towards someone's fate combined with readiness to help".³⁴ This kind of help should range from material assistance to support in moral development. The basis of this disposition is a culture of feeling which can help the subject make an accurate assessment of a situation in terms of their approval or disapproval of it.

A culture of narcissistic individualism

Narcissism is so widespread nowadays that it is hardly limited to people with symptoms of relatively high intensity. The source of people's problems is the strong need to confirm their worth through the approval from the broader "public". On the basis of the data they have collected, psychologists Jean M. Twenge and W. Keith

³¹ Cf. Izydora Dąbmska, "Konwencjonalizm a relatywizm" [Conventionalism vs. relativism]. In: *Reason, Heart, Taste*, 257-266.

³² Andrzej Wroński, "Wspomnienie" [Reminiscence]. In: *Izydora Dąbmska 1904-1983*, 124.

³³ *Ibid.*, 123.

³⁴ Cichoń, "O wykładach z etyki", 335.

Campbell argue that the phenomenon of narcissism strongly defines a significant range of contemporary culture.³⁵ The author of this text focuses particularly on the cultural aspect, which makes people of modest disposition who live within a certain environment become narcissistic in spite of themselves. Twenge and Keith write that the continuous growth of narcissism in the US population not only means that the intensity of certain traits in some people is increasing, but that in people who do not have narcissistic predispositions desires for material wealth, a beautiful appearance, celebrity admiration and attracting attention of others are, as it were, artificially induced.³⁶ The growth of this factor has been noted in American society for several decades, but it has begun to escalate since the beginning of the 21st century. Social research confirms that a general link exists between economic prosperity and individualistic culture. This even applies, for example, to countries such as Japan and Singapore, where individualism does not have a long tradition.³⁷

An important environmental aspect that contributes to the emergence and development of narcissistic personality is the economic situation. In fact, in a state of economic recession, the level of narcissism is relatively lower. In the United States, the scale of narcissism increased between the 1980s and 2008. When the economic recession began, the intensity of narcissistic traits in this society decreased.³⁸ Perhaps the drop is related to the fact that in a situation of economic crisis people cannot rely on many elements of support from the general social contract. Under such circumstances, the help that an individual can receive from their family or circle of close friends becomes more relevant.

During the time under discussion, the highest levels of narcissism have been recorded among young adults. U.S. studies demonstrate that people in this age group are aware that they have the highest incidence of narcissistic traits and express anxiety and dissatisfaction with the fact that they belong to a group that is described as the most narcissistic in history.³⁹ Perhaps behind this is a basic moral intuition which perceives the selfishness associated with narcissism as an ignoble attitude and as such disgraceful.

³⁵ Jean M. Twenge, W. Keith Campbell, *The Narcissism Epidemic. Living in the Age of Entitlement* (New York: Atria Paperback, 2013).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

³⁷ Aaron C. Ahuvia, "Indywidualizm – kolektywizm a kultura szczęścia: teoretyczne rozważania nad związkiem między konsumpcją, kulturą i subiektywnym dobrostanem w przekroju międzynarodowym" [Individualism – collectivism and the culture of happiness: theoretical reflections on the relationship between consumption, culture and subjective well-being in an international cross-section]. In: *Psychologia pozytywna. Nauka o szczęściu, zdrowiu, sile i cnotach człowieka* [Positive psychology. The science of happiness, health, strength, and human virtue], ed. Janusz Czapiński (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2004), 322.

³⁸ Jean M. Twenge et al., "Egos deflating with the Great Recession: A cross-temporal meta-analysis and within-campus analysis of the Narcissistic Personality Inventory". *Personality and Individual Differences* 179 (2021): 1-8.

³⁹ Joshua B. Grubbs et al., "Emerging Adult Reactions to Labeling Regarding Age-Group Differences in Narcissism and Entitlement". *PLoS ONE* 14(5) (2019): 1-33.

Twenge and Campbell point out that the general increase in the level of narcissism applies to the general social dimension as well as the clinical one. In the latter case, there is such a strong intensity of certain traits that specialists in clinical psychology have had grounds to conclude personality disorders of a narcissistic nature. There is also a certain correlation between the general, social and clinical dimensions. The authors of *The Narcissism Epidemic* say that there has been a higher incidence of narcissistic traits in American society in recent decades, as well as a higher number of people diagnosed with narcissistic disorders.⁴⁰ Although the main focus of analysis in this section is society-wide narcissism, which is linked to certain cultural changes, the clinical dimension is also worth considering in order to understand the essence of narcissism, because there problems that commonly occur in a more diffused form are focused and clearly visible. As Christopher Lasch says, “Every age develops its own peculiar forms of pathology, which express in exaggerated form its underlying character structure.”⁴¹ Perhaps narcissism is one of the characteristic signs of our culture with the narcissistic person, who has an inflated sense of self-esteem combined with a lack of empathy for other people, right at its centre.⁴² Miller and Campbell also distinguish between introverted narcissistic people with labile emotionality and extroverted narcissistic people who exhibit high emotional resilience. The common denominator lies in the interpersonal difficulties that result in short-lived relationships.⁴³ Researchers also distinguish between *grandiose* and *vulnerable* narcissism. In this approach the phenomenon has three dimensions. First, it expresses itself in the form of antagonistic behaviours such as arrogance, aggression, and using other people for one’s own purposes. Second, it is manifested in various forms of self-promotion. The third dimension is expressed through neurotic insecurity and hypersensitivity. Researchers find that the shared essence of distinct types of narcissism is antagonism, which can find different means of expression. The belief, characteristic of the narcissistic personality, of distinguished self-worth, as well as of entitlement to special privilege and power, may be actualized with diplomatic or, in other words, tactical respect for community values.⁴⁴

The question remains about the authenticity of the narcissistic person’s sense of value. Doubts arise about the strong need to have it confirmed through the approval of other people, as well as aggressive responses in the face of criticism.

⁴⁰ Twenge, Campbell, *The Narcissism Epidemic*, 2.

⁴¹ Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism. American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: W.W. Norton 1979), 87-88.

⁴² The relationship between narcissism and lack of empathy is complex, but it has generally been confirmed in numerous studies. Cf. Pascal Simard et al., “The relationship between narcissism and empathy: A meta-analytic review”. *Journal of Research in Personality* 102 (2023).

⁴³ Joshua D. Miller, W. Keith Campbell, “Comparing clinical and social-personality conceptualizations of narcissism”. *Journal of Personality* 76 (2008), 449-476.

⁴⁴ Marta Rogoza, Marta Marchlewska, Radosław Rogoza, “Towards integration of communal narcissism within the structure of the narcissistic personality traits”. *Journal of Research in Personality* 102 (2023).

Two possibilities are likely; the first hypothesis explaining such behavior is called compensatory narcissism, in which “a person takes on some work in order to de-emphasize a deep sense of undervaluation by drawing attention to herself; the content of the work done is irrelevant.”⁴⁵ The lack of attentiveness on the part of parents throughout the person's childhood is the reason for the constant search for recognition from the wider public, sometimes throughout a person's entire adult life.

The second hypothesis is called “self-inflation narcissism”, with its sources in the excessive focus on the child and emphasizing that he or she is special, exceptionally talented, etc.⁴⁶ It seems that these two explanatory hypotheses are not necessarily mutually exclusive. That is to say the two extreme parental approaches – low attentiveness and excessive focus on the child – have a similar psychological effect. Its essence is that a narcissistic person has no awareness of her real value. Under such patterns of socialization, it is hard to have an experience expressed in the belief “I am an ordinary person with diverse talents in various areas, and at the same time I am a person that is unique.” The peculiar paradox of narcissistic individualism is that if a narcissist feels unique, in his or her experience he/she is dependent on the opinions of others. The source of such individualism is not in personal experience but in an external factor that trigger it.

Christopher Lasch wrote, in his 1979 book *The Culture of Narcissism*, that “Cameras and recording machines not only transcribe experience, but also alter its quality, giving to much of modern life the character of an enormous echo chamber, a hall of mirrors.”⁴⁷ Given the enormous development of new media, it seems likely that this is now a major, constitutive factor for the culture of narcissism. Lasch points to the widespread recording and copying of human experience through technology. Access to the Internet is behind the expansion of this pattern by allowing people to instantly publish their experiences with a potentially global reach. A very pertinent observation by the author of *The Culture of Narcissism* is also that the mediatization of people's lives through images leads to altered value of our experiences, which causes authenticity to lose its value in social relationships. Individuals experience themselves and others not through reflection and empathy but through images in the media. People respond to others “as if their actions – and our own – were being recorded and simultaneously transmitted to an unseen audience or stored up for close scrutiny at a later time.”⁴⁸ Seen from this perspective, what is valuable is the impression created through an image, rather than the adherence to principles that can be maintained through consistency of character.

⁴⁵ Jeanne Nakamura, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, “Motywacyjne źródła kreatywności z perspektywy psychologii pozytywnej” [Motivational sources of creativity from a positive psychology perspective]. In: *Psychologia pozytywna*, 109.

⁴⁶ Twenge, Campbell, *The Narcissism Epidemic*, 80.

⁴⁷ Lasch, *Culture of Narcissism*, 97.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 97.

From the point of view of axiological ethics, we can say that mediatization causes a change in our way of valuing, rather than the value of different experiences themselves. The word “immediacy” is important for a deeper understanding of this. One of the peculiarities of new media environments is that what is happening in the very moment, evoking vivid emotional responses, is considered valuable. Nowadays, the lived experience of people, especially young people, is largely mediatized, which means that the attention and activity of the subject is transferred to the digital sphere. These changes are particularly evident among adolescents. A 2014–2015 study of the U.S. population found that 24% of adolescents said they used the Internet “almost constantly”, while 56% admitted to going online several times a day. In a 2022 survey, 46% of adolescents admitted that they used the internet “almost constantly”, while 48% used it several times a day.⁴⁹ The survey also showed that in this age group the most popular services were YouTube, Tik Tok, Snapchat and Instagram. According to the recorded responses, 19% of young people used Youtube, 16% Tik Tok, 15% Snapchat, and 10% Instagram “almost constantly”; 41%, 32%, 29%, and 27%, respectively, used these platforms “several times a day”. Notably, Facebook was mentioned very rarely in the study. Only 2% of respondents said that they used Facebook “almost constantly.”⁵⁰ Regardless of the frequency of device use, we observe the phenomenon of media-oriented consciousness, which is continuous. What this means is the constant anticipation of notifications and prioritizing of them over social interactions taking place in the physical world. A common symptom is that a person engaged in face-to-face conversation immediately checks a message and often responds to it while disregarding the physical presence of another. Some adolescents (36%) are aware that they use social media all too often, but the majority of them fail to recognize this problem. More than half of the adolescents surveyed admitted that it would be difficult for them to give up using social media.⁵¹

Among the students of journalism and social communication in Poland, this awareness seems to be deeper. This is probably due to their age and the specialized knowledge they have of the media. Based on her interviews with them, Ewa Nowak-Teter concludes that mediatized time is assessed by students as being of little value, while at the same time the people surveyed presented themselves as supporters of intensive media use. Randomness is also an important aspect, meaning that media activities are often unplanned and purposeless. Their important function is that of a time-filler. Respondents also admitted that usually the first activity of the day was checking a social media platform, and that the thought of a “day without social

⁴⁹ Emily A. Vogels, Risa Gelles-Watnick, Navid Massarat, *Teens, Social Media and Technology 2022* (Washington: Pew Research Center, 2022), 8.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 5, 15.

media” causes anxiety. The students also confirmed that most of their leisure time was mediatized.⁵²

Social media technologies, supported by artificial intelligence systems, are increasingly capable of stirring emotions that cause users to stay in the virtual space, and sometimes they become trapped in it, as if in the Platonic cave. Sherry Turkle's research indicates that today many people have become “tethered” to virtual space and their devices.⁵³ The media message is personalized – i.e., tailored to the preferences of a particular person. Devices equipped with an artificial intelligence system are able to recognize and realize the needs of a particular person, thus reinforcing egocentrism.⁵⁴ Personalization of media content is one of the factors that support the development of narcissistic traits. Psychiatrist Elias Aboujaoude suggests that social media is a convenient environment for creating idealized images and self-promotion, which is why narcissistic individuals are particularly active in it and “set the tone,” defining the content of these services. Modest individuals, through social or peer pressure, are, as it were, forced to conform to these conventions.⁵⁵

One of the ubiquitous signs of social media is the photographic self-portrait (*selfie*). Studies have confirmed that individuals with high rates of grandiose narcissism are more likely to post this type of content.⁵⁶ Narcissistic individuals begin a process that, through social pressure, prompts others to replicate such behavioral patterns. A statement by one of the female students surveyed by E. Nowak-Teter illustrates this mechanism well: “I often feel remorse because let's say I post 15 pictures on the social media so that everyone knows I have the exam session, and when I sit down [to study], people are already writing comments, so I write back, begin studying late, go to the exam sleep-deprived and find that I could have really just studied.”⁵⁷

Two important premises can be formulated based on the material discussed in this section. First, that being in new media environments reinforces or evokes narcissistic traits. Second, that young people spend most of their free time in new media spaces. We can therefore conclude that the specific conventions governing social media environments are a crucial factor in the spread of narcissistic individualism.

⁵² Ewa Nowak-Teter, “Temporalny wymiar mediatyzacji, czyli co media robią z naszym czasem” [Temporal dimension of mediatization, or what do the media do with our time] *Zeszyty Prasoznawcze* 3 (235) (2018), 526.

⁵³ Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together. Why we expect more from technology and less from each other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 155–157.

⁵⁴ Cf. Aleksandra Przegalińska, Paweł Oksanowicz, *Artificial Intelligence Unhuman, Arch-human* (Kraków: Znak, 2020), 11–39.

⁵⁵ Elias Aboujaoude, *Wirtualna osobowość naszych czasów. Mroczna strona e-osobowości* [The virtual personality of our time. The dark side of e-personality] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2012), 64–72.

⁵⁶ Christina Shane-Simpson et al., “I love my selfie! An investigation of overt and covert narcissism to understand selfie-posting behaviors within three geographic communities.” *Computers in Human Behavior* 104 (2020).

⁵⁷ Nowak-Teter, “Temporalny”, 522.

Given its frequent occurrence, we can also conclude that this is not only clinical, but also a cultural, phenomenon.

Narcissistic individualism is an attitude expressed in caring about one's own image. It is about forming a certain disposition, which helps one present oneself in such a way as to attract attention and be perceived as attractive. Within the narcissistic culture, emotions are shaped in such a way that, through them, the subject senses what behavior is attractive to a wider public.

Axiological ethics in the face of a culture of narcissistic individualism

The data cited in this paper, and in the student's statement quoted above, indicate that at least some young people are aware that new media environments often limit or outright block their growth. The awareness of the fact that a person performs actions that he or she does not actually want to is a prerequisite for change. In this section, I will seek an answer to this question: Can we find, in the axiological ethics and life attitude of Izydora Dąmbska, a significant inspiration for the development of educational methods that can curb the cultural phenomenon defined as narcissistic individualism?

Given the desirability of reducing narcissistic individualism in the society, we can accept that silence is a fundamental aspect of axiological ethics. This is because silence is an essential element in the formation of feelings, which play an important role in the knowledge of values. Silence is personal as well as interpersonal. Two scenes, in which Dąmbska is a key figure, illustrate this well; let us begin with the one captured by Andrzej Wroński:

First, I was shocked at the entrance exam, when, after a series of ordinary and moderately difficult questions, a (previously silent) member of the exam committee asked me to point out to some concept more general than the concept of reasoning – a concept that would lend itself to a higher kind, if we wanted to define the concept of reasoning.⁵⁸

Wroński remembered being surprised at someone asking him this kind of question; he seems to have captured something even more basic by saying, in parentheses, “previously silent”. If this observation was still vivid in his memory many years later, it probably meant that not only the words, but also the silence made a deep impression on him as a university candidate. Conscious, reflective and attentive silence intensifies, in a peculiar way, the presence of a person. An important aspect of this is the word that originates in silence; it is then deeply saturated

⁵⁸ Wroński, *Wspomnienie*, 123.

in the semantic layer. Silence of this kind is a preparation of the interlocutor for the reception of the verbal message. Probably it is not an accidental association of memory that Wroński associates these two elements: silence, and a question that follows which is so astonishing in its depth.

The second scene is also from the entrance exam, which took place in July 1960. Jerzy Perzanowski recalled Professor Dąmbska's character in this situation as follows: "[...] calm, as if retreating into herself, warm and listening. During the conversation she leaned forward, with her head slightly tilted to one side, with a hint of a gentle smile on her face, first of all she listened, she let the person speak."⁵⁹ In this description, silence is presented as the grounds for listening. To let the other person speak is, as it were, to let her be. This is one of the dimensions of Dąmbska's authority; with her greatness, and enormous erudition, she gave space for growth, never dominating, never overwhelming. Her way of being was offering deep, friendly silence and attentive listening to the mystery of the presence of another.

This was a conscious and thoughtful approach, as evidenced by Dąmbska's remarkable texts on the subject of silence. She recognizes that in certain circumstances silence can have a positive moral value, and in others just the opposite. The Polish scholar knew that, for example, when Twardowski's good name was being tarnished, she in particular, as his last assistant, could not remain silent. On the other hand, refusing to speak can be a noble approach: "If someone who is forced to testify and give information remains silent, the silence may be self-defence or defense of someone else's well-being. There are times when silence of this kind is heroic."⁶⁰ Dąmbska knew the importance and meaning of these words, as she was a soldier in the Home Army.⁶¹

Silence can be a moral obligation or transgression, but it can also be used as a method of inner development. Through the practice of consciously refraining from speaking, two important goals can be achieved: "1. It is to train one's capacity for self-control and willpower. 2. It is to facilitate inner focus and intensify the experience of certain states of consciousness."⁶² Methodical silence can be very helpful for people who have a sense and belief that their time using the social media is largely lost from the point of view of their development. For a person who has been using new media extensively for many years, such an experience may be too difficult, so it is perhaps worth beginning with an exercise lasting a few minutes.

⁵⁹ Perzanowski, *Głos prawdy*, 26.

⁶⁰ Izydora Dąmbska, "Milczenie jako środek taktyczny i kategoria etyczna" [Silence as a tactical measure and ethical category]. In: ead., *Znaki i myśli. Wybór pism z semiotyki, teorii nauki i historii filozofii* [Signs and thoughts. A selection of writings in semiotics, theory of science and history of philosophy], (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1975), 104.

⁶¹ On Dąmbska's activities during the war and occupation, cf. Maria Obercowa, "Kilka wspomnień o Izydorzcie Dąmbskiej" [Several recollections about Izydora Dąmbska]. In: *Izydora Dąmbska 1904–1983*, 119.

⁶² Dąmbska, *Milczenie*, 105.

If the thought of a “social media-free day” causes anxiety or tension, it might be better to start with a “social media-free hour.” Since heavy users of social media technology often have a disturbed circadian rhythm, it would be advisable to make it an hour before a night’s rest.⁶³ If this would also prove to be too much, it is worth adopting even a few minutes of conscious silence and not receiving any notifications or messages. These few minutes can be important, as they will make a person feel how much they are missing or perhaps even realize how they are being manipulated. These few minutes can also be the basis for building a habit leading to a permanent disposition. Thus, the practice itself will not require the commitment of volitional resources but will instead provide the basis for the systematic strengthening of willpower. Through these basic exercises, a person can achieve a certain functional level of self-control, which means that they are capable of meeting their duties. Practicing silence for oneself is also the first step that gives a person the inner strength to speak or remain silent on behalf of others, when it is our moral duty to do so. Functionally, this is the basis of the deontological concept, as it empowers the subject to meet their duties. It seems that this kind of experience can be an important developmental stimulus, especially for people who feel uncomfortable in the environments dominated by narcissistic behavior patterns.

The second, especially important function of silence is the “intensification of the experience of certain states of consciousness,” which, according to Dąbbska, is linked to inner focus. The basic problem of narcissistic individualism is the lack of adequate experience of self-esteem: “Narcissism is a disorder of self-esteem. People suffering from it, without realizing it, deep inside carry such a bad opinion of themselves that they build up a huge sense of Self in order to be able to exist at all.”⁶⁴ The ability to have experiences, in which the subject realizes that they are an autotelic value, without comparing themselves to others or listening to their opinions, may be a key factor that triggers the process of developing noble individualism. The problem that arises here is that people who have been formed by the culture of narcissistic individualism may fear an inner emptiness, from which they escape by creating an idealised virtual image or multiple images. It seems that in such circumstances an educator who is capable of listening carefully and letting the person speak plays a key role.

All of the qualities mentioned by Perzanowski are important for achieving this goal. First of all, there is calmness, which is integrally connected with this “withdrawal into oneself.” This is a withdrawal that is not an escape or disregard but is the giving of space in which the other can experience himself/herself as a value. This

⁶³ Manfred Spitzer discusses research and the effects of “digital insomnia” Cf. Manfred Spitzer, *Cyber Diseases. How Digital Life is Ruining our Health*, transl. Małgorzata Guzowska (Słupsk: Dobra Literatura, 2016), 271-294.

⁶⁴ John M. Oldham, Lois B. Morris, *Twój psychologiczny autoportret* [Your psychological self-portrait], transl. Agata Bielik (Warszawa: Jacek Santorski & Co, 2007), 110.

is an attitude that is a radical negation of the practice of “liking”, so characteristic of the culture of narcissistic individualism. Collecting “likes” is like a drug; it is an easy and addictive gratification but, when lacking, it easily turns into its opposite. Retreating into one’s depths, on the other hand, is the maieutic attitude par excellence, and its goal and effect is the birth of an independent individual. The bravery which may be found through such encounters empowers a silence in which the individual can experience herself as an autotelic value. In this fundamental aspect, the difference between narcissistic individualism and noble individualism is that the former feeds fear, while the latter feeds bravery.

In his brief memory of Dąmbska, Perzanowski also says that she was “warm and listening.” The important category of emotions for axiological ethics appears here; in the situation Perzanowski describes, they are probably related to Dąmbska’s approval of the prospective student’s efforts and the person himself. From this point of view, what is crucial in Perzanowski’s description is that emotions are not “dissolved” in an excessive expression of them. On the contrary, their expression is remarkably subtle and understated. This aspect is captured in precise words “with a hint of a gentle smile on her face.” Again, we can conclude that this type of expression is the opposite of “emoticons”, which are another symbol of the culture of narcissistic individualism. Emotions in the culture of new media, even if they are *in statu nascendi* authentic, are rendered schematically and completely, thus losing the emotional depth, mystery and impact. They evoke an immediate response, which hardly leaves a lasting trace in the memory; on the contrary, as all it produces is a hunger for more such stimuli.

In her work, Dąmbska distinguishes between informing others about inner states and expressing them. The former is about objectivizing, one might say reporting, while the latter is more difficult, and often occurs when strong emotions are experienced: “words have a secondary character or become outright asemantic,” she writes, “A person with a certain level of inner culture, wanting in such situations to be master of himself/herself, suppresses and limits the outward expression of [emotional] states, and is often silent. In a sense, silence enriches one’s inner state and in one’s perception (and sometimes in the perception of the intended or casual recipient) becomes an expression more eloquent than words.”⁶⁵ Being in such a state, it is better to remain silent, because words have no meaning, but become signs, and through them the subject’s inner state may become impoverished.

Emotions that are unreflectively and entirely given away in expression lose their cognitive and axiological function. From this point of view, their primary purpose is to lead the subject to the self-experience of an autotelic value. This is possible when, to a considerable extent, emotions are turned inward, and their expression stops. For people who live in the new media culture that creates many incentives for

⁶⁵ Izydora Dąmbska, “On the semiotic functions of silence”. In: ead., *Signs and thoughts*, 102.

“self-expression”, the ability to withstand emotional tension within oneself can be a difficult challenge. However, it seems that without taking this task on the problem of inadequate self-esteem, and all its derivatives, will grow.

In 1964, by a decision of the state authorities, Dąmbska was removed from the Jagiellonian University against her will. She was given no opportunity to make her last statement to the Faculty Council, so she wrote a letter, which was not read out at the time. It was deliberately silenced, which made it even more significant. Its content is a symbol of the Socratic attitude in the full sense as Dąmbska was dismissed on the basis of “charges” of bad influence on young people and of practicing philosophy in a rigorously scientific manner rather than following Marxist idea of philosophy as merely a worldview. In the last paragraph of this remarkable letter, she writes: “And one can only truly philosophize if, disregarding what the mighty of this world like or dislike, one persistently seeks in honest intellectual effort, with all sense of responsibility for words, for legitimate answers concerning existence, truth and goodness. This is what, I think, Socrates taught us.”⁶⁶ This is an interpretation of the maxim formulated and expressed in this letter by Dąmbska: *non est necesse vivere, necesse est philosophari*.

This is an attitude that is precisely the opposite of the one we associate with the word *influencer*. The extent of success in this case is popularity, measured by the number of people referred to as *followers*. In the letter quoted above, Dąmbska described the students that she had to leave behind as “zealous in their philosophizing”. This persistent drive to “formulate reasoned answers” is born of experience. It is the emotions hidden in silence that allow one to “touch” on the values of existence, truth and goodness. The order in which Dąmbska listed them is also relevant. Existence comes first and the experience of this value is the basic existential shock, from which the path of development of noble individualism begins. Existence, including my existence, is not necessary. Truth is necessary because even if it perished, then the truth would be that there is no truth. From this it follows that truth cannot perish, and therefore the deconstruction of this value is impossible.⁶⁷ Perhaps this is the deepest source of narcissistic individualism. The multiplication of virtual phantoms, including of one’s own corporeality, brings consciousness into the world of hyperreal shadows. The subject living in the culture of new media is, as it were, forced to constantly imbue virtual images with their own emotions,

⁶⁶ Ead., “List pożegnalny do Rady Wydziału Historyczno-Filozoficznego UJ (czerwiec 1964)” [Farewell letter to the Council of the Faculty of History and Philosophy of the Jagiellonian University (June 1964)]. In: *Izydora Dąmbska 1904–1983*, 62–63.

⁶⁷ This reasoning comes from St. Augustine. Cf. Św. Augustyn, “Solilokwia”. In: idem, *Dialogi filozoficzne* (Kraków: Znak, 1999), 270–271. Dąmbska’s research on Plato suggests that she was close to the belief that the idea of truth can be known through intellectual and moral effort and the love of wisdom. Cf. Dąmbska, *Dwa studia*, 36–37.

experiences, thoughts. Therefore, it is not surprising that directing consciousness into the depths of the self produces an experience of emptiness rather than that of an existential shock. Even five minutes a day without the media, five minutes of conscious silence and a simple handwritten record of one's thoughts, can set in motion the process of restoring the source experience of existence, and then awaken the desire for truth and goodness. The message of Dąmbska's ethics for a culture of narcissistic individualism can be of practical use. Living in a virtual illusion is comfortable, but worthless. Philosophizing is necessary if we are to live a real life.

Conclusion

From the cognitive point of view, a fundamental aspect of Dąmbska's ethical system is the ability to read one's own emotional states adequately. One's ability to formulate axiological judgments of an evaluative nature is based on this step. The culture of narcissistic individualism produces considerable pressure for the immediate and complete expression of feelings. The prerequisite for the development of noble individualism, on the other hand, is to "retreat into oneself" and hold emotions in silence, and then read their meaning through personal reflection. Silence creates a space in the subject in which feelings can mature into their proper axiological and cognitive function.

On the basis of the material collected, it seems likely that the ability to experience emotional states that adequately reflect the values present in a given situation is significantly reduced in people living in a culture of narcissistic individualism through intensive use of new media technologies. Consequently, the subject also loses the ability to experience values as objectively existing beings. As a result of these limitations, such a person cannot adequately recognize duties or determine true moral norms.

A significant inspiration from Dąmbska's Axiological Ethics and Individual Morality is the understanding that experiencing feelings silently and reading their meaning in the act of reflection empowers the subject to experience and accurately read emotional states. The feelings formed in this way are necessary to know the values present in a particular object or situation. This also enables a person to form an accurate evaluative judgment. The practice of silence, understood as the conscious act of refraining from verbal and emotional expression, is the first and necessary condition for educating a person in accordance with the concept of noble individualism. Emotional experiences accepted and retained in silence and subjected to reflection, only after some time and to a limited extent, should find their expression first in words handwritten, which is important for the formation of self-awareness. Emotions formed in reflective silence allow for the understanding

of the axiological dimension of situations. If this can be achieved, “only” a kind, attentive presence is needed on the part of the educator. In the pedagogy of silence, the teacher is a person who primarily listens, gives time and space for the development of independence, inspiring and fascinating students with the mystery of existence and presence.

Translated from Polish by Marta Robson

Etyka Izydory Dąbskiej wobec kultury indywidualizmu narcystycznego

S t r e s z c z e n i e: W artykule podjęto próbę odpowiedzi na pytanie, czy koncepcja etyki Izydory Dąbskiej może być przydatna w kontekście kultury indywidualizmu narcystycznego. W pierwszej części omówiono koncepcję etyki i aksjologii Izydory Dąbskiej. W drugim punkcie zaprezentowano pojęcie kultury indywidualizmu narcystycznego. W ostatniej części wskazano, jak etyka i aksjologia Izydory Dąbskiej może być zastosowana w praktyce pedagogicznej w kontekście kultury indywidualizmu narcystycznego.

S ł o w a k l u c z o w e: indywidualizm szlachetny, indywidualizm narcystyczny, Izydora Dąbska, etyka, wartości, kultura, milczenie

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