Moral Autonomy and Responsibility – The Reformation's Legacy in Today's Society

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ABSTRACT: The Reformation Movement laid the foundation for two fundamental human values: moral autonomy and personal responsibility, whose rediscovery had a strong resonance. Later, these were taken over and themed by Enlightenment, in modern society, representing the essential characteristics of an adult personality. To what extent are these still relevant in the 21st century? An analysis of the current society finds that the very complexity of the 21st century overwhelms the individual being a call for developing autonomy and personal responsibility. In achieving this goal, the present society needs to promote these two values as the target of the educational process and, at the same time, to create a social framework favorable to their development.
KEYWORDS: Reformation, moral autonomy, responsibility, self-determination, thinking ability, education, socialization

It has been 500 years since the Reformation event and yet it is still present in human consciousness. Is there a possibility of a lasting inheritance, beyond the theological discourse, to convey over the centuries the "spirit of reformation", certain values that fundamentally define the human condition, regardless of the historical age? This debate aims precisely to highlight two rediscovered and promoted values of the reformation as well as their capitalization in the present society.

Moral autonomy and responsibility — fundamental values of the Reformation

From a theologically point of view, the ideas and values of the central reformers find their expression in *Confessio Augustana* as "the most important writing of the Lutheran churches" (Graf 2010, 33. It was to regulate man's relationship with God and the Church as a community. According to this man has been granted much liberty from God, so that it becomes his duty to seek salvation (Fees in Dingel et.al. 2014, 318). This, however, implies a certain degree of maturity in the ability to think. That is why education plays a particularly important role in Protestantism, especially after the unwanted consequences of the early period when the monasteries were closed or there was a lack of teachers. In addition, as there is no Protestant education without faith, so there is no faith without education (Schweitzer in Dingel et. al. 2014, 335 ff).

Luther's work *De libertate Christiana* (Freedom of the Christians) - where he devotes himself in detail to the term of liberty — had, besides translating the Bible, the most powerful effect going beyond his contemporary era. Freedom offered by Christ makes man - from Luther's point of view - free on the inside but at the same time servile on the outside. Luther sustains this dialectic tension and does not dissolve it in any direction. Internal freedom means for

him a release from the pressure to do good deeds to be forgiven and the release from any form of moral heteronomy. This implies from his perspective both freedom of conscience and moral autonomy. According to Luther, consciousness is the place of meeting with God and not the court of law between good and evil. (Lexutt 2008, 92-95.) Freedom of conscience, however, does not mean a lack of responsibility or attachment, but on the contrary: this inner freedom is the basis of responsibility by the attachment to people. As for the inner man and his creed, he remains free and responsible only to God. For human dignity has its foundation in the likeness of God and the salvation offered by Christ. So as far as external freedom is concerned, this is a freedom "in" and "towards": in structures and responsibility towards oneself and neighbor (Lexutt 2008, 96-103).

Because of the inner liberty - offered by God - man can best devote himself to the good of his neighbor. As other consequences of inner liberty, the following qualities are mentioned: orientation towards solving, the ability of inner strength, of vigilance and clear discernment, as well as the capacity for self-criticism and self-evaluation (Lexutt 2008, 106-108).

Man—as the mirror of God—is a rational being able to think abstractly and causally, to make moral decisions, is be able to reflect on life and not just to react to it. Everyone is different from others because individuality is a fundamental feature of human existence. And yet there are many people today who have a lifestyle below the human level, reacting only to external stimuli instead of reflecting on the situation and taking the initiative (Knight 2003, 194ff).

Moral autonomy and responsibility in the context of human personality development

The term of personal autonomy (implicitly the moral one) will be discussed from a psycho-pedagogical point of view, without

considering its specific legal or psychiatric aspects. In this context, the question arises as to the relationship between autonomy and personal identity.

The answer seems to be in the ideal of the personality of "autonomous identity" where the role of the educator lies in helping the individual to acquire this ideal. So, not every type of identity is the target of the education process but only the one who finds expression in the autonomy of the subject (Dammer and Wortmann 2014, 7. Comp. Göppel 2014, 173). The task of the educational process is then to convey on the one hand traditional values and on the other hand the ability to further transform them responsibly and autonomously.

The idea of personal autonomy played, after Luther, a special role during the Enlightenment and was discussed in detail by Kant, which underlined the ability of self thinking. Later J.J. Rouseau defined by autonomy the ability of the individual to be fit for society while J. Habermas described it as being the independent ability of thinking on the basis of personal reflection. Finally, W. v. Humbold holistically describes personal autonomy as the product of an educated individuality and self-development (Maier 1981, 136-137).

Currently there are some differences in describing the essence of the concept of personal autonomy. Heinrich Roth defines for example, from a German perspective, personal autonomy as a mature stage of development characterized by the following aspects: a developed self-control system, a system of orientation that allows the confrontation with life from a perceptual, imaginative, verbal and cognitive perspective, a value system and a developed motivational one, a system of action determined by capacities and forms of realization as well as a personal development system (Roth 1971, 220).

From a French point of view personal autonomy is regarded as an independent and responsible form of life in the context of inevitable dependencies. According to this, autonomy and heteronomy do not exist in ideal forms but merely in mixed ones (Rieger-Ladich 2002, 175). Even though forms of formulation differ, it is still about a meta-criterium: the balance between self well-being and others (Comp. Mickler 2004, 26).

It becomes obvious that autonomy is realized in the context of a relationship between a subject and "something" from the outside such as, for example, another subject, your own consciousness, a certain thing or idea, the surrounding society, etc. Personal autonomy does not materialize in a certain mentality but in the ability to adopt and express and argue an attitude. In addition, it also describes a reflective relationship with itself opposite to the external reality (Maier 1981, 15-17). The decisional capacity that involves the recognition of the reasons and the consequences of its own behavior is based not only on the development of intellectual but also moral categories (Comp. Binder 1964, 11ff).

Thus, the term of moral autonomy describes from the pedagogical-psychological perspective the inner and the external capacity of self-determination. This attitude is a state of independence in which the individual has the ability to express his point of view alone, an attitude that implies a mature thinking capacity, personal reflection, critical thinking and the ability to act with effect. The road, the development towards maturity in this sense, is regarded by H. Roth (1971, 383) as a learning process. The capacity for moral-autonomous action as self-determination—like Luther's perspective —assumes the existence of perceptual and recognition capacity as well as social competencies in observing ethical principles. For moral self-determination, as a high form of human action capacity, builds on intellectual and social autonomy.

This degree of independence in development can be achieved through learning processes: not just in a socialization process but also in a self-learning process. This implies that the individual has some freedom of action despite the influence of socialization. Regarding the development of cognitive processes, H. Roth distinguishes between the promotion of intelligence as an information processing capacity and, at the same time, the development of cognitive flexibility, the possibility of perception from different perspectives (Maier 1981, 143-144).

The purpose of the social learning processes is a social and creative behavior based on the social perception capacity. Although the assumption of social responsibility is first built on the affective relationship between the child, the mother and the family as well as the socialization process within it, there are other factors that allow for the remote reflection of the acquired values and the gradual development of the own autonomy: the same age group, rational processing of instincts and emotions, flexibility of the roles as well as the school institution (Maier 1981, 144ff).

In this context, there are some issues that need to be considered. On the one hand, the moments of the young child's will have to be respected and integrated into the heteronomy action of the adult. On the other hand, it should be noted that the same age group fulfills its social-critical role only if its members use their rationale in a constructive way and already possess autonomous social competences (Comp. Uhlendorff and Oswald 2002, 43ff). In addition, for an individual to develop his / her own beliefs, it is not enough just distancing from certain values but also the personal reflection capacity (Maier 1981, 150-151).

The judgment capacity and moral decision can be described as a theoretical construct structured on the following dimensions: cognitive (including perceptive), affective and moral. At the rational

level it is composed of the ability to change the perspective and the competence in argumentation, the basis of which is the ability to control and logical thinking. At the affective level, the ability to judge and moral decision is described by an attitude of respect and a degree of tolerance in ambiguity that implies a sense of belonging, responsibility and interest, empathy or sympathy (Bienengräber 2002, 172). Competence formation at the level of reflective self-regulation of the action depends largely on cognitive and verbal-terminological development (Brandstädter 2011, 233).

Regarding the capacity for moral autonomy, one must also remember the model of the American psychologist Kohlberg (1974), which, based on Piaget's cognitive development structure, describes it as a universally valid evolutionary process. It is dependent on the development of logical thinking and at the same time oriented towards specific solutions of "justice" and related to the context of social dilemmas. Kohlberg believes that the concept of socialization does not sufficiently describe the factors that directly influence the process of forming the moral autonomy. On the other hand, they also beneficially favor, in turn, the appropriation of other categories in the context of socialization (Bienengräber 2002, 15, 23).

Thus, Kohlberg describes 6 levels of moral development based on 3 levels: preconventional, conventional and post-conventional where level 4 (orientation according to law and public order) is regarded as the target of education, the so-called social maturity of the individual. The parallelism between cognitive and moral development is true only in one direction: while moral thinking requires a degree of cognitive development, reaching a certain stage of logical thinking does not automatically involve moral development at the appropriate level (Bienengräber 2002, 17; Loevinger 1976 (1997). Kohlberg calls 4 social factors that influence the development of moral autonomy and accountability: an attitude of appreciation, open and reflective communication, the

existence of potentially ambiguous social conflicts, and the giving of responsibility (Bienengräber 2002, 244-245).

Moral autonomy and responsibility in today's society

How necessary and relevant are personal autonomy and responsibility in today's society? During Luther's time, they really constituted a "novum"; but in the modern society there is no such visible heteronomy as massive as in Luther's time. And yet, is it possible that these human qualities are today more current than ever? The visible change of Western society since the mid-twentieth century includes not only economic-technological processes but also political and socio-cultural processes. Their starting point is scientific and technological progress. Despite the fact that this personal maturity and freedom of decision in self-realization constituted the basic objective in the 20th century, the individual still lives and suffers under the dictation of so-called freedom, the feeling of being the sole responsible for his own life, which involves initiative and mental power (Heinzlmaier 2013, 22). But what are the causes of this phenomenon?

The task of the individual, of orienting himself in the multitude of life concepts and values, of evaluating them in a critical and detailed manner, respectively reflecting upon them and ultimately deciding on his own model of life - requires a lot of personal skills, such as the ability to analyze and synthesize, systematic thinking, personal reflection, decision-making, etc. In addition, this requires more social and material resources, which are usually non-existent, as well as a value-political framework that allows for active engagement in positions of responsibility (Klages 1988, 147).

Based on the multitude of options, a biographical decision-making pressure is born in the modern world. Previously, this range of

possibilities did not exist, but due to socialization in a normal biography there was a decision-making liberation and, at the same time, liberation of social protection (Faltermaier et. al. 2002, 74). Today, in modern society, there is nothing in it, and every decision for an option involves giving up on others. This requires from the individual a continuous process of analysis and evaluation (Keupp 1999, 56).

High demands on the self-control capacity, where "internal control" has to replace "non-existent external control" (Beck 1997, 212) lead not only to doubt, uncertainty, stress and frustration, but also to unproductive, even destructive behavioral strategies: avoiding conflicts and criticism, adaptation to mass culture, a passive reaction instead of an active one, or a escape behavior in fundamentalist circles, respectively, in a consumer attitude, especially of young people (Comp. Schwarte 2015, 256ff). There is a continuous insistence on adapting to the changes taking place at an increasingly rhythmical pace and to the acceptance of risks. So instead of the 21st Century person acting consciously in front of apparent appearances, he is often only able to react to commercial demands (Hetzel in Gamm 2004, 133). How to "function" in life, that is, to simply "react" without co-operation, really reduces the fear of existence - because everything is ritualized - at the same time diminishes self-consciousness until the complete dissolution of the meaning of life (Ritz-Schulte and Huckebrink 2012, 56-57).

And the professional field in turn formulates high criteria and requirements up to constraints for personal optimization of the individual. The new basic standards for the "hired entrepreneur" claim on the one hand a productive-active orientation and a commercial valorization of the individual in terms of his own qualities and achievements, such as the ability to self-organize his life and biography, of management and identity delimitation as well as the provision of continuing vocational training and acquiring social

skills. On the other hand, unfortunately, it is not being pursued to develop and promote this classical ideal of personality and education in pedagogical programs, but on the contrary the schooling period is reduced and adapts as a content of the requirements in the economic field (Voß in Gamm et. al. 2004, 154-155).

Certainly, the influence of social transition has a greater impact especially on the period between childhood and young adulthood, as this time is a significant milestone in values and attitudes (Alwin 1995). In this regard, the detraditionalization and individualization of professional guidance parents also has consequences for the socialization of children. An ambivalent juxtaposition is represented by the socio-emotional dismantling of family structures during the acute emphasis of the "social" qualities in the professional field. The development of social competences in childhood presupposes the existence of a sustainable family environment, which today is rare (Evers 2000, 108).

It is obvious that the current society due to its complexity implies in most aspects of life the need to develop a personal and moral autonomy. The remarkable values of the Reformation have been proven throughout the Enlightenment era and are proving today to be extremely present and necessary. In other terms, society not only imposes at present the need to acquire moral autonomy and self-responsibility, but at the same time it represents the context that determines their formation. Thus it is still discussed the extent to which the current society promotes the development of moral autonomy and personal responsibility?

Both moral autonomy and self-responsibility are integrated into the development of identity training. Human identity can only develop in a context where there are relatively stable structures (clear attitudes and positions, ideal qualities or virtues) that at the same time have a certain degree of flexibility. Through social

processes, society can either condition the individual as a puppet or support him in his development towards autonomy (Roth 1971, 227). The quality of the environment also determines the quality of learning processes as well as the quality and direction of motivation (Schwarte 2002, 24).

Because the socialization process does not take place in a programmatic way but in a spontaneous one, by imitation. People in the immediate environment are automatically a model for developing individuals. So it is important to pay attention to the existing atmosphere in society as a socialization framework. Mentioned as optimal social conditions are: soul warmth and belonging, such as stimulating factors and positive social experiences. These characteristics are not limited to the family environment, because in the modern age dominated by the mass media the general atmosphere of the society directly affects and shapes the family. Schwarte (2015, 84ff) notes that, unfortunately, the mass media means are not at present sufficiently aware of their massive destructive effect on positive educational values or on the development of the human brain (Comp. Lembke and Leipner 2015, 69ff).

Despite a wide range of existing educational offerings - as stimulant factors - there are still risk factors with a profoundly destructive effect on individual development: the crisis of orientation and the crisis of values, the lack of ideals, the moral crisis as well as the lack of determination or arbitrariness (Schwarte 2015, 88-89). All these aspects create an unfriendly environment for the development of moral autonomy and self-responsibility. Helmut Fend believes that the following factors ensure a social climate favorable in general to the development of social competences in particular during adolescence: realistic and reflective expectations, the promotion of conflict resolution capacity and a dialogue atmosphere (Fend 1990, 33ff). The key criterion is "the potential to support development" which, in turn, mirrors "the promotion of autonomy and personal

responsibility" and "self-referencing skills towards others and demands" (Fend 1990, 35-39).

W. Brezinka emphasizes the importance of paying attention to "indirect" education within society. He pleads for a framework with new forms of social order that exploits the potential of skills training in the educational process (Brezinka 1993, 30). For autonomy first develops through heteronomy and requires exercise. Different research studies show that the individual does not have indefinite self-control resources. When they are exhausted then only skills or discipline help (Brunsting in Kubesch 2016, 352; Comp. Baumeister and Tierney 2012). This first involves public awareness and elucidation of the impact of society on the socialization process and the existing destructive factors. Secondly, it is necessary that the adaptation of the social climate, in order to support the development of autonomous individuals, to become a subject of political interest and purpose. In this respect we can talk about the moral protection of the environment as well as about a "socialization policy". Anyone who is interested in a sustainable lifestyle will sooner or later face this problem (Schwarte 2015, 95ff).

As far as educational institutions are concerned, they need a great deal of transformation into a protective factor of personality development. Due to the boosting of modern life as well as the necessity of continuous development, there is also the need to also boost and extend the term of autonomy in the field of adult education (Weber 1999, 498). The provision, such as decision-making and reflection, requires at an adult age certain emotional, cognitive and motivational premise that must be considered.

Conclusions

The central message of the Reformation was one of liberation: towards external heteronomy, towards oneself and towards the

weaknesses of human nature. God offers man inner freedom that further manifests itself by caring for one's neighbor. So Luther's concept of freedom knows two moments: inner liberty in the form of moral autonomy and self-determination as well as external freedom in the form of personal responsibility.

If these values during Luther's time had a strong resonance due to the context of personal and social deprivation today their appeal is just as relevant and current; but this time, not because of the deprivation, but rather the overworking of the human identity. For the individual must create himself in the midst of a pluralistic sense and value proposition an ideology of his own, consisting of the concept of self, the concept of the world, a personal concept of values and a picture of society. A life fulfilled within the present society is possible only if the individual possesses at the same time moral autonomy and personal responsibility.

On the other hand, society also represents the determinant context of acquiring and promoting these values. Yet such complex personal and social skills can only develop in a context of positive and reflective relationships. Unfortunately, there are significant factors in the current society that lead indirectly but inevitably to non-civilization processes. It remains an acute need to create a concrete policy of supporting personality development by guaranteeing the most favorable socialization conditions within society. For in the end - according to Luther - moral autonomy and personal responsibility build a picture of the dignified man, "in the image and likeness" of the Creator.

Notes

[1] Even philosopher Wilhelm Schmidt in his work on the art of living presents the priority objective of encouraging the individual towards an autonomous and conscious life leadership through the reflection of the logical consequence from cause to effect. (comp. Schmid 1998, 50)

[2] Unfortunately, the youth schooling period in the Western-modern society is not perceived in this context as a chance but as a risk factor in terms of school standards and subsequent professional insecurity. This is also evident in the fact that most young people attend school without emotional participation, and the goal itself is not perceived as a source of appreciation or personal development. (Pörnbacher 1999, 189)

[3] From the perspective of moral-psychological development the question arises about the necessary level of development for the objective reflection capacity and the possibilities for their promotion in adulthood. (Comp. Neufeld / Mate 2007)

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