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## Practice of Self-Dehumanization

### Abstract

This article examines a context that is critical for understanding contemporary transformations in socio-cultural reality, with a particular focus on broadly understood educational practice. Specifically, it addresses dehumanization, and more precisely, the variant which may be called self-dehumanization. The analysis proceeds in two stages. First, the phenomenon of self-imposed dehumanisation is conceptualized using selected themes from the humanist tradition of mass society analysis (Znaniecki, Ortega y Gasset, Oakeshott, Sloterdijk). Second, the article poses a series of questions regarding the relationship between contemporary education and the core elements of self-dehumanization: the culture of cynicism, the ontology of ingratitude, intellectual-ethical inertia, and resentment. The discussion seeks to invite further examination of education as a potential environment for dehumanization and, above all, the tendency among educational actors toward self-degradation, a topic that remains underexplored in pedagogical theory and is often overlooked in educational practice.

**Keywords:** dehumanization, self-imposed dehumanisation, revolt of the masses, cynicism, ingratitude, mental certainty, resentment.

### Praktyka autodehumanizacji

#### Abstrakt

Artykuł podejmuje namysł nad kontekstem ważnym dla rozumienia zmian zachodzących współcześnie w rzeczywistości społeczno-kulturowej, w szczególności w szeroko rozumianej praktyce edukacyjnej. Tym kontekstem jest dehumanizacja, a dokładniej rzecz ujmując, jeden z jej wariantów – autodehumanizacja. Autor przeprowadza argumentację w dwóch krokach. Najpierw konceptualizuje zjawisko dehumanizacji-na-własne-życzenie w oparciu o wybrane tropy z humanistycznej tradycji analizy społeczeństwa masowego (Znaniecki, Ortega y Gasset, Oakeshott,

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Sloterdijk), następnie formułuje szereg pytań dotyczących związku współczesnej edukacji ze składowymi elementami struktury autodehumanizacji: kulturą cynizmu, ontologią niewdzięczności, inercją intelektualno-etyczną oraz nastawieniem resentymentalnym. W ten sposób tekst staje się zaproszeniem do dyskusji o niewystarczająco obecnej w teorii pedagogicznej oraz lekceważonej w praktykach edukacyjnych skłonności podmiotów edukacyjnych do autodegradacji.

**Słowa kluczowe:** dehumanizacja, dehumanizacja-na-własne-życzenie, bunt mas, cynizm, niewdzięczność, pewność umysłowa, resentment.

## Introduction

Due to various reasons, we are accustomed to underestimating the results of dehumanisation within social practices. In my opinion, we reflect on these results too rarely and not deeply enough also as far as pedagogy is concerned. Yet, within the field of education, it is hard to imagine anything more disturbing, sinister and threatening than the loss of the human dimension of education – exposing pupils, students, people under someone's care, colleagues and partners to dehumanisation. Unless, that is, we identify the human with the social, with the deep mental patterns and complex results of functioning within collective frameworks, with – in short – the way in which *Homo sapiens* usually organises their life. In such a case, various practices may turn out to be too human (cf. Sławek 2020) and exposing pupils to dehumanisation (desocialisation) beneficial. The problem is that what turns out to be too human (i.e., without the sufficient level of ecological embedding in the network of connections with the world and without the sufficient level of attention paid to complex interconnections within the world) imposes upon us an inhuman (life-degrading) reality. Therefore, it is necessary – paradoxically only apparently – to counteract dehumanisation (the loss of the social rather than existential dimension of life) by means of de-humanisation (distancing oneself from processes of socialisation).

In this existential meaning dehumanisation can be understood as the decline of hermeneutic and ethical sensitivity. The life ceases to be a question and the other person ceases to be an object of care and responsibility. Robert Kwaśnica insightfully demonstrates that dehumanisation is the condition when existential questions fall silent – the ones focused on the meaning of existence and thus sustaining within us the readiness to exist in a human – understanding – way (cf. Kwaśnica 2014: 71). But this is not all. The decline of reflexivity is only the first level of contemporary dehumanisation. There is a second level built upon it – the concealment of absence. The replacement of existential questions with technical ones (what works?, which method to choose?) is presented and perceived as progress more and more often. The first-level dehumanisation is rationalised, that is the absence of questions about meaning, about what is really significant in life is presented in terms of necessity and benefit. From this perspective, a pragmatic calculation must replace the old, meaningless and naive reflections. Thus, the loss of important questions (questions about

significance) no longer is perceived as degradation or limitation, a manifestation of human imperfection or a life failure, but as sobriety and modernity. Contemporary generations may lose the language of existential problems – and do so without any misgivings but feeling that they fulfil their historical destiny:

Nobody taught them this language. On the contrary, the school, or really particularly the school, as well as quasi-educational public institutions, such as the media, have done a lot and remain very committed to ridiculing, degrading and excluding this language from the public discourse and from our private thinking about ourselves, our problems and our relations with others (Kwaśnica 2014: 89).

One must add to this the codified numbing of the moral self (cf. Kołakowski 2000; Bauman 1996) and the bureaucratically and politically driven adiaphorisation, i.e. the exclusion of others from moral concern (cf. Bauman 2009; 2016), with the purpose of realising the risk of a ‘non-human’ life, which is unproblematic for oneself, pridefully certain of one’s own reasons and principles, yet contemptuously indifferent to others’ hardships.

Among various activities, processes and mechanisms that contribute to the effect of dehumanisation, there is one which is usually overlooked – one’s own agency, the individual’s own dehumanising agency, their subjective de-subjectification. Simon Leys recounts a certain day in a café with the radio playing in the background. Loud music, interrupted from time to time by news or stock market or sports updates, had been coming from the speakers all morning. Nobody paid any attention to this. It was just the usual background noise in the café. And suddenly the room was filled with music, calm and beautiful music – Mozart’s clarinet quintet.

The customers began to look around in amazement and exchange glances: “Their hesitation did not last long: one of them, to everyone’s relief, got up briskly and turned the knob of the radio, switched the station, and thus restored the familiar and soothing wave of noise, which once again could be safely ignored” (Leys 2013: 214–215). What strikes me as particularly significant in this story is the motif of escape from what demands attention, the neutralisation of the experience that absorbs one’s sensitivity and the elimination of the factor that disrupts the comfort of being at ease; in short: anti-transformation. A Belgian critic comments on the event as follows:

And at that moment I was struck by an obvious truth which has never left me since: real philistines are not people who are unable to recognize beauty — on the contrary, they recognize it all too well, they detect it instantly [...] but only in order to pounce upon it at once and smother it before it can set foot in their ubiquitous empire of ugliness. For ignorance, obscurantism, bad taste or stupidity are not merely deficiencies: they are active forces, which manifest themselves ferociously at every opportunity and tolerate no infringement of their tyranny. Inspired talent always offends mediocrity. (Leys 2013: 206–207).

This is not merely a matter of aesthetics. Perhaps by analogy one can view the phenomenon of dehumanisation, one dimension of which is probably self-dehumanisation. The suppression of existential questions (due to a focus on production techniques), the hardening of conscience (so that it remains normatively certain and causes no anxiety), and the pushing of others outside the circle of moral concern (because then there is no need to make room within oneself and around oneself, and it is easy to channel one's own frustration) – all this may be not only a shortcoming of a fragile condition, a submission to overwhelming circumstances, but – at least in part – an active force, a choice made by the subject. Education must take into consideration that its participants may not be ready for humanising actions and may actively avoid them, that there is such a thing as self-imposed dehumanisation.

The same can be said in the post-humanist language. The dehumanising process must take into consideration the possibility that social actors may not wish to be less human (species-specific, social), that they may not be ready to give up comfortable modes of socialisation and 'humanistic' claims, and that they may actively work towards what people usually do.

This paper examines the phenomenon of self-dehumanisation and explores what humanistic concepts centred on subjectification refusal might contribute to its description and understanding. Then the paper attempts to conceptualise the phenomenon of self-imposed dehumanisation as a starting point for future, prospective pedagogical reflection.

## **The Anti-Individual**

As Peter Sloterdijk says (1987) we are surrounded by the culture of cynicism. Nothingness permeates the language of values; cold indifference allows committed phraseology to be uttered and then to fade away. We no longer believe in the initiatory power of education. We do not expect any emancipatory change. Yet, the cynic is not what they used to be. In antiquity, he was a solitary eccentric, a provocateur and moralist, a mocking whistle-blower operating from the position of an outsider (*kynic*, from the Greek *kyon* – dog). Today, cynicism takes the form of grim realism of both the masses and the elites – a derisive attitude to ethics perceived as principles applicable to the carefree and the foolish. The cynic is no longer someone on the margins who must face a blind community but is a mass figure. The pressure of individualisation disappears in the big city anonymity and the environment of electronic media. The cynic is no longer a bold and distinctive figure, but an everyman trying not to come across as silly. The cynic is not a critic of culture demonstrating an alternative by means of setting an example, but is an average person who – in their own opinion – has seen through the nothingness towards which everything is heading, and therefore will not get involved into any existentially engaging excess:

Allusions to the ideals of humanist culture now seem tolerable only in the form of mockery and negation. Cynicism, as enlightened false conscio-

usness, has become an insensitive wisdom of decline, which wards off courage; it treats all positive things a priori as deception and only wants somehow to get through life (Sloterdijk 1987: 563–565).

Sloterdijk does not seem to be correct writing that individualisation pressure has stopped today, although now it undoubtedly takes a different form from the one that he suggests (we will return to this point). What is important is the fact that he accurately points to the mass culture syndrome. Cynicism has become easy: anyone can try to destroy humanistic involvement treating the effort to understand and ethical sensitivity as dead wood that significantly hinders successful ‘managing’ through life and they can do so with no risk of the disapproval of those around them, that is riding the wave and, additionally, in the atmosphere of critical insightfulness.

The context that inevitably comes to mind here is José Ortega y Gasset’s ‘the revolt of the masses’. It is worth recalling that the Spanish thinker does not use this term to describe a syndrome affecting social classes (such as labourers), but rather to highlight the characteristics of a certain category of people. There are, actually, two types of human beings:

Those who impose upon themselves great demands, assuming duties and exposing themselves to danger, and those who place no special demands upon themselves, for whom to live is to remain as they are, without making any effort toward self-improvement — to drift through life like a buoy carried passively by shifting sea currents (Ortega y Gasset 1985: 14–15).

The revolt of the masses is a state of mind in which the expansion of life demands combines – and this is the crucial point – with a lack of gratitude, inability to appreciate those who, through their own efforts, contribute to the development of civilisation and culture, and reluctance to take an interest in their accomplishments. The mass man does not let anything force them to step outside their own framework and avoids contact that might disturb his sense of being at ease. Ortega again makes a distinction:

A man is intellectually mass when, confronted with a problem, he is satisfied with the ideas that happen to come to his mind at the moment. The man of excellence, on the other hand, is he who is not satisfied with what comes to him immediately and without prior effort, but considers worthy of himself only that which still surpasses him, and whose comprehension demands a double effort (Ortega y Gasset 1985: 17–18).

A refusal to make an effort, to train, to learn from those superior ones, to live under pressure; closing the soul, demanding that mediocrity become the norm, so that nobody might challenge inertia and a poor condition – these are the characteristics of rebellious masses. Even before Ortega – whose work was published in 1929 – Florian Znaniecki warned against the syndrome of refusing to acknowledge personal superiority and rebellion against institutions requiring talent and long preparation in his 1921 work *Upadek cywilizacji* (lit. *The Decline of Western Civilisation*): “Masses

demand that everything be at their comprehension level and are unwilling to make the necessary effort in order to learn gradually to understand what surpasses this level" (Znaniński 1991: 1006). The education system does its best to "avoid disturbing the mind" and due to comprehensive courses and programmes, complete textbooks and exhaustive lectures, it produces graduates who are convinced they have already acquired knowledge and are unaware of their own ignorance being remarkably self-confident (cf. Znaniński 1991: 1007).

I expressed some reservations regarding Sloterdijk's thesis on the modern cessation of the pressure to individualise since the mass effect is changing its characteristics today. The digital world is introducing new conditions into the functioning of the mass man. We are no longer dealing with crowds marching for power – argues Byung-Chul Han, a Korean philosopher – but with fleeting swarms releasing no political energy. The individual does not disappear into a crowd or an average 'We' in which they dissolve, but retains their own, compulsively cultivated, image: "Although he expresses himself anonymously, as a rule he has a profile—and he works ceaselessly at optimizing it. Instead of being 'nobody,' he is insistently *somebody* exhibiting himself and vying for attention" (Han 2017: 10–11). To be fair, Sloterdijk does, in fact, recognise this change: in this new mass, one is mass as an individual – one is mass without seeing the others (Sloterdijk 1987). In the digital world, individualisation – despised in the wake of the revolt of the masses and imminent ochlocracy – returns, but no longer as an existential rite of passage and a path to self-education, but as a marketing strategy for the individual's life within the swarm. Needless to say, the loss of political agency changes nothing as regards the tendencies towards cynicism, ingratitude and mental fortification typical of rebellious masses. From this perspective, the views of Znaniński, Ortega and Sloterdijk remain valid.

The Spanish thinker attributes the emergence of the domineering claims of mediocrity to the 19th century, whose spectacular success in improving living conditions meant that the civilisation achievements were no longer perceived by people as the product of long-term cultural development but began to be regarded as something natural, obvious and requiring no special self-education. Michael Oakeshott believes that it began much earlier. It is a long story that starts neither with the French Revolution nor with the industrial transformations of the 18th century, but in the Renaissance – in the 14th and 15th centuries – when the most outstanding event in the history of modern Europe happened: the emergence of the individual. The collapse of the ancient and medieval community order led to the emergence of a tendency towards individualism, towards being a subject of choice. At the same time, numerous of people – deprived of the certainties of faith, profession and social status – were unable to transform their inherited identity into creative individuality, perceiving choice as a burden to get rid of. Thus, as the flip side of individuality, the anti-individual emerged, the 'manquée' individual (failed, defective, incomplete) full of resentment and, in its envy, destroying everything that fills them with a sense of inadequacy: "From the frustrated 'individual *manque*' there sprang the militant 'anti-individual', disposed to assimilate the world to his own character by deposing

the individual and destroying his moral prestige" (Oakeshott 1961: 159–160). The masses (and let us include swarms too) do not consist of individuals, but of »anti-individuals« united in a revulsion from individuality" (Oakeshott 1961: 160).

Nowadays it is not difficult to dismiss such views on aesthetic grounds, perceiving them as traditional intellectual complaining, a frustrated academic elite's reaction due to losing their social influence or a conservative mantra. However, such an interpretation would mean taking the easy way out and wasting the critical energy of insightful life observers. If one uses Sloterdijk's idea that culture involves "attempts to challenge the mass within ourselves to declare itself against itself" (Sloterdijk 2012: 154–155), one can notice all the current potential of the matter. The all-too-easy, false wisdom of cynicism; the inability to feel gratitude; closed-mindedness towards anything that exists beyond the framework of our current understanding and lifestyle; intellectual certainty and a sense of moral security; the cold anger of resentment – these are the shortcomings that threaten everybody, and which one must constantly challenge within oneself. Oakeshott writes: "In short, the disposition to be an 'anti-individual' is one to which every European man has a propensity; the 'mass man' is merely one in whom this propensity is dominant " (Oakeshott 1961: 168). The mass man, the defective individual, the cynic are realities passing through the centre of the subject. From an existential perspective, these are not, after all, social invectives, nor are they even categories of sociological description, but names for mental dispositions which one may consent to or resist in everyday life.

Making use of the clues gathered in this way, one can conceptualise the notion of 'self-imposed dehumanisation as a structure based on four pillars: cynicism, ingratitude, arrogance and resentment. In individual cases, the dominant element may shift. There are forms of concealing existential questions and numbing the conscience dominated by cynicism, but also there are instances in which superficiality of engagement with the world and self-sufficiency come to the foreground, or those where blind self-confidence prevails, or finally – those driven by resentment and a desire to devalue.

## **Pedagogical questions about self-dehumanisation**

Therefore, we face a major challenge in pedagogy and education. In addition, having a defensive attitude, we do not seem to think much about it. People involved in educational situations – on both sides of the desk (lecture podium) or screen – often demonstrate a cynical mindset devaluing any deeper, existential, initiatory learning involvement. They are confined to horizons that are already acquired or merely temporary and thus devoid of gratitude (towards the spirits that challenge the horizons), arrogantly self-confident and untroubled by anything – especially within themselves, in their own relation to the world. They are untroubled and yet at the same time resentfully hostile towards those who rise above the familiar confines. This is what we (teachers, pupils, parents, administrators, decision-makers,

journalists, priests, businesspeople, etc.) are en masse / in swarms. At best this is what we are like only at times.

In this situation, it is time for serious reflection and discussion on the effects of self-dehumanisation. In particular cases, it is always the individual who ultimately decides – the subject as the decisive being, the ‘I’ that tips the balance when it comes to responding to such tendencies. However, no one operates in a vacuum. Various educational practices and methods of organising education can either contribute to the dehumanisation of the individual or support resistance to degrading tendencies. Therefore, the present author believes it is necessary to ask the key questions. Below come but a few sample questions which are organised around the fourfold structure of self-dehumanisation outlined above.

Firstly – how do the various components of the education system (school and university funding, teacher training, academic and professional career progression, teacher and student workloads, class and tutorial group sizes, educational bureaucracy, architecture, school facilities, the class-and-lesson system, the state examination system, the curriculum model, reading strategies and other teaching methods, the market orientation of schools and universities and other directives stemming from dominant educational ideologies, performance evaluation systems, reward and ranking systems, etc.) contribute to reinforcing the tendency towards self-dehumanisation or counteract it? How does each of these components help direct life towards a human (understanding and ethically sensitive) way of being, and how does it marginalise existential questions and suppress the troubled conscience? With regard to the first dominant feature in the structure of self-dehumanisation, the crucial question that should constantly occupy our minds is this: how should we counteract cynicism (that grey, nihilistic focus on the lowest common denominator) through institutional solutions, social practices and personal choices in everyday life? For instance, how should we think of education so that there is no room in it for what Richard Rorty calls knowingness (empty knowledge) that shields us from the “shiver of dread” and “romantic enthusiasm” (cf. Rorty 1998), and what Alfred North Whitehead describes as “inert ideas” that are not subject to mental combinations (cf. Whitehead 1967: 1)? Above all, however, there is the question – once boldly posed by Józef Tischner as the most important pedagogical question but unfortunately rarely found in educational theory and practice today – how can we restore hope in others? (cf. Tischner 1992: 97). Hope that education is really about something – something important. That what is at stake is what is human.

Secondly, one must ask which of our organisational solutions and practices enhance an ontology of gratitude, and which stifle the value-creating connection with the outstanding achievements of others. The issue is really significant since Lech Witkowski’s research shows that one often perceives contact with an authority in a simplistic and degrading manner, treating it as an instance of social power that relieves us of the need to think and take decisions, rather than a meaningful voice with which one can enter into an agon that transforms the horizon of identity (cf. Witkowski 2009, 2011). And so: how shall one conceive of education so that it

becomes a space for meaningful encounters, inspiration, and testimony to a life-giving path? What aspects of the current education system undermine our ability to recognise greatness and to establish a beneficial relationship with it and what aspects facilitate this ability?

Thirdly, a crucial question seems to be the one about overcoming intellectual arrogance: which elements of the system and which actions enhance intellectual ferment and ethical unease, and which dull the mind and reassure the conscience that one is on the right path? How can we acknowledge misunderstanding and uncertainty in education so that it supports neither complacent ignorance ("I don't know, I don't understand, I don't read and so what!"), nor the arrogance of an expert unaware of their own frame of reference and the breadth of culture ("I know, I understand, I've already read it")? How must education function so that it weakens, rather than reinforces, what Leszek Kołakowski calls the rationalist-positivist attitude? Here is the answer:

The attitude of rationalist-positivists, in its most widespread form, is harmful in that it passes final judgments [...] in such a way that those who adopt this attitude are, from the outset, exempt from the duty of studying anything that they have once been told is obscure, murky, unverifiable, or metaphysical. [...] Without any justification, however, they make their own sense of intelligibility into a universal criterion, which they attempt to impose upon the world; rationalism understood in this way is an ideology of simplified mental life, in which one can get rid of all troublesome problems once and for all by declaring them to be unintelligible (Kołakowski 2002: 226–227).

There is a lot at stake, because, as Hannah Arendt teaches us, the price one must sometimes pay for thoughtlessness, that is, for limiting oneself to clichés and professional jargon, is banal evil. And banal evil can be extreme, though unrecognisable to the perpetrator (cf. Arendt 1963). An untroubled mind is dangerous.

Fourthly, the risk of dehumanisation forces one to ask a question: how should education be organised and practised in order to counteract resentful gestures of rejection, disdain, aggressive exclusion and condescending belittlement in cultural encounters? There are people who make no effort to engage with the other's attitude – resentment and prejudice prevent them from involvement in a genuine encounter: "They do not read the books they denounce, but simply pick out titles and sentences to which they can react indignantly" (Rorty 1998: 91). How to imagine education in which neither the institution nor teachers discourage pupils from engaging with certain cultural fields, nor encourage resentment towards specific authors, works, movements or disciplines and at the same time they stimulate a critical approach? How to make ourselves and others aware of the trap of "the terrorism of one's own boundary", as the Romanian philosopher Gabriel Liiceanu calls the fundamentalist tendency to impose one's own ideas on others and to disparage the ideas of others? As Liiceanu explains: within the limit I am situated with the force of the concrete from the outset and without effort, while being human – a delicate abstraction – must first be painstakingly achieved (cf. Liiceanu 2018: 24). But above all, the threat of

resentimental self-dehumanisation demands that we ask how education can support the desire for subjectification, strengthen the pursuit of an autonomous life, and encourage individualisation – not in the sense of superficial self-promotion or banal pop-cultural authenticity (cf. Taylor 1992), but as a path to oneself based on self-education? What kind of education supports the modern invention of individualisation, and what kind pushes a person onto the path of the resentful *manquée* individual?

I am afraid that analytical responses to the above-indicated issues would produce a devastating assessment of our contemporary notions of education. These questions must be taken seriously, but even a preliminary evaluation and the state of critical research demonstrate that the dominant ideologies and forms of education do not only fail to effectively counteract the under-humanisation of the individual, but actively support self-imposed dehumanisation, creating an environment of cynical disregard for humanistic engagement, one that lacks the life-giving contact with great figures and their achievements (and that, thus, is devoid of cultural gratitude and continuity), an environment of unfounded self-confidence (including the certainty that one infallibly knows what one needs, that one understands perfectly the purpose of education and what exactly it is supposed to provide), and, finally, an environment of resentment towards those who refuse to keep adapting to the ‘challenges of the times’ or do not fit the profile of a graduate (a successful person, a citizen of the world, a patriot, a faithful member of the church, etc.). In such an environment, resistance to the inner tendency to be an anti-individual, refusal to give up existential questions and to accept a clear conscience are acts of heroism.

## Conclusion

The above may be regarded as a footnote to Immanuel Kant’s famous – and pedagogically crucial – text, and in particular to the following passage:

*Enlightenment is mankind's exit from its self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to make use of one's own understanding without the guidance of another. Self-incurred is this inability if its cause lies not in the lack of understanding but rather in the lack of the resolution and the courage to use it without the guidance of another. Sapere aude! (Kant 1996: 58).*

The key phrase in this quote is self-incurred. It is not a matter of a lack of ability, but of a lack of courage and decision-taking. The same may be true of the four pillars of the structure of self-dehumanisation. Dehumanisation can be self-inflicted. One can choose to remove oneself from the gravitational pull of weighty questions and ethical sensitivity. Without individual fortitude and a personal choice of what is truly human, even the best-drafted legislation and the most sophisticated plans for educational reform will be undermined by the practice of dehumanisation (which is why organisational changes, top-down interventions and bureaucratic audits are so illusory). The matter is decided daily in the courage to resist, both within oneself and

one's environment, the tendency to cynically deprecate axiological commitment; in the decision to be open to the gift of inspiration; in the boldness of testing one's own assumptions, opinions and habits, even to the point of a possible shock to the 'self'; in the choice of a conscious, responsible, adult life on one's own account, without an alibi that exempts one from thinking and caring, without – all too easily – giving up one's own agency, for it is, after all, far simpler to think what one already thinks about various matters and to do what one already does. We give up the human within us all too easily. The fight against dehumanisation must begin with an individual.

Resisting self-dehumanisation is crucial, but the matter is, of course, far from straightforward. The question of initiating people into a conscious life and leading them towards autonomy is the fundamental and most difficult issue in education, one that resists simple solutions. Immaturity – as Michel Foucault writes in his commentary on Kant's text – means a deficiency of a relationship with oneself, inner laziness and cowardice, and thus a state from which one cannot, as a rule, emerge on their own (cf. Foucault 2010). Therefore, it is so important whether educational institutions and practices enhance an infantile life (one that is guided, focused on needs and a naturally integrated ego) or an adult life (one that is autonomous and concerned with the state of the ego and the world). In other words, do they create conditions encouraging self-dehumanisation, or do they offer the individual an opportunity to overcome cynicism, ingratitude, intellectual and ethical inertia, and resentment. The individual is the decisive authority, but educational conditions can either facilitate or hinder this choice, even to the point of blocking it. It is necessary to initiate a serious analysis of those elements of the educational process that pave the way for self-dehumanisation as well as those that equip the individual with the tools to resist the sad human tendency towards self-degradation.

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