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Encounter as a Turning Point in Shaping the Student's Biography from a Personalistic and Existential Perspective

„Spotkanie” jako punkt zwrotny w budowaniu biografii wychowanka w ujęciu personalistyczno-egzystencjalnym

Abstract: This article explores the various meanings and dimensions of the notion of *encounter* in the framework of personalistic and existential pedagogy. By referring to the views of its Polish creators and reconstructing the features of upbringing as a dialogical process that interweaves the mutual interactions of *You* and *I*—two subjects engaged in this dynamic—I aim to illustrate the multidimensionality and universality of the encounter. This phenomenon corresponds not only with Stefan Kunowski's contour theory of development, revealing its complex features and pedagogical significance—relationality, breakthrough, transgression, as well as its therapeutic and person-forming aspects—but also with broader humanistic pedagogical traditions that guide individuals toward goodness, beauty, and truth.

Keywords: pedagogy, personalism, encounter, relationship, upbringing, development.

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Introduction

In recent decades, personalist pedagogy, understood as a system of thought concerning human development and education, has experienced a resurgence. This revival is likely linked to the uncertainty, disorientation, and chaos that have accompanied the turn of the century and the millennium. These upheavals have led to a weakening of the human condition, a loss of confidence in the values that guide our actions, and a fading sense of hope once provided by adhering to our beliefs—whether religious or rooted in secular philosophical traditions—which used to offer reassurance and a sense of spiritual direction, especially amid surrounding tensions and conflicts.

This article begins by outlining the key premises of existential-personalist pedagogy, focusing on the ideas put forward by scholars who have made significant contributions to this field. These include Janusz Tarnowski, Józef Tischner—primarily as a philosopher, including in educational theory—and Stefan Kunowski, a representative of general Christian pedagogy. Kunowski, in particular, is known for developing one of the most influential educational theories—the contour theory of upbringing, inspired by the views of Sergiusz Hessen.

By reconstructing selected ideas of these scholars, I will present the fundamental concepts underpinning their theories. These concepts not only shed light on key phenomena in our development and life stories but also, from a narratological perspective, function as fluid,¹ interdisciplinary notions, such as biography, (self-)education, dialogue, self-actualisation, and, most importantly, the titular concept of the encounter. I will then turn to the theory of the encounter, examining its underlying principles, situating it within the educational process, and explaining its links to central themes in personalist pedagogy and humanistic psychology, such as dialogue, introspection, self-actualisation, subjectivity, and identity. Finally, drawing on the insights of Krzysztof Maliszewski, I will consider the contemporary relevance of the encounter from both a personalist and existential perspective, particularly in relation to the modern concept of ‘fragile education.’²

1 M. Bał, *Narratologia. Wprowadzenie do teorii narracji*, eds. and trans. E. Kraskowska, E. Rajewska, Kraków 2012.

2 K. Maliszewski, *Bez-silna edukacja. O kształceniu kruchego*, Katowice 2021.

Key Foundations of Existential-Personalist Pedagogy

Pedagogy inspired by existential-personalist thought has established itself as a distinct educational approach. Over the years, various branches of pedagogical thought have emerged under this umbrella, including existentialist-oriented pedagogy,³ Christian personalist-existential pedagogy,⁴ Christian existential pedagogy,⁵ and existentialist pedagogy.⁶ Personalist education, which prioritises the human person above all other beings, can be understood in different ways: as spiritual formation, as a form of support (whether through guidance, assistance, or therapy), as a synthesis of action and reception, or as an encounter.⁷ Regardless of the specific interpretation, all perspectives emphasise human autonomy, dignity, and reason. Humans are fundamentally relational beings—socially fulfilled through relationships with others and transcendently oriented towards God or the Absolute. The fundamental values pursued in personalist education, understood as a process of formation, are freedom, love, and truth. These are regarded as the highest virtues that benefit both individual well-being and the advancement of society.⁸ The bearer of these values is always another person—the educator—who facilitates the formative process by 'guiding the student from potentiality to actualisation, unlocking their potential, and transforming raw material into a finished product'.⁹

Janusz Tarnowski defines education as 'the totality of methods and processes that help a human being—especially through interaction—to realise and develop their humanity'.¹⁰ This assistance is based on a parallel relationship between the educator and the learner, in which the role of the former is not merely to provide care and protection but to support the latter in achieving

- 3 S. Wołoszyn, *Dzieje wychowania i myśli pedagogicznej w zarysie*, Warszawa 1998.
- 4 B. Śliwerski, *Współczesne teorie i nurty wychowania*, Kraków 2008.
- 5 J. Tarnowski, *Problem chrześcijańskiej pedagogiki egzystencjalnej*, Warszawa 1982.
- 6 K. Sośnicki, *Rozwój pedagogiki zachodniej na przełomie XIX i XX wieku*, Warszawa 1967.
- 7 B. Śliwerski, *Podstawowe prawidłowości pedagogiki*, Warszawa 2011, pp. 155–225.
- 8 Ibidem, p. 228.
- 9 J. Bagrowicz, *Edukacja religijna współczesnej młodzieży. Źródła i cele*, Toruń 2000.
- 10 J. Tarnowski, *Problem chrześcijańskiej pedagogiki egzystencjalnej*, p. 228.

independence and autonomy. Personalist anthropology and phenomenology suggest that education is not an objective fact; it cannot be viewed as something that simply 'is' but rather as something that 'becomes' or takes place between two subjects: the educator, who acts, and the learner, who experiences. This duality mirrors both human nature and human entanglement in the cultural and social world we inhabit. Humans think and function in terms of both 'I' (the individual self) and 'we' (the self in relation to others, the social self).¹¹ By interweaving these dimensions, we develop self-awareness, communicate with others, and construct our own identity. In this sense, each person is both a product of their culture and its creator.

For Tarnowski, dialogue is the key mechanism that unlocks a learner's full developmental potential—not only intellectually but also spiritually. Dialogue can take different forms: as a method (objective dialogue involving the factual exchange of information), as a process (personal dialogue engaging emotions and shared values), or as an attitude (existential dialogue, in which self-expression is based on love and self-sacrifice for another).¹² Personalist dialogue assumes a dual role—of giving and receiving, speaking and listening—allowing both participants to constitute one another in the process.¹³

Agnieszka Rumianowska, reconstructing the ideas of Marian Nowak, notes that the ultimate goal of personalist pedagogy is to equip the learner with the ability to take charge of their development. As Nowak points out, the essence of (personalist) education does not lie in acquiring specific concepts or skills, nor can it be reduced to internalising culture, customs, or social norms. Instead, it is a continuous process of realising and actualising one's unique personal identity.¹⁴

11 Compare G. H. Mead's concept of identity, which is based on two dimensions: the individual 'I' (the self for oneself) and the social 'Me' (the self for others).

12 J. Tarnowski, *Problem chrześcijańskiej pedagogiki egzystencjalnej*, p. 148–149.

13 B. Śliwerski, *Współczesne teorie i nurty wychowania*, p. 71.

14 M. Nowak, *Pedagogika personalistyczna*, in: *Pedagogika*, eds. B. Śliwerski, Z. Kwieciński, Warszawa 2004, pp. 232–146.

Personalist Approach to Education

The personalist vision of education is far removed from moralism, which dictates ready-made answers, or controls a person's development. Instead, it seeks to lay the foundations for lifelong growth by orienting education towards values and creating favourable conditions that enable students to discover their calling and achieve personal fulfilment with the support of others. Personal growth must be the individual's own endeavour, the result of their efforts and perseverance.¹⁵ It is a lifelong and never-ending process, one that requires understanding, recognition, and the continuous transcending of personal limitations, as well as overcoming harmful tendencies, fears, vanity, and weaknesses. To avoid becoming an object in the world or just another anonymous figure in the crowd, a person must remain ever vigilant and make full use of their freedom to realise their personal potential. Ultimately, the goal is for the student to take responsibility for their life as well as internalise and nurture the values of truth, hope, love, and goodness.

Katarzyna Olbrycht¹⁶ identifies three main goals of personalist education. The first is to help learners recognise their potential and responsibilities while reinforcing the values that enable them to find fulfilment and meaning in life. The second goal is to create educational situations that encourage self-improvement, character development, and responsibility for meaningful values. The third is to initiate communal activities, encouraging people to collaborate and jointly reflect on the decisions made in pursuit of the common good.

This approach emphasises cultivating love, service, and respect for both oneself and others.¹⁷ Personalist education, when viewed as a form of support, reveals connections with principles of humanistic psychology. Just as in therapy,

15 F. Adamski, *Wprowadzenie: personalizm-filozoficzny nurt myślenia o człowieku i wychowaniu*, in: *Wychowanie personalistyczne. Wybór tekstów*, ed. F. Adamski, Kraków 2005, pp. 9–22.

16 K. Olbrycht, *Istota wychowania personalistycznego*, in: *W trosce o rodzinę. W poszukiwaniu prawdy, dobra, piękna*, eds. M. Ryś, M. Jankowska, Warszawa 2007, pp. 43–44.

17 A. Rumianowska, *Młodzi dorośli wobec konfliktów w ujęciu filozofii i pedagogiki egzystencjalnej*, Płock 2022, p. 52.

its success relies on freedom, self-acceptance, and maturity, rather than formal qualifications or pedagogical knowledge alone. At its core, education as a process of supporting growth and maturity always strengthens the process of becoming a person. Janusz Tarnowski, Marian Nowak, and Józef Tischner identify shared characteristics of personalist education, which involves working both *with* and *on* the person, and requires their active involvement in their own process of development. It can take the form of therapy or guidance, or it may be an interpersonal relationship in which the person is both influenced by and influences others. A particularly significant example of this is the *encounter*—a reciprocal exchange through which individuals gradually transform one another.¹⁸

These processes serve self-actualisation, the fulfilment of one's potential, and the overcoming of psychological disintegration—understood as a temporary loosening of mental structures and functions to make room for higher emotions so that one can become more authentic and autonomous by working through crises.¹⁹ Weakening instinctual mechanisms, connecting with the core of one's self instead of escaping problems, and identifying the root of personal weaknesses all have significant developmental value. They facilitate self-dialogue while also cultivating empathy and sensitivity towards others. Realising that we are weaker than we once believed—or, conversely, that we can confront our flaws and turn them into assets—often becomes a moment of awakening, a turning point.

The concept of turning points in biographical studies is not new; I will return to it later when discussing *encounter*, which, due to its self-creative and often transformative nature, can become as such a pivotal moment. The entire process of self-creation has both an interpretative aspect—learning to understand reality, making sense of the world, and becoming rooted in our environment—and an emancipatory one—rejecting what oppresses us and maturing towards freedom, autonomy, and the courage to be ourselves in relation to others. The cost of this change can be high, yet true humanity is expressed only through agency. In both personalist pedagogy and the theory of positive

18 B. Śliwerski, *Podstawowe prawidłowości pedagogiki*.

19 K. Dąbrowski, *Dezintegracja pozytywna*, Warszawa 1979.

disintegration, the individual and the social are intertwined; transformation concerns both the person and the environment in which they live.²⁰ Not every encounter leads to such a transformation or constitutes a turning point in itself. Only those encounters that awaken a person's transformative potential or carry deep existential meaning –by bringing inner conflicts to the surface or sparking a need for change– hold this power.

It is impossible to consider the process of education and the phenomenon of encounter without acknowledging biography, which is their fundamental backdrop. In the humanities, biography is most commonly defined as a written account of a person's life—literary, scholarly, or popular—which offers an interpretation of their experiences and incorporates analytical, critical, and reflective elements.²¹ Biography is also a sequence of events—a person's life journey, rich in patterns of action, people, and places—that furnishes the basis for reflection and the accumulation of memories. From a personalist standpoint, people and relationships, particularly those that stimulate growth and maturity, have special significance. Moreover, role models and the examples they provide during the process of identification are anchor points for constructing one's identity.

One of the most important aspects of personalist education is maintaining a balance between reason and emotion. Emotions not only convey vital information about a person's life circumstances but also act as channels of connection—with oneself and with others.²² Consequently, deficiencies in either sphere are easily observable, as they disrupt relationships with both the world and other people. Someone who loves sincerely but lacks the ability to think critically, assess situations, and recognise dangers is naive and vulnerable to deception and exploitation. On the other hand, a person who possesses sharp analytical skills but struggles to love—to open up to others, relinquish control momentarily, and trust in the power of positive emotions—is often perceived as cynical and may feel unfulfilled. For personalist thinkers, the goal of education

20 D. Chojnowski, *Pedagogiczne implikacje teorii dezintegracji pozytywnej Kazimierza Dąbrowskiego*, Łódź 2021, p. 194.

21 *Biografia*, <https://encyklopedia.pwn.pl/haslo/;3877823>, accessed: 16.09.2024

22 M. Dziewiecki, *Młodzi pytają o miłość, rodzinę i wychowanie*, Kraków 2008.

is to nurture both emotional and cognitive development in order to equip young people with the ability to exercise freedom in a way that neither harms themselves nor others. The goal is to help a student become someone of a just heart and an open mind—capable of loving others as well as themselves.

Stefan Kunowski's Reflections on Education

Stefan Kunowski's contour theory of development refers to the phenomena under discussion. Kunowski—a pedagogue, philologist, and proponent of personalism—developed an original model of human development after the Second World War. At the heart of his theory lies the notion that, on an individual level, maturity involves a progression from selfish motivations to an altruistic stance. Socially, this involves moving beyond a dualistic, 'us vs. them' mindset rooted in group-based identification, towards a communal outlook (or 'illism'), which views society as a unified whole and promotes actions that benefit all people.²³

Kunowski defines education in two ways: metaphorically, as 'leading a person towards their higher destiny,'²⁴ and practically, as supporting a holistic and directed development across two dimensions—individual (personalisation) and social (socialisation).²⁵ The ultimate goal of the educational process is the autonomy and freedom of the learner. The educator's authority gradually diminishes as the learner's independence increases. Kunowski's concept of education is not restricted to specific social contexts or age groups. Ultimately, education should culminate in the highest stage of spiritual, creative, and intellectual development, which he describes as *encounter*. In this respect, Kunowski's views resonate with the existentialist ideas of Martin Buber.²⁶

Working within the broader environmental influences known as *ethos*, the educator tailors their actions to the learner's psychological needs and capacities. In this context, the educator identifies specific stimuli—value-based situa-

23 S. Kunowski, *Podstawy współczesnej pedagogiki*, Łódź 1981, p. 153.

24 Ibidem, p. 160.

25 Ibidem, p. 112.

26 M. Buber, *Wychowanie*, „Znak”, 166 (1968) pp. 442–461.

tions and their own pedagogical culture, which Kunowski refers to as *agos*. They rely on their personal resources, authority, knowledge, and often, their charisma. The educator's task is to interpret the world for the learner and to introduce them to an expanding network of social interactions. Additionally, they are responsible for exposing the learner to positive role models while shielding them from harmful influences or dysfunctional behaviours. The deeper the educator's engagement and the clearer the communication, the stronger the learner's identification with the educational process and the more profound their introspection and self-assessment of personal needs and goals.²⁷

Importantly, in Kunowski's theory, each developmental stage requires a different approach to educational guidance, each with distinct effects. Educational work does not take a purely hands-off approach, but the educator's influence and control over the learner's development gradually diminish over time. For example, play is used to regulate temperament—the first element of personality²⁸—with the educator closely supervising the learner's behaviour. Encouraging analytical thinking through comparison, grouping and classification, intellectual development promotes individuality, which ultimately leads to wisdom. Activities such as reading, educational games, tourism, crafts, and DIY develop attention, perception, memory, reasoning, and intelligence. Character formation involves developing traits that shape the learner's relationship with themselves, others, and everyday life. This process aims to instil a mature attitude towards personal and social responsibility—a dimension of the educator's work that Kunowski explicitly refers to as *upbringing*.²⁹

Another layer, built upon the foundation of character, is the creative personality. The most pressing task in shaping this aspect is to cultivate the most

27 M. Karkowska, *Ewolucja koncepcji autorytetu w wybranych filozofiach wychowania*, „Pedagogika Filozoficzna”, 1 (2006) p. 26.

28 Kunowski often uses the terms 'person' and 'personality' interchangeably, although, according to contemporary psychological theory, these concepts are not synonymous and should be distinguished. This is pointed out by Iwona Jazukiewicz in her article on the relevance of the scholar's ideas: see I. Jazukiewicz, *Aktualność założeń warstwicowej teorii wychowania Stefana Kunowskiego*, „Roczniki Pedagogiczne”, 10 (2018) issue 1, pp. 39–54, DOI: 10.18290/rped.2018.10.1-4.

29 J. Karczewska, *Integralne wychowanie – chrześcijańska koncepcja Stefana Kunowskiego*, Kielce 2012, pp. 162.

desirable form of human behaviour—one that is 'based on a sense of self-hood, an awareness of one's being, and an appreciation of cultural values.'³⁰ In Kunowski's contour theory, fostering creative activities— a form of education that is more specialized than instruction—aims to guide the learner towards maturity, which manifests in several ways: wisdom (understood not merely as worldly knowledge but as the ability to make sound decisions), the ability to evaluate values, a striving towards ideals, the creative transformation of cultural models, a desire for freedom (as an expression of free will), creative abilities (expressed through work and artistic activity), and openness to the Absolute.

At this stage, the learner begins to establish a hierarchy of life goals and develops the ability to relinquish what is either currently unattainable or does not contribute to self-fulfilment and self-education. What matters is not only the outcomes of educational efforts but also the direction of the internal developmental process—specifically, its final stage, where the learner's worldview crystallises.³¹ In this stage, the physical and spiritual dimensions of the person become intertwined, with the latter increasingly dominating. The individual transitions from a sensual being to a spiritual one, seeking answers to fundamental questions about the surrounding reality, the trajectory of their life, the meaning of existence, and the role of fate, destiny, and divine will in their experiences. In Kunowski's framework, worldview is the product of prolonged environmental influences as well as the educational process, resulting in a system of personal convictions grounded in knowledge—combining scientific, philosophical, and ideological elements.³²

At its core, this worldview structure rests on the individual's spiritual qualities, which the educator shares responsibility for shaping: wisdom and rationality, the capacity for spiritual love, the potential for both good and evil, freedom of action coupled with responsibility, and readiness for work, creativity,

30 S. Kunowski, *Proces wychowawczy i jego struktury. Temperament, indywidualność, charakter, osobowość*, Lublin 1946, p. 46.

31 J. Karczevska, *Integralne wychowanie – chrześcijańska koncepcja Stefana Kunowskiego*, p. 169.

32 Ibidem, p. 170.

and profound contemplation.³³ The experience that leads to the formation of these qualities often emerges from a moment of openness, a breakthrough, or even a personality-shaping encounter with the educator—an encounter that represents the essence of this transformative relationship. Given the profound axiological (value-laden) and religious undertones of this encounter, many educators exploring Kunowski's concept of upbringing question whether the phenomenon of encounter itself eludes comprehensive analysis and interpretation. Let us now take a closer look at this issue.

The Relational and Person-Forming Dimension of the Encounter

Bogusław Śliwowski suggests that at the heart of education as an encounter is a special kind of relationship with another person—one that acknowledges their uniqueness and individuality and is formed by shared values. A defining feature of this encounter is mutual influence: both individuals open themselves to the relationship and define how they perceive themselves and one another. This two-way process is encapsulated in the concept of introception—in which the recipient responds to the values and ideals embodied by the educator. Education, therefore, involves assimilating external norms and values—rooted in the educator's value system, representing the cultural world (heterotelia)—into the learner's evolving personality (autotelia).³⁴

The person-forming aspect of the encounter arises through the meeting of two people and initiating a flow that is as much emotional as it is axiological: based on the participation of one person's being in the being of another. This process involves a unique 'movement towards the self': one that does not extend outward but turns inward, guiding the individual towards becoming their true self. This process encourages a person to seek and discover themselves through another,³⁵ and ultimately, in the surrounding world and in others. The goal is not simply adapting to social expectations or fulfilling others'

33 Ibidem, p. 171.

34 B. Nawroczyński, *Życie duchowe. Zarys filozofii kultury*, Warszawa 1947, p. 144.

35 B. Śliwowski, *Podstawowe prawidłowości pedagogiki*, p. 159.

demands. Instead, it is a journey of self-discovery, driven by the belief that another person places in the learner's potential.

Central to this process is identification with a personal role model—a figure who embodies the values and ideals to which the learner aspires. This identification strengthens fidelity both to oneself and to the moral principles imparted by the educator. Fundamentally, the encounter is built on trust—a willingness to entrust oneself to the other person. Such encounters, which are part of (or perhaps the beginning of?) a worldview-shaping experience, help to define our values, establish our boundaries through reference to others, maintain balance, and cultivate self-governance. They teach us how to take responsibility for ourselves, to act according to our conscience, overcome developmental challenges, meet expectations and aspire to our ideal role models.

At times, these encounters also lead to transgression. This usually occurs when the learner perceives the norms, values, or models they have been given as not fully suited to the realities and problems that they encounter. These transgressions, inherent to personalist education, can be directed outward, 'towards others', or inward,³⁶ toward 'self-reflection and growth', but their core function remains the same: to encourage the learner to expand their way of thinking, acting, and understanding their place in both immediate and wider social environments.

An encounter prepares us for new experiences and encourages self-reflection. It also serves a protective role by offering guidance, supporting us through crises, and providing (self)knowledge about how to live in a community—how to support others while also pursuing personal growth. No group or relationship is ever a simple amalgam, and to function within them in a fulfilling way, one must seek and carve out space for their own individuality. In this sense, the purpose of such a self-formative (person-forming) experience is to undergo personal growth—through strengthening existing capacities and cultivating new ones, thereby increasing both our potential and our confidence in ourselves.

An encounter, as a person-forming phenomenon that supports identity construction, also has a therapeutic function as it allows us to confront our

36 J. Koziół, *Koncepcja transgresyjna człowieka. Analiza psychologiczna*, Warszawa 1987.

understanding of past events, organize that knowledge and integrate it into the structure of present experience so that past traumatic experiences no longer exert a destructive influence on our current life and perceptions. This symbolic closure of the past occurs through the act of being heard, receiving support and companionship, and embracing the possibility of transforming the disintegrating aspects of the psyche into something constructive.

As mentioned earlier, some encounters are tumultuous, with consequences that can be likened to a biographical revolution. In these instances, the encounter becomes a turning point—its impact directed toward transformation and a break from previously held perceptions of oneself, others, and significant aspects of one's reality. Woven into the life cycle, such encounters which often coincide with personal or moral crises and divide a person's life into a 'before' and 'after.' As Ewa Charymska points out, human beings—capable of thought and free will—are capable of moving 'beyond and above themselves.' We have the ability not only to consciously develop but also to 'dismantle' aspects of our identity. The human spirit is never at rest—it is in constant motion, always pressing forward.³⁷

An encounter stimulates the development of self-awareness and self-knowledge through the feedback we receive in (unsupervised) interaction with another person. This involves drawing closer to or distancing oneself from a personal role model and often prompts a delayed reflection captured by the question: 'What would X do in the situation I am facing now?'³⁸ In this way, encounters are a form of working on one's self-awareness. From here, it is only a short step to the idea that this flow of values—the result of the 'movement that touches the self'—leads to an extension of influence, this time directed towards oneself. Self-education, as a form of self-actualisation, rests on the belief that the potential for growth resides within us. Education and self-reflection solely help to reveal this inner potential: in line with the principles of existential psychology, each of us becomes 'our own project.'³⁹

37 E. Charymska, *Kim jest człowiek? Hierarchia wartości*, „Rozprawy Społeczne”, 9 (2015) issue 3, p. 6.

38 B. Śliwerski, *Podstawowe prawidłowości pedagogiki*, p. 165.

39 A. Maslow, *W stronę psychologii istnienia*, tłum. I. Wyrzykowska, Poznań 2004, p. 12.

An open, hands-off approach—one that is both liberating and promotes authenticity, acceptance, and open communication—is the cornerstone of meaningful encounters. This attitude encourages and enhances the individual's ability to pursue self-actualisation, which is inherently linked to transgression: the act of crossing and creating boundaries, and redefining those previously established. We might ask whether self-actualisation is more often Promethean—acting outwardly to transform the external world, change one's environment—or Socratic—directed inward, enhancing autonomy, agency, self-governance, and independence from the opinions of others. What matters is not fixating on outcomes but embracing the process—recognising self-education as a journey or a biographical narrative of change, one without fixed standards or a predetermined version of the perfect self. This approach requires maturity. In return, it fosters important qualities of a self-actualising person: self-creation, an enhanced sense of personal agency, and a well-developed worldview rooted in a coherent understanding of one's ontological foundations and life experiences. These qualities are enough to become a fully functioning person.

Sergiusz Hessen emphasises the indispensable role that values play in life, as they possess the power to transform everyday existence into a meaningful biography:

Not everyone can have a biography, and not all past events are suitable for biographical description. Only those facts from the past that relate to supra-personal tasks—the object of an individual's creative work—and that represent stages in fulfilling their calling or service to higher values are preserved in a biography. This does not mean, however, that biographies are reserved only for exceptional individuals—scientists, artists, economists, or political leaders. Ordinary people may also have biographies, as long as their lives follow a consistent path, however modest, toward ever greater freedom in fulfilling the moral duties that they recognise as binding obligations.⁴⁰

Whether we view encounters as random and unpredictable or as part of a deterministic framework may be of little consequence. Thinkers such as

40 S. Hessen, *O sprzecznościach i jedności wychowania: zagadnienia pedagogiki personalistycznej*, ed. W. Okoń, Warszawa 1997, p. 111.

Buber⁴¹ and Guardini⁴² advocate preserving the sense of mystery, inspiration, and grace that accompanies the experience of such meetings. In contrast, proponents of a deterministic outlook⁴³ argue for a degree of predictability and for defined circumstances and timelines in which these encounters should occur. They argue that the fundamental goal of education, as envisioned by Kunowski, can only be achieved when the relationship between the active educator and the receptive learner exerts a profound, holistic influence—one that leaves a lasting imprint on the learner's personality. In this view, the educator's task is to guide others toward higher values—love, friendship, goodness, and inner beauty—enabling them to reach higher destinies and come closer to what we now call a 'better version' of themselves.

The Pedagogical Relevance of the Concept of Encounter

In conclusion, it is worth considering how the concept of the encounter remains relevant today and how it might be revitalised in educational practice. Krzysztof Maliszewski, a philosopher of education, argues that for learning to be effective, it must spark disagreement and resist inertia or pure adaptation. Drawing an analogy between a teacher's work and that of a midwife who assists in bringing new life into the world, Maliszewski calls for the presence of a teacher who is a Master—someone we meet who helps us not only learn but also mature.⁴⁴

It is beneficial when the educational process involves someone who not only explains the world and facilitates growth through dialogue and social participation but also emancipates and supports the 'unbinding' from identity structures—identifications, habits, and assumptions—and allows us to start anew. As a result, we come to realise that what is valuable and compelling in education is rarely simple, self-evident, or static.⁴⁵ In Maliszewski's reflections on the encounter, we find both a personalist openness to others and

41 M. Buber, *Wychowanie*, pp. 442–461.

42 R. Guardini, *Wolność – łaska – los: rozważania o sensie istnienia*, trans. J. Bronowicz, introduction M. Jaworski, Kraków 1995.

43 M. Nowicki, *Nauczyciele*, Lublin 1981, p. 14.

44 K. Maliszewski, *Bez-silna edukacja*, p. 157.

45 Ibidem, p. 158.

an acceptance of human weaknesses and limitations, coupled with an encouragement to pursue self-realisation. Education today, in this personalist view, should not only promote autonomy, independence, and self-governance but also teach us to identify and work with our strengths and limitations as part of our search for personal agency.

When the educator acts as a symbolic authority,⁴⁶ they do not demand blind imitation or obedience but rather offer inspiration. They are not infallible; like their students, they too face existential dilemmas and grapple with questions such as: *'Who am I? What can I offer my students?'* Rather than simply transmitting information, they engage in what Józef Tischner calls an act of narrative entrustment⁴⁷—speaking 'with' and 'for' others rather than 'to' them. Thus, education becomes an encounter—a relationship grounded in trust, dialogue, and hope. Returning to the original point, the central role of a worldview-forming experience, and the encounter that defines it, is to construct an image of the world. Yet, equally important is the formation of the human self—entrusting the educator with what is most valuable: our very being.

Streszczenie: Artykuł ukazuje różne znaczenia i wymiary pojęcia „spotkanie” w ujęciu pedagogiki personalistycznej i egzystencjalnej. Przywołując wybrane poglądy jej twórców w Polsce i rekonstruując cechy wychowania jako aktywności opartej na dialogu i spletającej ze sobą wzajemne oddziaływania Ty i Ja – dwóch podmiotów weń uwikłanych – próbuję ukazać wielowymiarowość i uniwersalność spotkania. Opisywane zjawisko doskonale wpisuje się nie tylko w warstwicową teorię rozwoju Stefana Kunowskiego odsłaniając swoje niejednoznaczne cechy i pedagogiczne znaczenia – relacyjność, przełomowość i transgresyjność, a także terapeutyczny i osobotwórczy charakter, ale i w każdą inną humanistyczną pedagogię opartą na prowadzeniu człowieka ku dobru, pięknu i prawdzie.

Słowa kluczowe: pedagogika, personalizm, spotkanie, relacja, wychowanie, rozwój.

46 K. Maliszewski, *Bez-silna edukacja*, p. 159.

47 J. Tischner, *Inny. Eseje o spotkaniu*, Kraków 2017, p. 175.

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