

SELF-EDUCATION AND SELF-SUFFICIENCY

Gabriel ALBU, Ph.D.,
Petroleum-Gas University of Ploiesti
gabrielalbu04@yahoo.com

Abstract: *Preoccupied almost exclusively and permanently by the (current) problems of education, it seems that we forgot about the existence, significance and value of self-education in shaping human beings. Some even tend to exclude it, either identifying it with personal development, or with (professional) training. The study focuses on another subject, almost overlooked by specialists, self-sufficiency (understood as the general tendency towards complacency of the great majority of people), on the one side, and the ratio between self-sufficiency and self-education, on the other side. Also, the study aims to prove that: a. without self-education we are condemned to self-sufficiency; b. Self-education is the antidote of self-sufficiency, it is what gives us (or by which we regain) our inner life, our spiritual noblesse, the access to the deep issues of humanity, through which we grow from the inside, organically and authentically.*

Keywords: *self-education, self-sufficiency, doubt, self-interrogation*

1. Introduction

Whether we like it or not, whether we accept it, are aware of it, are preoccupied by it or not, a very common reality among us, human beings, is self-sufficiency. In education and research such a subject (and the state it designates) does not get treated (and less so analysed). And perhaps we might not even have a (critical, reflexive) connection with it, we might as well not approach it if we had not approached the concept of self-education (and the state it designates) more closely, deeply and with a special interest.

2. Self-sufficiency – possible approach

Besides the interesting and still unstudied relations of self-education with personal development, with the capacity of observation and self-observation, with improvement and self-improvement, self-education can be studied and compared against self-sufficiency.

In Aristocles's footsteps (who went to war as Aristocles and came back as Plato) - in dialogue with Socrates - R. Riemen (2008) noted that self-sufficiency designates the state of *complacency* most of us live in and indulge in for the most part of our lives (if not even the entire life). Complacency lies in the power of what is considered normal, that is what we *believe* should be and/ or should happen/ take place. It pertains to the “seductive ease with which people become accustomed at all times to mannerisms, opinions and predetermined order; it is related to the firm belief that everything is as it should be. Cultivating the desire to lead a life free of thoughts – goes on the founder and president of the Nexus Institute – makes the amazement about everything there is and all critical questions to be considered not only bizarre but downright undesirable” (ibid, p. 130).

Most people live within given conceptual frameworks and axiological references, they pursue their impulses and follow the course of their life according to the general social-axiological state, considering that nothing and nobody can deny or (even) question the existing habitual and mental status quo shared by those part of the social network to which – directly or indirectly – they have access. They build their life so impeccable out of certainties and self-explanatory things; they let themselves be so badly taken and seduced by ephemeral passions and desires (see *Fight against passions*, 2015) that they are willing “to believe anything, preferring to do this instead of thinking with their own minds” (Riemen, 2008, p. 130)

Self-sufficiency refers to that mental and attitudinal state of *believing* that what we know, understand and perceive (in this world) at a given time (in our personal life) is what stands out as necessary, clear, but also sufficient to be known, understood and perceived. It consists in *believing* that what we know, understand and perceive is enough-needed for our prosperity and purpose in life. In other words, in the state of self-sufficiency we are convinced that what we know, understand and perceive is all that is to know, understand and perceive.

Self-sufficiency gives us (and entices us with) the *impression* – upon which we approach and spend our lives – that we are the owners of the sole (and the safest) way of knowing, understanding and perceiving the things, events and challenges of (our) existence, on the one hand, and – equally – that we are the owners of the ultimate and exclusive truth that we really, in terms of the knowledge, understanding and representation of its essence, on the other hand.

Of what we discerned so far, we can deduce that the way self-sufficiency insinuates and merges with our mental states and/ or attitude is that of the certainty and confidence in what we know, understand, perceive and do. In these (possible but also reliable/ credible) circumstances, we live with such belief, without us asking ourselves about them, without intending to detach

ourselves from them, to look at them and evaluate them critically. We understand, therefore, that – usually – self-sufficiency does not allow itself to be contested, compromised, thrown away (much easily). It does not let itself be undermined by questions, searches, doubts.

Self-sufficiency is strongly interwoven with the cognitive, perceptual and comprehensive satiety; it exists in the anatomy and physiognomy of our soul. We can say – by way of hypothesis – that self-sufficiency is a mental and/ or attitudinal (malignant) tumour, by which – perhaps potentially – we are all afflicted. If we agree with this view, it means that to cure our self-sufficiency, we need to administer a long, careful, persevering and desired treatment for the mind and soul. Self-sufficiency is a lethal threat to the existence of our knowledge, understanding and perceptions, taken as individual and individualizing items, but also to the opportunity of completing, correcting and enhancing them.

In short, the lives of most of us are only “a docile adaptation to the prevailing mores and habits” (*ibid*, p. 131), validated by the given ideological context.

In this stage of the research we can identify several (possible) forms of self-sufficiency:

From the point of view of relating to others and to ourselves, we distinguish:

- Self-sufficiency by relating to others: it is the state in which we do not doubt others’ way of being, thinking, acting, choosing, believing, coping and adapting, their way of seeing life and live it/ survive;
- Self-sufficiency by relating to ourselves: it is the state in which we do not doubt our way of being (which we consider to be the best, the most efficient, the most valid, opportune and accomplished), of acting, thinking, deciding, believing, accumulating life experience, coping with the problems and trials of personal existence; in short, we believe that what we are, think and do is what we are supposed to/ must be, think and do.

By virtue of this (first) criterion, our *trust* in the way others and/ or ourselves (following in their footsteps) think, appreciate, act, believe, cope and adapt is, if not absolute/ exclusive then overwhelming in relation to *doubt* about all this.

In terms of awareness, we distinguish:

- An arrogant self-sufficiency, displayed, all-knowing and all-encompassing; one that is part of the manifestation of our personalities and of our usual, constant relation with others;
- A non-displayed self-sufficiency, given as such, one about (unconsciously, tacitly) accepting the clichés and the (predominant, extended) habits existing in society, stemming from (mental) convenience

and kept alive by daily routine; it is a naive self-sufficiency, of self-safeguarding and self-protection.

Challenged by Socrates, Plato (in the interpretation of R. Riemen, 2008) realizes “how hollow any form of self-sufficiency is”; moreover, he realizes that we can be erudite, but still ignorant (*ibid*, p. 131). In this surprising context, in his defence, the great Athenian philosopher shows that it is wiser to know what we do not know than to pretend to know something, and eventually prove that we did not.

Formulating the right questions helps us better understand human beings than uncritically repeating the answers others give us (*ibid*, p. 134). In such a context and in such a way of looking at things, and interpreting them, a life without reflection, (deep) doubt, permanent and honest interrogation “is not only stupid, but also bad, and the knowledge that teaches us *how* to live is by far the most important knowledge” (*ibid*, etc.).

Always referring to itself and convinced by itself, (our) self-sufficiency does not (and cannot) decline its status; it does not enter the self-doubting process, does not second guesses itself. Self-sufficiency – always full and confident – is always in itself grounds for and landmark of understanding and confronting life’s problems. It involves two moments:

- First and foremost, it is an act of (self) negligence. We live on, overlooking our fundamental purpose, our deep selves, our peers (in their background, complexity and individualities), our thoughts, sensitivity, tensions, deep and boundless humanity;

- Then, eventually, it is a suicidal act: we lose our fundamental purpose, we kill our thoughts, (essential) searches, spiritual vitality and noblesse; we exit only as physical beings, as a number in a crowd, and not as *human* beings, caught in self-construction and/ or spiritual-cultural self-reconstruction.

- No matter how paradoxical or unimaginable it may seem at first sight, we can state (as a possible research hypothesis) that education – by its most important imperative, that of integrating new generations into society, adapting them to the existent economic requirements and conditions, to the common convictions shared in social life and the ideology of the time – participate substantially to the shaping and internalization of self-sufficiency.

- As an institution, we do not accept the vitality and originality of new generations unless within the limits of this imposed and legitimated adaptation, in the name of finding a job, finding an income source (as safe and as substantial as possible), achieving material and financial prosperity.

Also, within the school atmosphere, and given its norms, it appears that – largely – the presentation of self along with a teaching style that is confident and self-sufficient, authoritarian and not exposed to possible comments (or to any interrogations) from students, as we undoubtedly encounter in most of

the teachers, create the prerequisites of training disciples in how to be self-sufficient and relate to their life's experiences/ events in the same manner, manifesting the same inertia and habits encountered everywhere.

3. Self-sufficiency and self-education in the manifestation of the individual

Self-education is the process of ongoing searches and clarifications, (fundamental) constant questions either about the outer, or about the inner world. They are all ways to discover (again and again) life, its meaning, the soul and its struggles. In fact, as Riemen R. (2008) noted, culture is “the sum of the many ways that people can follow to seek the truth about themselves and about human existence” (p. 138).

Through self-education:

- We doubt and question what is considered to be ‘*normal*’; the beliefs and behaviours of the majority do not legitimate or validate this concept;
- We always get to search and clarify our social and individual existence, we get to penetrate the appearances/ the veneers/ the waves of our existence;
- We are always about to test our own safety nets, our own certitudes, meanings, ideological constructs;
- We give ourselves the chance to come out of our self-sufficiency; in this way, we realize how restrictive it is for a mind and a soul that are *alive*, eager to clarify what is *apparently* safe and ‘normal’, to find out what is *apparently* clear and distinct.

In short, we cannot be – at once – involved in self-education and self-sufficient. Self-education wards off self-sufficiency as self-sufficiency prevents self-education (and for many of us, it can even eliminate it); the moment it sets in, exclusively and completely, self-sufficiency doesn't give self-education almost any chance.

4. Possible conclusions

From what was presented above and from the way things were presented, we can extract the following (possible, but plausible) conclusions:

- a. Self-sufficiency is that (general human) state that clouds the mind and conscience (without us realizing that actually we live with diffuse, precarious minds and conscience); it blunts our cognitive, investigative and dubitative acuity, it cancels the feverishness of our spiritual life;

b. Without a need for self-education and in the absence of the self-formative approach, our vast majority – *believing* in the importance and the value of our unique way of being, thinking, acting, believing, adapting – live self-sufficiently. We exist, merely, only by reference to the present and to current problems, by accepting the ideas, beliefs, stereotypes and behaviours of others, of the great majority (indulging in complacency, as well).

Self-education is the perfect antidote for self-sufficiency; due to it we have the possibility to become aware and free ourselves from our own self-sufficiency. Self-education awards us (or helps us regain access to) spiritual life, noblesse of the soul, and the deepest issues of existence (humanity).

References

- Platon (1974-1986). *Opere*. București: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică
Riemen, R. (2008). *Noblețea spiritului. Un ideal uitat*. București: Editura Curtea Veche
* * * (2015). *Lupta cu patimile*. București: Editura Sophia