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To Think Globally – to Act Locally – to Exist Networkly. The Criticism of the Idea of Global Responsibility in an Ethical and Educational Perspective

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The end of the common world has come when it is seen only under one aspect and is permitted to present itself in only one perspective.*

Hannah Arendt

Education is an instrument that prepares the entrepreneurial, self-renewable, compatible modes of the global economy.**

Joanna Danilewska

Every few hundred years in Western history there occurs a sharp transformation. Within a few short decades, society rearranges itself—its worldview; its basic values; its social and political structure; its arts; its key institutions. Fifty years later, there is a new world... We are currently living through just such a transformation.***

Peter Ferdinand Drucker

One should not succumb to the illusion amplified by the popular slogan "think globally, act locally". Everything that is achieved locally can be destroyed at any time by global action.****

Joanna Danilewska

* Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (New York: Doubleday & Company, inc., 1959), 53.

** Joanna Danilewska, *Edukacyjny doping ery globalizacji – czy potrafimy go zrównoważyć? [The Educational Doping of the Globalization Era – Can we Balance It?]*, in: *Wspólnota pedagogicznego niepokoju*, ed. Joanna Danilewska (Kraków: Wydawnictwo UJ, 2008), 26.

*** Peter F. Drucker, *Post-capitalist Society* (New York: HarperCollins, HarperBusiness, 1993), 89–101. Cit. after: Bernie Neville, *Reakcja, chaos, transformacja: z australijskiej perspektywy [Chaos, Reaction, Transformation]*, transl. M. Kościelniak, in: *Wspólnota pedagogicznego niepokoju*, ed. Danilewska, 89.

**** Danilewska, *Edukacyjny doping ery globalizacji [The Educational Doping of the Globalization Era]*, 36.

A Popular Illusion

Following the *dictum* of Joanna Danilewska, a professor at the Pedagogical Institute of the Jagiellonian University, although – admittedly – the title of my paper contains a provocatively worded slogan – I have no intention of giving in to the illusions it amplifies. On the other hand, however, I would like, at least for a brief moment, to be able to succumb to it, by finding examples confirming the reality and adequacy of the honey-mouthed appeal: “think globally, act locally, exist networkly.” Maybe this is how it could be. I do not know. It is impossible to prejudge it giving rise to naive hopes willing to cling on to it as if it were a fact, forgetting that it is only an illusion.

In my opinion, local dimensions of global responsibility only generate interpretational problems. For what is this refined dialectics of locality and globality supposed to mean? How much can a small one do against a great one? What is the relation between the concrete and the general? How can the local accommodate the global? How much of the global can we fit into the local? Already when using the concepts that we employ here, we instantly realize that the adherence of one to another appears to be poor, whereas as far as the rest is concerned, they are aligned with one another into an appropriating coupling. The local localizes (contextualizes, regionalizes) the global, the global – globalizes (decontextualizes, deregionalises) the local. In other words, when discussing the local dimensions of global responsibility, we instantly need to be aware of the system of mutual interrelations and appropriations that cause that locality (of actions) does not allow globality to fully articulate itself, just as the globality is too capacious to let locality constitute its means of expression. As a result, either the global succumbs to the local – which is unlikely, if at all possible – or the local to the global – which not only seems highly probable, but also the only option possible. This inevitably means that the local dimensions of globality, being faced with it – like the small with the great, like the concrete with the general – yield to its pressure, beginning to slowly, gradually or instantly speak its language.

Cogito – Ago – Vivo

“To think globally – to act locally – to exist networkly” is not only a slogan, a phrase, a cliché, a banality, it is much more – it is an idea demanding matriculation in the common consciousness of preferably still fresh and absorbent, usually uncritical, still naive, and, in principle, idealizing minds of schoolchildren and youth; and in the worst case, in student

community. While instilling such principles in our protégés, we should remember that it is them who deserve our care and the responsibility it entails. Any appeals, including in particular appeals for accountability, whether individual, local, group or global, must meet at least this one condition that they be voiced responsibly. Otherwise, we are facing either hypocrisy or phraseology, and in both cases – inauthenticity or, more accurately, superficiality. And nothing changes with the fact that these calls are usually abundantly basted with moral sauce – quite to the contrary.

The encouragement to “think globally – act locally – exist networkly” clearly resonates with the association calling for the three fundamentally inseparable domains: *cogito* (thinking) – *ago* (acting) and *vivo* (existing – expressing itself in human life, hence *vivo*, and not *sum* or *existo*). To paraphrase Descartes, this appeal can be transposed into a slogan: “I think, I act, therefore I am”, or more precisely: “I think globally, I act locally, therefore I am networked”. This means, more or less, and this is how I think it should be interpreted that the condition for an authentic, meaningful, acceptable and self-justifying life is to think in global terms, and specifically in terms of global responsibility, in local context of action. It follows that local action makes sense only, or particularly, if it implements globalized principles, which similarly gain in importance and strength only if, or primarily because, they have been subject to the pressure of globalization.

However, the matter becomes much more complicated once we consider that, apart from local and global factors, relations and rules, there also exist network-related factors, relations and rules. Bruno Latour made this very clear in his well-known sociology-based Actor-Network Theory.¹ But this is not what we want to talk about now. We invoke the context of networking in order to make it even clearer that, besides locality and globality, there is also networking. What is more, it exists not so much beside, as instead, according to the dialectical sequence of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. If locality is a thesis, then globality serves as an antithesis. The fulfilment, and at the same time rebuttal of both of them, is the synthesis in networking. It should be firmly established that, regardless of the level and scale of our thought, action and responsibility, whether they are local or global, there is no question that they are in fact always predefined as network-based. Networks, indeed, can be local and can be global. The problem, however, is that the local ones always remain entangled in the global and vice versa. And what is more,

¹ See Bruno Latour, *Splatając na nowo to, co społeczne. Wprowadzenie do teorii aktor-sieci, Wstęp [Reassembling the Social – An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory]* Krzysztof Abriszewski, transl. Aleksandra Derra, Krzysztof Abriszewski, series “Horizonty nowoczesności” (Kraków: TAIWPN Universitas, 2010).

a network, every network, is by definition global. Local may be, at best, a specific manifestation of it. In the network, the local is upfront always implicated in the global, whilst the global always reaches the local. The lesson that can be learned from ANT (Actor-Network Theory) in the context of the issues under discussion can be at least this: whether we think globally or act locally, we always exist within a network.

The Trouble with Responsibility

The situation becomes even more complicated as we concretize the concepts on which we operate. Perhaps the greatest confusion is caused by the introduction of the concept of responsibility, with the emphasis on global responsibility, used alongside the concepts of locality, globality and networking. This confusion arises not only from the introduction of yet another variable, but above all, although a sea of ink has already been used up on the subject of responsibility, because it is not entirely clear to this day what it is in its very essence. Instead of hard data, we merely employ in its description a series of approximations; instead of explicitness, we are drowned in ambiguities; instead of finding similarities, we vanish into a nebula of differences, and with each successive judgment, instead of certainty, we seem to plunge into ever deeper doubts.

The main doubt arises already at the starting point. This is what Peter Sloterdijk, searching for the philosophical theory of globalization in *The World Interior of Capital*, sensibly points out.² We read:

In fact, as more inquisitive thinkers have shown, responsibility is less a moral concept than ontological, or even a concept from the sphere of theory of relations – it can even anchor the responsive being-in-relation (Bezogen-Sein) to the real other (as well as the third and multiplicity of others) in the structure of subjectivity. It is also about holding back the expansion of the I by the opposing You, as well as holding back action in general by a retrospective and prospective feedback of consequences, however far they may be from the place of causation. It dooms actors to be expelled from paradise, where success does not yet ask how you achieve it.³ [transl. Anna Wójtowicz]

² See Peter Sloterdijk, *Kryształowy pałac. O filozoficzną teorię globalizacji* [*In the World Interior of Capital: Towards a Philosophical Theory of Globalization*], transl. Borys Cymbrowski, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2011.

³ Ibidem, chap. 35: *Twilight of the Perpetrators and the Ethics of Responsibility: The Cybernetic Erinyes*, 233–234.

If Sloterdijk's "inquisitive thinkers" are right, as was stated in the quoted fragment, it inevitably means that responsibility is a fact that does not require any moral barriers or ethical hedges to be set for its realization. If responsibility "is less a moral concept than ontological", the ethics of responsibility, by necessity, must yield to its ontology. This would imply that responsibility does not need to be demanded, nor do we need to be urged to assume responsibility, since it is not a binding normative provision but the way in which man exists. Since responsibility is to be considered as a way of existence, anyone who shares it is by definition responsible, even if he has not yet done anything. What is more, this kind of approach makes it possible to talk not only about our being responsible but also about our being the responsibility. To say that responsibility is the way of human existence is to admit that man exists in the way of responsibility. This, in turn, means, that by his very existence, by simply living, man fulfils all its requirements and claims. The perceptible absurdity of this type of narrative dismisses it even further once we note that with such an optics one cannot not be responsible, thus irresponsibility is not possible at all. Why would we then so loudly, and at times nostalgically, complain about the deficiencies of responsibility in modern society? Why would anyone need this, as Sloterdijk puts it, "unstoppable growth in the ethics of responsibility in the 20th century"?⁴

The ontologisation of responsibility, depriving it of its moral root, implies that it is impossible not only to demand it, but also to teach it, which makes the next issue which remains to be discussed, highly problematic. What I mean is the issue of embedding responsive discourse in educational contexts.

However, let us stop for a moment at the very concept of global responsibility. It seems to me a little suspicious, though I would rather be wrong here, and moreover I do not mind that it is now a generally growing trend. It strikes me as suspicious mainly due to its internal inconsistencies which I should like to say a word about.

If, truthfully, responsibility by definition is always someone else's, then the global nature of responsibility must mean that it is the responsibility of everyone (i.e. of the inhabitants of the globe). It is so at least *de iure*, however, *de facto* the responsibility of everyone proves to be the responsibility of no-one. Furthermore, under the same definition, responsibility is always intentional, and thus directed towards a specific person or thing. Since we are talking about globality, the concept of global responsibility implies the responsibility of everyone for everyone. It would undoubtedly be good if such a responsibility could work in reality. But

⁴ Ibidem, 233.

again, the said responsibility, if at all possible, is at most *de iure*, whereas it seems to be impossible *de facto*.

The Dimensions of Responsiveness

In general, we may speak of three dimensions of contemporary responsibility: global, local and networked, emphasizing that the global dimension concerns at most projects of responsibility of everyone for everything that remain in the sphere of ideas; the local dimension is practical and concerns concrete solutions and actions in local field, within specific social groups and environments; finally, the networked dimension of responsibility, combining elements of the two, simultaneously transcends them, allowing individuals from their local perspectives to combine into larger wholes, concentrated around shared ideas either to promote them or to practice them on the largest possible scale, preferably global.

Assuming that criticism of global responsibility is legitimate, since, as has already been said, responsibility is always someone's and for something, and thus local, individual and concrete, the encouragement of global responsibility proves, in fact, to be nothing more than following the conviction that collective responsibility is possible. This kind of thinking is, unfortunately, based on an error that is not very obvious, yet quite self-imposing. It is contained in the suggestion that everyone at the same time is equally responsible towards everyone for roughly the same faults, shortcomings, or deficiencies.

I therefore propose to adopt the assumption that the concept of responsibility has at least two formal aspects: theoretical normative and praxionormative. We may rightfully speak of global responsibility only in the theoretical normative sense as a conceptualized normative, whose purpose is to encourage, persuade, indicate or discipline towards initiating, expanding and deepening responsive acts in concrete *scilicet* local actions.

In the praxionormative aspect, on the other hand, responsibility is only possible as local, i.e. anchored in a specific place, addressed to known (and not hypothetical) persons and environments, entailing enforceable sanctions. Education at every level and in every dimension should allow for the twofold division of responsibility models discussed in my paper, making it clear to protégés, pupils and students that, while responsibility should become diffusive, no one is able, either individually or even within a group, to meet the requirements of global responsibility; therefore, it should remain and function as a theoretical incentive to exceed the limits of one's own, always local, responsibility.

As I argue, one of the solutions that could be proposed here is to utilize all platforms and forums, the most effective of which seems to

be the Internet, to promote translocal projects and activities, while realizing that it is impossible to solve all the problems of the world at the same time from a single place, and that global problems could hardly be placed on the head of a pin of locality.

It is important that the educational process respects the principle of efficiency. The idea is to discontinue activities that consist only in sterile deliberation about global responsibility, without developing the desirable postures, if it is at all possible. Secondly, situations should be prevented in which the promotion of responsibility-based attitudes results in an openly or covertly hypocritical behaviour. Thirdly and finally, it cannot be the case that educational activities result only in temporary spurts, occasional actions, common movements, promotional campaigns that do not develop permanent postures, nor lead to people's identification with the publicized idea; which accustom the addressees to the fact that morality is based on festivity, occasionality and periodicity, outside of which life goes on as before in its own way, as if nothing has happened. We are here – locally, and globality, by implication, is where we are not. Why then, should we waste our breath on something that does not really concern us? Let the problems of global responsibility be addressed by those who cause them or those who can afford them, or, finally, by those who have the power to regulate the activities and processes taking place on a global scale. "Our piece of the floor" is right here. If we are to be held responsible for something, it is primarily for this piece. For if we lose ourselves too much in responsibility that reaches global frameworks, it might soon be that, as a result of local negligence, the ground that keeps us alive will give way under our feet.

"How Global is Global Education?"*

Countless debates and texts on globalization and its derivatives have been marked by an astonishing irreverence that usually accompanies the reflection on what one might say is an interesting but difficult, ambiguous and highly complex subject. It is essentially expressed in inarticulate certainty that the subject matter of the debate is generally known, hence owing to the fact that it does not give rise to any particular cognitive doubts – not to count minor, if reasonably evaluated, hence negligible controversies – it deserves to be recognized as universally binding, exponential and setting the tone for every kind of thinking, action and existence. In this respect, I agree with the words of Peter Ferdinand Drucker,

* This wording I borrow from Tadeusz Mincer. See idem, "Na ile globalna jest edukacja globalna?" ["How Global is Global Education?"], *Kultura–Historia–Globalizacja* 14 (2013): 197–206.

cited as the motto of this paper, that we are indeed in a phase of ‘sharp transformation’ involving ‘rearrangement of the society’,⁵ fuelled by globalization changes, but aside from this knowledge and perhaps the ability to imagine the scale of the global revolution taking place, we do not have any hard facts concerning what it will lead to in the end. Travestying the well-known evangelical phrase, one can say that it has not yet been revealed what we will be, yet we are already debating about it passionately, as if we had already found out. Our inquiries into globalization are thus still only prognoses, predictions and projections. For the time being, they have not managed to go beyond *doxa*, even though they pretend to be *episteme*.

We do not know exactly what globalism really is, as it will only become apparent once it takes its last breath and becomes a thing of the past, yielding to another epoch-making successor – if any at all – since Sloterdijk stubbornly claims – and he is not the only one – that globalisation resembles “mass production of the last man”,⁶ living in a “crystal palace” in a “post-historic situation”.⁷ So, not knowing what this globalism really is, we make the effort to create the impression, just in case, that it had already been finally constituted and solidified as overpowering and unambiguous, and moreover offering no alternatives, that it is followed without a shadow of hesitation, we harness it into the chariots of various sciences, cultures, arts, ethics, education, almost entirely ignoring their specificity, constitution, history, possibilities and purpose.

This creates an imperative and tacitly accepted *dictum* that if globalization progresses, what else can we do but adapt to it? As in Sartre’s case, existence preceded essence, in this case, the blind and listless adaptation precedes a visionary and autonomous reflection. In the present day – although who knows whether it has not always been this way – we are ruled by a generally respected imperative of accommodation (adaptation). It proclaims no more and no less that whatever the circumstances, whatever they are and whatever they savor of, it is best to adapt to them. It was with great sensitivity that Erich Fromm once wrote about it in *Man for Himself*, however, in the context of disputes about the shape of psychology. He argues that modern psychology is dominated by a tendency “which places the emphasis on ‘adaptation’ rather

⁵ See Drucker, *Post-capitalist Society*, 89–101. Cit. after: Neville, “Reakcja, chaos, transformacja” [“Reaction, Chaos, Transformation”], 89.

⁶ Cf. Sloterdijk, *Kryształowy pałac [In the World Interior of Capital]*, ch. 1: *Of Great Narratives*, 20.

⁷ *Ibidem*, ch. 35: *Twilight of the Perpetrators and the Ethics of Responsibility: The Cybernetic Erinyes*, 233.

than the ‘good’ and leans towards ethical relativism”.⁸ It is my fear that the uncritical promotion of globalization in science, culture, art, or education is similarly guided by the emphasis on ‘adaptation’ rather than on the ‘good’, contributing at the same time to the perpetuation of the unpredictable effects of the process itself and, incidentally, to the metamorphoses taking place within the fields of promotion and application of globalization tools and styles.

In this context, it is necessary to posit a question, or rather a series of questions: what is the subject of global education, what are its objectives, what is it that it implements, what does it encourage, and what is the initial profile of those who are subject to its treatment and impact? What only remains is to articulate a legitimate doubt whether global education by succumbing – like everything else – to the pressure of anonymous forces of globalization processes, does not popularize *eo ipso* also the negative models that are invariably associated with them.⁹

Without going into details which require separate elaboration, I will briefly refer to a justifiable doubt expressed by Tadeusz Mincer in the question: “How global is global education?”,¹⁰ and specifically: “What aspects of globalization does this type of pedagogical practice relate to? [Since – P.D.] on the one hand, global education is a certain effect of global processes, while, on the other hand, it contains postulates to target those processes”.¹¹ Essentially, as Mincer notes, there are two important moments encompassed within the concept of global education: cognitive and ethical.¹²

The first one says that it is education that focuses on learning about global processes, i.e. ones in which mutual relations and connections of the contemporary world reveal themselves. In other words, it is supposed to be an education that transcends the national perspective. The second element is that the mentioned relations constitute a challenge that requires a response. Hence the call for participants in global education to act responsibly in their daily local lives, bearing in mind the global consequences of their actions. Global education is to increase awareness of the existence of various threats connected with globalization and

⁸ Erich Fromm, *Niech się stanie człowiek. Z psychologii etyki [Man for Himself. An Inquiry into Psychology of Ethics]*, transl. Robert Saciuk, ed. 3 (Warszawa–Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1999), *Introduction*, 7.

⁹ Cf. Magdalena Kuleta-Hulboj, “Kilka uwag o heterogeniczności edukacji globalnej” [“Some Remarks on the Heterogeneity of Global Education”], *Teraźniejszość–Człowiek–Edukacja*, v. 18, 2015, no. 1(69), here: in particular the fragment of *Dylematy edukacji globalnej*: 72–76.

¹⁰ See Mincer, “Na ile globalna jest edukacja globalna?” [“How Global is Global Education?”].

¹¹ *Ibidem*, 197.

¹² *Ibidem*, 198.

to teach how to respond to these threats. Global education is not only a theory, but also a practice. Its aim, as Zbyszko Melosik notes, is to create a global consciousness, aimed at intercultural dialogue, orientation towards change, anticipation and participation. It is intended to result in the identification of the individual with the whole human species,¹³ and thus in a sense of co-responsibility for the fate of the whole world.¹⁴ [trans. Anna Wójtowicz]

It is worth realizing at least some of the weaknesses, deficits and, often, the flaws in the thus defined ethical education. In the cognitive aspect, such a shortcoming is usually the unrealized, modernist, and in the strict sense, the enlightened – as Melosik claims¹⁵ – tendency towards universalizing rationalization and unification, which is opposed to the pedagogy of difference. Such an approach, as the author says, includes *implicite* the conviction that “reason plays a decisive role as a source of progress in the field of knowledge and in social life”.¹⁶ Tadeusz Mincer comments on it in the following way:

However, there is no denying the enlightened approach of this type of education, which is perhaps most evident in the declarations that it will lead to the “opening of eyes to the world”. A similar reservation can be made with regard to the ethical moments of global education, which refer to the need for responsibility for the planet as a whole.¹⁷

Michael Walzer expresses a strong conviction that thinking about global education as such, which is intended to make us capable of creating uniform, identical political structures¹⁸ should be regarded as unwarranted and wishful owing to the irremovable fact that “negotiating differences will never lead to a final agreement. This also means, Walzer continues, that our common humanity will never make us members of one tribe. The essential common feature of the human race is [indeed – P.D.] particularism: we all participate in our own dense cultures”.¹⁹ All

¹³ See Zbyszko Melosik, “Edukacja globalna: nadzieje i kontrowersje” [“Global Education: Hopes and Controversies”], in: *Wprowadzenie do pedagogiki: wybór tekstów*, ed. Teresa Jaworska, Roman Leppert (Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza IMPULS, 1996), 55.

¹⁴ Mincer, “Na ile globalna jest edukacja globalna?” [“How Global is Global Education?”], 198.

¹⁵ Melosik, “Edukacja globalna” [“Global Education”], 55.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹⁷ Mincer, “Na ile globalna jest edukacja globalna?” [“How Global is Global Education?”], 204.

¹⁸ See Michael Walzer, *Moralne maksimum, moralne minimum* [Thick and Thin. Moral Argument at Home and Abroad], transl. Joanna Erbel (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2012), ch. 4, 84.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

we can currently do is “recognize this commonality and open the difficult negotiations it requires”²⁰ which may and should include sensibly conceived global education, understanding its own limitations and deficits.

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²⁰ Ibidem.

Summary

The text presented here discusses an issue of global responsibility, placing it in an ethical and educational perspective. It is indicated that the concept of global responsibility has got at least two formal aspects: theoretical normative and praxionormative one. The author is convinced that we can talk about global responsibility in the strict sense only in the first, theoretical normative meaning in which it functions as a performative utterance. In the praxionormative aspect, in which an emphasis is placed on the practical side of global responsibility, it is stated that practising responsibility on a global scale – with certain exceptions – is unrealizable as a universal ethical rule. Therefore, among others, there is a need to rethink the strategy and objectives of both global ethics and global education at an angle of making them more real and practical.

Keywords: globalization, global education, ethics, locality, networkness, responsibility

Streszczenie

Mysleć globalnie – działać lokalnie – istnieć sieciowo. Krytyka idei odpowiedzialności globalnej w perspektywie etycznej i edukacyjnej

Prezentowany artykuł omawia zagadnienie odpowiedzialności globalnej, umiejscawiając je w perspektywie etycznej i edukacyjnej. Wykazuje się w tekście, że pojęcie odpowiedzialności globalnej ma co najmniej dwa aspekty formalne: teorionormatywny oraz praksjonormatywny. W przekonaniu autora w sensie ścisłym o odpowiedzialności globalnej można mówić jedynie w pierwszym, teorionormatywnym znaczeniu, w którym funkcjonuje ono w roli performatywu. W aspekcie praksjonormatywnym, w którym nacisk położony jest na praktyczną stronę odpowiedzialności globalnej, stwierdza się, że praktykowanie odpowiedzialności w skali globalnej, poza wyjątkami, jako uniwersalna reguła etyczna, jest w istocie nierealizowalne. Z tego powodu, między innymi, należy na nowo przemyśleć strategię oraz cele zarówno etyki, jak i edukacji globalnej pod kątem ich urealnienia.

Słowa kluczowe: globalizacja, edukacja globalna, etyka, lokalność, sieciowość, odpowiedzialność