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Tolerance – an important value for a disabled person

What are values? They are so complex phenomenon that their different aspects can be shown depending the point of view and the method of research. Values can be considered from the point of view of philosopher, psychologist, ethnographer, cultural anthropologist, sociologist or economist. The answer depends on the fact who answers the question and it is different in every case.

A sociologist says: “value is what activates people’s motivation”, “an object worthy of desire, deserving for acceptance”, “a general criterion of using different objects, which decides about our attitudes towards certain objects”.

The philosopher, J. M. Bocheński claims that “value is the reason why an object is valuable, secondarily and less precisely it is the name for valuable objects”¹.

A psychologist, while talking about values, thinks of the process of assessing values, the conditions of this process and its results – values perceived by certain people and groups as well as the level of their awareness and the process of discovering and ascribing the level of integration with values to persons, events and things. M. Rokeach defines values as „a stable belief that certain behaviour or the ultimate aim of life is individually and socially more attractive than other ways of behaving and other life goals (...), so they are standards that guide humans activity”².

This belief is shared by other psychologists, for whom values are “convictions about what is desirable, organising experiences and directing behaviours with reference to some broader classes of events”.

To sum up, values are objects and beliefs without normative character, which determine relatively similar psychical experiences and actions of individuals. In cultural meaning values are generally desired symbolic objects and generally accepted existential and normative judgements. Each object, idea or institution which plays an important role in a life of an individual and which an individual is willing to gain because of perceiving it as a necessity, can be a value.

¹ M. Bocheński „Sto zabobonów”, Cracow 1992, p. 135.

² M. Rokeach „The nature of human values”, New York 1973, p. 5.

A behaviour that can be observed is the external exemplification of values. Values serve as criteria of choosing social aspirations, standards of integration of an individual with society, they also differentiate social sphere of human personality. Values are characteristics that decide about untypical qualities of someone or something.

Psychologists generally agree with the fact systems of values of particular people are changed, developed and improved according to what is – as writes B. Hali – perceived by individuals as consequences of their actions, their perception of themselves and of the world. Changes in valuation depends on the transformation of social life and culture, however the existence of relatively stable social frames is fully objective and thus it is a factor integrating social classes, societies and nations³. C. Rogers stresses the role of parents, teachers, social workers and others in shaping values of an individual.

Considering the tasks of individuals according to themselves, other people around them and broad non-human environment, three types of hierarchy of values can be distinguished:

- in reference to itself - during individual existence an individual should develop itself in order to achieve complete humanity, which can be expressed in harmonic and hierarchic satisfying its biological, psychical, social and spiritual needs
- in reference to others the task of an individual is to cooperate with them in achieving their complete development and creating new interpersonal structures serving people
- in reference to the environment, generally speaking the “cosmos”, the task of an individual is to work on maintaining and multiplying its qualities.

Following types of values can be distinguished:

- sociocentric values (national security, environmental protection)
- interpersonal values (safety of family, loyalty)
- egocentric values (connected with the good of “I”)
- intellectual values (curiosity, wisdom, truth)
- ethical values (good, faith, religiousness)
- emotional values (empathy, love)
- esthetical values (beauty, art)
- prestigious values (social status, authority)
- perfectionistic values (creativity, ambition)
- preservative values (health, life)
- consumerist values

³ W. Okoń „Nowy słownik pedagogiczny”, Warsaw 2001, p. 432.

- hedonistic values (happiness of life, risk)
- material values (material welfare, financial stability)

I would like to focus on ethical values and precisely on one of them which is tolerance. We live in times when unemployment, inflation, crime, conflict and first of all intolerance increase. Intolerance can be seen in different social and educational processes. We can observe that whole communities tend to close in their own circles. We live in times when we can guide more and more complicated processes of production of all goods but we are not always able to guide our own lives. It is not easy to live when we have to accept every dissimilarities.

The word “tolerance” comes from Latin word “tolero” which means bear, allow. As time passed by, this term started to include such meanings as: 1. sociological (lenience) 2. medical (resistance) 3. technical (probable error). Tolerance means patience and lenience for dissimilarities. It is the respect for the feelings, opinions, likings, beliefs, habits and behaviour of others even if they were completely different than ours or even conflicting. Contemporary understanding of tolerance encompasses respect for freedom of other people, their opinions, their ways of life and thinking. This respect shows in lenience and kindness for what we do not have to share but what we accept. Tolerance means also resigning from constraint as a mean of influencing attitudes of others.

In sociological meaning tolerance has also an axiological aspect as one of general values, as tolerance for beliefs, systems and ethical behaviours of others. It is a very useful value in human life. It is an ability to survive in unfavourable conditions and behaviours. Tolerant person is kind to people whose ways of thinking and life are different than their own. They are willing to get to know what is different. Unfortunately, as I mentioned earlier, in contemporary world tolerance coexists with intolerance which is generally speaking an attitude of reluctance to everything that is strange. Intolerance is egoism, ruthlessness and intransigence that sometimes may lead to extremes, for instance hatred, anti-Semitism, pathologies. An aggressive form of intolerance is fanaticism, chauvinism which usually leads to conflicts and misunderstandings. Deep intolerance based on ideological grounds is fundamentalism. A theoretical type of intolerance, without action and without emotions is absolutizing ones own attitude. We come to a conclusion that both tolerance and intolerance are peculiar properties of thinking and behaving individuals toward others, they are specific attitudes toward dissimilarity and otherness, toward others behaving differently in some way. It is tolerance that should be the confirmation of democracy understood as the equality of rights of every human being, their orientations, views and attitudes. It is the realization of the

right to freedom, independence of thinking, expression of beliefs, choice of path of life. The respect for other views, understanding for different predilections does not mean the lack of one's own views and the lack of one's own system of values. Tolerance does not mean giving up judgements and discussion nor hiding one's views and beliefs.

A very large social group in Poland and in the world touched by the problem of intolerance are disabled people. In developed countries of European Union about 15 per cent of population are disabled people. According to the national census from 2002, the number of disabled people in Poland is 5.456.700 – that is 14.3 per cent of population. It means every seventh polish citizen is disabled or perceives himself that way.

The definition of disability is very fluid and cannot be strictly specified. There are moments of bigger or smaller possibilities as well as physical limitations in the life of every human being. What is easily available for us now, may be an obstruction impossible to overcome in a few years. Passing over the dysfunctions caused by accidents, there are many reasons of deepening the disabilities and dysfunctions while growing old. Contrary to common opinions, disability is the lack of adaptation of functions of particular organism to conditions in which it lives. According to the definition formulated by World Health Organization (WHO):

Disabled person is the one whose serious injuries restrictions in efficient functioning of organism made it impossible, harder or limited for this person to function efficiently in the society, taking into consideration such factors as age, sex and external factors.

Looking for a common denominator and shaping environment in an optimally available way is of course obvious. However, because of our cultural and ethnical diversity as well as perceiving human being as a unique individual there are no perfect solutions. This is why we can be called “disabled” in every moment and every stage of our lives. There are three main types of dysfunctions:

- physical,
- mental-psychical,
- other and unspecified.

Beside those mentioned before, there are also complicated psychophysical diseases that determine severe degree of mental retardation. Another classification characterising disabled people takes into consideration the type of their disability:

- a) people with physical disability and among them:
 - people with damage of motor organ – motor disability
 - people with chronic internal diseases

- b) people with sensory disability (damage of sense organs) and among them:
 - blind and with serious sight disorders
 - deaf and with serious hearing disorders
- c) people with psychological disability and among them:
 - people with mental diseases
 - people with intellectual disorder

There are two types of judicature in Poland which depend on the institution. A persons' degree of disability may be:

- mild
- moderate
- severe

or:

- partially unable to work
- completely unable to work
- completely unable to work and to individual existence.

According to the Occupational and Social Rehabilitation and Employment of the Disabled Act (article 4.4): "The severe degree of disability is stated for a person whose organism efficiency is affected and:

- 1) is unable to be employed
- 2) is able to be employed in sheltered workshop or in occupational activation institution, needs permanent or long-lasting care or help from other people which is necessary for them to play their social roles or because of seriously limited possibilities of self-reliant existence.

2. The moderate degree of disability is stated for a person with affected organism efficiency that is able to be employed on a position adapted in accordance with the needs and possibilities caused by disability and needs partial or periodical help from other people which is necessary for them to play their social roles or because of limited possibilities of self-reliant existence.

3. The mild degree of disability is stated for a person with affected organism efficiency that is able to be employed and does not need help from other play their social.

4. Limited possibilities of self-reliant existence means affected organism efficiency that makes a person unable to satisfy basic life needs such as self-service, moving, communication and communicating without help from others.

5. The statement of severe degree of disability does not exclude the possibility of employing a disabled person, also in places which are not sheltered workshops or occupational activation institutions.

To assure disabled individuals normal functioning in social life it is necessary for their environment to have proper attitudes toward them, such as kindness based on understanding their needs and possibilities. Another necessary attitude is understanding and tolerance for everything that is different, not fitting to definite, stereotypical standard of human body and its functions as well as behaviour and deeper assessment of the value of a human being.

However, recent studies conducted in Poland show a significant variety of attitudes of Polish society towards disabled.

The results of researches quoted by Izabela Krasiejko in the article called "Tolerance to disabled"⁴ show that about 15 per cent of respondents has a definitely negative attitude of isolation. They have also minimal knowledge about disabled. In their opinion such person has many limitations in physical and mental efficiency, is non self-reliant, unproductive and is a burden for other people.

People who present this negative attitude avoid contacts with disabled and their families. They are usually afraid that they can not behave properly in relations with disabled, that they can experience unpleasantness. They express opinions, that such child is a burden for parents, it has no chances of development and should be given to institutions. Sometimes they demonstrate sympathy and pity.

These people forbid their children to play with a disabled child which is for sure a big mistake. They often fear that healthy children will learn irregular behaviours from disabled children. Such fears are comprehensible but completely unreasonable. Healthy children imitate the disabled as they get to know each other. Dealing with the problem of disability and the process of identification are important for mutual understanding and learning. In order to improve cooperation, social workers and educators should inform people that no child can voluntarily give up the motor or mental level or the ability of perception it has already achieved. The fact of healthy children adopting for a long time behaviours of the disabled ones has not been noticed in past integration experiences. On contrary, "in the process of common learning healthy children learn to notice the needs of others, they learn acceptance and tolerance to different behaviours, protectiveness and responsibility for the weaker. The

⁴ I. Krasiejko „Tolerancja wobec niepełnosprawnych”, Edukacja i dialog 2000, No. 8.

disabled children during common play and learning gain many new skills, notice their strengths, not only weaknesses. For the disabled children the possibility of learning in the frames of general educational system is often ennobling in the eyes of others, restores their psychical balance and creates conditions to normal emotional development. The sooner a child learns to enter relations and to associate with healthy people, the easier it gets rid of fears of new environment. While being among healthy peers, disabled children notice that invalidism does not have to discriminate but it also does not put them into privileged situation. This prevents them from taking too much for granted and avoiding responsibility for their lives”⁵. This shows us why it is so important to form an attitude of tolerance by children and even more by their parents.

Research shows, that such attitude is represented by 25 percent of Polish society. “People from this group perceive disability as a kind of social fact. In their opinion a disabled person may be, despite their limited possibilities, useful for family and environment, has a chance of having happy personal and occupational life. Such image of the disabled is connected with the attitude of integration that is giving healthy children the chance of contact with the disabled. These people treat disabled children and their parents normally, are ready to help them. They have no prejudice toward them and they are in neighbourly and social relations”⁶.

It is a big success that the increase in “social openness” to problems of the disabled is noticeable nowadays. This fact may be caused by the gradual increase of their number in society but also from media’s huge commitment to integration. There has been an increase of tolerance to adapting positions in normal workplaces rather than creating special ones only for the invalids. Numerous social campaigns in media influence the perception of disabled by people from different social and occupational classes. New projects as “The disabled able to work” or “The disabled are among us” are arising and enlarge life chances of the disabled. These projects help to overcome the obstacles of fear and ignorance and what follows them – intolerance. This gives hope for real help to a huge group of the disabled.

We should remember that every human being is equal, everyone of us, especially a child, has the right to happiness, which is based on activity – playing and learning the world. The disabled children do not have to learn in separate schools and to be isolated from normally developing peers. They can and they should learn and play together with everyone on the condition that they are accepted as they are. It is in the interest of all of us to change the attitudes toward the disabled. Despite its dysfunctions, every disabled child wants to be loved

⁵ J. Bałachowicz „ Wychowanie do akceptacji niepełnosprawnych" *Życie szkoły* 1993, No. 10.

⁶ I. Krasiejko „ Tolerancja wobec niepełnosprawnych", *Edukacja i dialog* 2000, No. 8.

and accepted as other children, it wants to be approved in groups of friends, it wants to achieve successes at school and participate actively in all games and activities their healthy friends take. This is why we should not be afraid of dissimilarities and open our doors and hearts to it.

References:

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4. M. Rokeach „The nature of human values", New York 1973
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