Kultura – Przemiany – Edukacja t. XVIII (2026)
https://journals.ur.edu.pl/kpe/ ISSN 2300-9888; ISSN online 2544-1205

DOI: 10.15584/kpe.2026.27
Artykuł oryginalny

Data nadesłania: 31.07.2026 r.
Zaakceptowano do druku: 14.09.2026 r.
Opublikowano: 31.12.2026 r.

Jan Szot
Akademy of Zamość
ORCID: 0009-0009-6820-1259

The philosophical foundations of teacher education

Filozoficzne podstawy edukacji pedagogów

Abstract

Reading the works of the most distinguished figures in culture – texts that reflect the struggle with questions every thinking person asks themselves – combined with reflection and discussion on the topics at hand, fosters intellectual and moral maturity. Therefore, it should be a permanent element of the education of students, including future educators. This article presents an example of such a practice, carried out during meetings of the Philosophy and Pedagogy Section of the Student Pedagogical Research Club at the Zamość Academy and during the seminars concluding this work. It emphasizes the need to combine practical professional training with classical education and indicates how the latter can be restored to its rightful place.

Keywords: classical education, philosophy of education, pedagogy

Streszczenie

Lektura tekstów najwybitniejszych przedstawicieli kultury – tekstów będących wyrazem zmagań z pytaniami, które zadaje sobie każdy myślący człowiek – połączona z refleksją i dysputą na rozważane tematy, sprzyja ludzkiemu dojrzewaniu intelektualnemu i moralnemu. Dlatego powinna być stałym elementem kształcenia studentów, m.in. pedagogów. Artykuł prezentuje przykład takiej praktyki realizowanej w ramach spotkań Sekcji Filozoficzno-Pedagogicznej Studenckiego Koła Naukowego Pedagogów w Akademii Zamojskiej oraz w trakcie wieńczących tę pracę seminariów. Podkreśla konieczność łączenia praktycznego przygotowania do zawodu z edukacją klasyczną i wskazuje, jak można próbować przywrócić tej ostatniej należne jej miejsce.

Słowa kluczowe: edukacja klasyczna, filozofia edukacji, pedagogika

Introduction

Knowledge and skills relating to the philosophical foundations of upbringing and education are an essential and indispensable part of teachers' training. After all, anyone who intends to support the development of others must possess a mature,

insightful understanding of human nature and the structure of existence, of human dignity, of human capacities and how to develop them, as well as knowledge of true freedom and how to attain it, and of the meaning of life. No sensible person would entrust equipment to someone who has no idea about its composition, purpose and functions, and yet we are not talking about equipment, but about human beings: pupils and students. It is no coincidence, therefore, that the curriculum for teacher training includes subjects such as philosophical anthropology, ethics and the philosophy of education. Equally important is the development of critical thinking skills – correct reasoning, deduction and definition; the study of logic fosters the development of these abilities.

The acquisition of knowledge regarding the philosophical foundations of education and upbringing, as well as critical thinking skills and relevant competencies, is achieved, amongst other things, through the study of classical philosophical texts, combined with discussion of the issues raised therein.[1] This work, centred on a selected text and the problems it raises, can be carried out during classes, as well as (more broadly) during meetings of the student research society's section. The section's work may culminate in a seminar devoted to the problem under consideration. This article presents an example of such a practice, carried out during meetings of the Philosophy and Pedagogy Section of the Student Research Society of Educators at the Zamość Academy and during the seminars concluding this work.

Reading

Reading texts by the classics of philosophy is a regular feature of the meetings;[2] these readings serve as a starting point for discussions on the issues raised in the texts, allowing participants, as it were, to join the debate that has been ongoing since ancient times amongst the most eminent figures of Western European culture. Participants have the opportunity to explore how great minds have grappled with questions that concern every human being, to weigh up the strengths and weaknesses of the proposed solutions, to identify their consequences and underlying assumptions, and to examine the arguments employed. The issues raised in the texts are discussed using the Socratic method. The facilitator therefore acts as a "midwife;" the participants' contributions provide an opportunity to discern the "state of their minds" – the ideas contained therein (proposals for resolving the

[1] W. Dłubacz, *Edukacja klasyczna dziś? Istota i geneza, struktura i metoda, cel*, "Edukacja" 2022, No. 4(163), pp. 12–13.

[2] The work of the Philosophy and Education Section of SKNP AZ has been ongoing since 2023; it is led by Dr Teresa Bojarska-Szot and Dr Jan Szot. Initially, the series of meetings focused on specific themes (theoretical wisdom, prudence, justice, fortitude, temperance); over time, the programme has been based on a selected reading for the year.

issue under consideration); these ideas (proposed solutions) are then subjected to joint examination.[3]

This approach – characteristic of classical education – fosters the development of intellectual and moral maturity. Dawid W. Lutz drew attention to this: "The aim of classical education is not to prepare students for a specific profession or career, but to equip them to embark on a lifelong process of achieving human excellence, both intellectual and moral. The tradition of classical education is rooted in the belief that the great minds of the past discovered important truths about the world and humanity's place within it, truths that remain relevant to this day. Classical education helps students realise their potential by learning and putting into practice the wisdom of the ages, which has stood the test of time. As a living tradition, classical education (…) continually expands our knowledge by applying unchanging truths to new problems.[4]

In the previous academic year, the series of meetings focused on Aristotle's 'Nicomachean Ethics,' particularly on passages from Book VIII; this work culminated in a seminar on *On Friendship*. This year, however, the work centred on A.M.S. Boethius's 'On the Consolation of Philosophy,' particularly Book IV, and as a conclusion, a seminar was organised on *Evil from the Perspective of Philosophers and Educators*. The seminars are part of the series 'The Philosophical Foundations of Education'. Participants include students and lecturers from the Institute of Pedagogy at the Zamoyski Academy.

On Friendship

The seminar *On Friendship* took place on 8 and 22 May 2024. The first session comprised three presentations, interspersed with discussion: 1) *Is social friendship possible?* (Dr Paweł Skrzydlewski, Professor at the Zamoyski Academy); 2) *Friendship in Aristotle's "Nicomachean Ethics"* (students: Khrystyna Humeniuk, Maja Krzesińska, Wiktoria Sokołowska, Izabela Szarek, Miłołaj Kolbus); 3) *Friendship in C.S. Lewis's "The Four Loves"* (Dr Jan Szot).

Skrzydlewski explored the theme of social friendship – that is, friendship practised in the public sphere, encompassing the entire community, and expressed through an attitude of solidarity and respect; the questions focused on the theme set out in the title of his talk and on the conditions necessary for such friendship to exist. Szot referred to Lewis's concept of friendship as the most spiritual form of love, outlined its foundations and the differences between this form of love and others;[5]

[3] G. Reale, *Historia filozofii starożytnej*, Vol. 1: *Od początków do Sokratesa*, transl. E.I. Zieliński, Lublin 1993, pp. 370–382.

[4] D.W. Lutz, *O edukacji klasycznej i progresywnej*, "Edukacja" 2022, No. 4(163), p. 49.

[5] See: C.S. Lewis, *Cztery miłości*, transl. M. Wańkowiczowa, Warszawa 1962, pp. 53–82. The fourth chapter of the book is devoted to the subject of friendship.



Figure 1. The poster announcing the seminar "On Friendship"

Source: https://www.akademiazamojska.edu.pl/pl/news/1755-zapraszamy-na-seminarium-naukowe-bdquo-o-przyjaznirdquo (28.03.2026)

in this context, the discussion turned to the possibility and conditions of friendship between men and women. In turn, the students presented the results of their work on the text of the *Nicomachean Ethics* – they addressed the nature of friendship, its significance and role in human life, the conditions for genuine friendship, and the characteristics distinguishing it from what is merely a semblance of friendship. The latter point in particular seemed significant to the participants. Following Aristotle, a distinction was drawn between friendship for the sake of benefit, friendship for the sake of pleasure, and friendship for the sake of the friend's person; each was characterised, and the basis for this distinction was also explained. The facilitator summed up the reflections on this part of the seminar with the words: "As the philosopher from Stagira used to say, every person desires good for themselves and clings to what seems to them to be good for them. Among various goods, everyone chooses what they value most. And since there are three kinds of goods: pleasant, useful and just, there are three directions of human endeavour. This also applies to the realm of interpersonal relationships, including those of a special nature: friendships. People form such relationships for various reasons – some for pleasure, others for benefit, and still others because of the friend's character: their integrity (*ethical courage*). These three motives correspond to three types of friendship. Friendship for pleasure is fleeting, as is friendship for benefit: «So when the reason why people were friends disappears, friendship disappears too (…)». Neither of these is really friendship, but merely resembles it. Friends in the proper

sense are only «those who wish their friends well for their own sake (…), and not for secondary reasons […]».”[6]

The second part of the seminar “On Friendship” took place on 22 May 2025. It comprised two presentations: 1) *Intellectual love as friendship* (*amor amicitiae*) *in Thomas Aquinas's 'Summa Theologica'* (Dr Teresa Bojarska-Szot); 2) *Can a choir be built without friendship?* (Paweł Łobacz, MA), as well as informal discussions among students regarding friendship and its significance. Once again, the speakers' presentations were interspersed with segments of discussion prompted by questions from the students. The speaker summarised her reflections on friendship understood as intellectual love with the following words: “It is customary to contrast love with friendship, reducing the former to the level of emotion (sensory stirrings), whilst linking the latter to reason. Thomas Aquinas, representing the Christian sphere of European culture, would say that man (a person of a spiritual and bodily nature) shares with animals the capacity for sensual love, yet unlike them is capable of intellectual love. Sensual love is a reaction of the emotions (sensory stirrings) to an object perceived by the senses as a potential source of benefit or pleasure. Intellectual love, on the other hand (*amor amicitiae, caritas*), is an act of the will (a free act), manifested in loving (*dilectio*), i.e. spiritual unity with the beloved, and benevolence (*benevolentia*) – wishing them well and supporting them in the realisation of what is actually good for them.”[7]

On Evil from the Perspective of Philosophers and Educators

The seminar *On Evil from the Perspective of Philosophers and Educators* took place on 22 April 2026. The event consisted of two parts, both of which took the form of a debate – the issues presented by the speakers and the conclusions drawn regarding them were interwoven with elements of discussion. During the seminar, the nature of evil, its causes and methods of counteracting it in the context of upbringing and education were discussed.

Szot presented some introductory remarks on the problem of evil and humanity's struggle with it. He pointed out that “The problem of evil – the question of its origin, basis, nature and consequences, of how it manifests itself, and of the possibility of controlling and overcoming it – is as old as the history of humanity. (…) It could be said that what distinguishes societies and cultures is precisely the ways in which they experience evil, and their attempts to define and overcome it.”[8]

[6] https://www.akademiazamojska.edu.pl/pl/news/1761-dyskutowali-o-przyjazni (28.03.2026). Cf. Arystoteles, *Etyka nikomachejska*, ch. 8 [in:]: *Dzieła wszystkie*, Vol. 5, Warszawa 1996, pp. 236–258.

[7] https://www.akademiazamojska.edu.pl/pl/news/1780-o-roznych-obliczach-przyjazni (28.03.2026). See: Tomasz z Akwinu, *Suma teologiczna*, Vol. 16, transl. A. Głażewski, Londyn 1967, II–II, q. 23–46.

[8] See: V. Lenzen, *Zło* [in:] H. Waldenfels, *Leksykon religii*, Warszawa 1997, p. 552.



Figure 2. The poster announcing the seminar 'On Evil'

https://www.akademiazamojska.edu.pl/pl/news/2071-o-zlu-ndash-z-perspektywy-filozofow-i-pedagogow (28.03.2026).

The first part of the meeting examined evil from a philosophical perspective. In her presentation, *Philosophical views on the nature and origin of evil*, Bojarska-Szot outlined the main ways of interpreting and attempting to explain the existence of evil; she stated, amongst other things, that: 'Views on the nature of evil divided philosophers into three camps: some accepted that evil exists as a being opposed to good and believed that evil is connected with the material side of the world. Others defined evil as a form of non-being – understood as nothingness or as *privatio* (privation). The denial of the reality of evil was based on flawed metaphysical and epistemological assumptions; it therefore has no cognitive value. Dualistic explanations are also untenable (there is no evil in itself; matter is not evil). Evil is the absence of the good that is naturally due to being.'[9] Subsequently, the students – Aleksandra Wiater, Aleksandra Rogala, Khrystyna Humeniuk and Michał Dudziński – presented reflections on evil and good contained in A.M.S. Boethius's *De consolatione Philosophiae*. They cited the philosopher's theses ('for

[9] https://www.akademiazamojska.edu.pl/pl/news/2083-pedagodzy-i-filozofowie-dyskutowali-o-zlu (28.03.2026). The concept of evil as the privation of good was most fully discussed by Thomas Aquinas. See his *Suma teologiczna*, Vol. 4, transl. S. Bełch, Londyn 1978, I, q. 48–49.

the evildoer, just punishment is a remedy, and impunity is a misfortune,' 'power accompanies the good, and weakness the evil,' 'reward is always associated with good, and punishment with evil') and presented their arguments.[10]

The second part of the seminar examined evil from the perspective of educators. The role of the educator in relation to people affected by physical and moral evil was discussed. The students explored two topics: *Education and self-education as a remedy for moral evil* (Joanna Książek, Wiktoria Sokołowska, Wiktoria Tracz) and *Social support as a response to the physical evil afflicting people* (Maja Krzesińska, Aleksandra Rügge, Justyna Winiarczyk). While discussing these issues, the students asked the audience questions, guided them towards answers, and initiated a discussion. They raised, among other things, the issue of the role of upbringing in overcoming moral evil, factors helpful in overcoming phonoholism and social maladjustment, as well as the nature and types of social support provided in the context of a child's terminal illness and in relation to families with a disabled member. The meeting concluded with a summary.

Conclusion

The practice of reading classic works of educational philosophy together, as presented here, is part of the tradition of classical education.[11] Its modern proponents, such as Robert M. Hutchins and Mortimer Adler, launched the "Great Books of the Western World' programme at the University of Chicago as early as 1946, which involved reading the most outstanding works of our culture and engaging in discussions about their content."[12] This programme, which constitutes a form of active participation in the 'Great Conversation' initiated by the ancient sages, is now being developed at many American universities. As it serves to foster the moral and intellectual maturity of students, it has been recognised as an essential complement

[10] A.M.S. Boecjusz, *O pocieszeniu, jakie daje filozofia*, transl. M. Antczak, G. Kurylewska, ch. 4.

[11] "Education, in the classical sense, is a method of teaching and upbringing that draws on the achievements of classical thought developed in ancient Greece, Rome and the Christian Middle Ages. It refers in particular to the purpose of such education, its teaching methods and its methods of upbringing. (…) The basis of such education is, in a sense, philosophy understood in the sapiential sense. (…) In classical education, a general education is of great importance. Its ultimate aim is to bring up a good, wise, righteous and honest person who desires wisdom, truth and beauty. In this concept of education, it is believed that one should learn from the past and not disregard tradition." W. Dłubacz, *Edukacja klasyczna*…, pp. 14–15. The methods of education and upbringing practised in ancient Greece and Rome, as well as in medieval Europe, were described, amongst others, by W. Jaeger in his works: *Wczesne chrześcijaństwo i grecka paideia*, transl. K. Bielawski, Bydgoszcz 1997 and *Paideia*, vol. 1–2, transl. M. Plezia, Warszawa 1964.

[12] D.W. Lutz, *O edukacji klasycznej*…, p. 51. G.L. Gutek, *Filozoficzne i ideologiczne podstawy edukacji*, Gdańsk 2003, p. 282.

to professional training. Such a programme is also worth implementing as part of the academic education of teachers. To justify the validity of this proposal, let us simply cite the following observation.

This series of philosophical meetings aims to address the systematic absence of philosophy teaching in Polish secondary schools. Maintaining this state of affairs is, in essence, an anti-cultural and anti-state act. And it does not seem that, without a fundamental change to the education system, one could "plead for philosophy in schools; one cannot plead for it, because there is no one to ask – these people are deaf, intellectually and spiritually deaf."[13] At this point, we cannot address the causes of this "deafness." Instead, we shall point to the effects of an education devoid of philosophy, quoting Stanisław Judycki: "When there is no philosophy, the human spirit is, in this day and age, exposed to every whim of the imagination of those who are clever at manipulating concepts, of the conjurers who peddle conceptual «nonsense» and emotional «distraction», which we commonly call the mass-media. People left at the mercy of this educational scandal are only able to defend themselves against it intuitively, but even so, much of this degrading manipulation seeps into them and they lose part of their potential identity, or even begin to believe that identity is not important at all."[14]

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[13] S. Judycki, *Czy edukacja bez filozofii prowadzi do istotnej ułomności intelektualnej i duchowej*, "Znak" 2005, No. 5, p. 84.

[14] *Ibidem*, p. 88.