

WHERE DOES THE RIGHT OF INCLUSION COME FROM?

THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL-ETHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE EDUCATIONAL MODEL

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Abstrakt

The goal of this paper is to consider the phenomenon of inclusion from a philosophical—specifically, anthropological and ethical—perspective. The reason is simple: inclusive education employs terms such as “humanity,” “person,” “every person,” “person with special needs” and so on. It is therefore about people. But it also uses phrases like “an individual has the right,” “everyone has the right,” “no one must be ignored,” “respect for life”, and these are statements of moral character. There is the way that a person is and the way a person should be, and likewise for the schools which form a person — there is the way they are and the way they should be. Advocates of inclusive education naturally wish that schools were inclusive. This desire, however, stands on very definite assumptions about, or a certain philosophical pre-understanding of, human ontology: that is, being (how a human is) and ethics (how a human should be). My argument here is that the moral requirement of educational inclusion comes from a specific anthropological preunderstanding. The paper will demonstrate it in texts written by the famous Czech educationalist J. A. Comenius.

Klíčová slova: inclusion, humanity, morality, ontology, Comenius, exclusion.

INTRODUCTION

This paper is about fundamentals. It does not deal with the problems of implementing inclusive principles in the Czech educational system (effectiveness, financing, support systems, etc.) because others have already dealt with them, but it wants to consider the phenomenon of inclusion from a philosophical perspective, specifically anthropological and ethical. And for a good reason. Inclusive education employs terms such as “humanity,” “person,” “every person,” “person with special needs” and so on. It is therefore about people. But it also uses phrases like “an individual has the right,” “everyone has the right,” “no one must be ignored,” “respect for life” (see Hájková and Strnadová, 2010; Bendl 2003; Zilcher, Svoboda, 2019b), and these are statements of moral character. There is the way that a person is and the way a person should be, and likewise for the schools which form a person — there is the way they are and the way they should be. Advocates of inclusive education naturally wish that schools were inclusive (in connection with multi-cultural education for example, see Zilcher, Říčan, 2014). This desire, however, stands on very definite assumptions about, or a certain philosophical pre-understanding of, human ontology: that is, being (how a human is) defines ethics (how a human should be). I will demonstrate the ontological-moral link in the concept of inclusion in texts written by the famous Czech educationalist J. A. Comenius.

HOW WE ARE AND HOW WE ARE TO BE¹

The phenomenon of inclusion is an educational expression of a specific philosophic pre-understanding of humanity. Inclusion presupposes the fundamental dignity of every human being, including the disadvantaged, the disabled, those with special needs, and the like. The question is, Why? It wasn't so in ancient Sparta, nor in Assyria. How do we account for our concept of human dignity, or an individual's right to an inclusive approach to education – as well as other rights?

There is a difference between what is, and what should be (Kreeft 2003). Anthropologically: the way I am and the way I am to be, or shouldn't be. How is that possible? It is because the human nature or essence is both complex and difficult, on at least two levels—ontologically and morally. In one's being, that is, ontologically, a person is undoubtedly *good*, or dignified, worthwhile, important, noble ... a person is someone. But a person is morally ambivalent—capable of both good and evil. And that "ability" is not just part of the human potential, but it is also reality. People truly do both good and evil.

Traditionally, the ontological dignity of a human person was accounted for metaphysically—from Moses to Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, and even to Comenius. One way or another a person has been conceived as a being which does not belong solely to herself, but is related to someone who is beyond. And this "belonging" does not represent some incidental or optional psychological need (I would love to have and belong to someone), but an ontological status, without which a human being is lacking something essential. *Nexus hypostaticus*, J. A. Comenius called it, that is, the foundational relationship of a person to the sacred (see for example his *Great Didactic*). A person is someone because she was created as *Imago Dei*, in the image of God. All of one's personal capacities—the ability to know oneself, to feel, to distinguish good and evil, beauty and ugliness, the ability to love, to laugh, and so on—were given on the one hand to be enjoyed, and on the other hand to mirror the Creator, and to be honoured as the *Summum bonum* – the highest good a human being can imagine. If there is something good, true and beautiful in human beings it is not a coincidence, it is intentional. A human is a being that was worth creating. Other creatures and beings were created as well, but human beings have a unique task and privilege—to reflect the Creator himself. This is the ground of human dignity, our philosophical ancestors used to say. It is unmeasurable, unquantifiable, incalculable. Even though a person may be weak, lame or blind—these are mere accidentals, the essence of humanity consists in the foundational status of human being as *Imago Dei*.

The ontological purpose of a human being is the basis of that person's moral purpose: that feeling "I should." Human beings somehow know or feel that they *should* live up to their calling. They should not act in a way that is beneath their dignity. The *I should* flows from the *I am*. Ethics from ontology. Humaneness from humanity.

An anthropological intuition regarding the worth of human beings has endured in our culture even after its philosophical justification was ideologically removed. Modernity programmatically rejects all metaphysics, and with it all ontology; yet most modern (and normal) people insist that human beings do have some kind of intrinsic value. When a house is on fire we save the people first, and only then the animals, followed by the property.

With that we come to the second, basic, problematic dimension of human nature—from "what is" to "what should be." There is something obviously wrong with people, or, with the moral capacity of human nature. It is clear that we are not able to attain to our ontological calling. Yes, there is the moral imperative, that voice which says "you should," but I don't listen to it, or I listen only when I think I need to. With a little introspection we realize that sometimes we absolutely don't want to hear it, and we do things to ensure we mishear it. Other times we hear the voice clearly and we want to obey it, but can't manage to do so. "I shouldn't smoke so much." "I shouldn't take it." "I should never do that again." And yet I find myself doing, or not doing that very thing. The will is (sometimes) good, but (often) weak (see Hábl 2014).

At this point it is necessary to touch on a question that begs an answer: Isn't it all merely fiction? Isn't that "voice of conscience" just an ethical whip we came up with ourselves? A mere construct—be it social, psychological or other? The implications of such a question are obvious. If yes, then first: the moral imperative "you should" has no objective validity, and therefore cannot make any claim on me; and second: I can freely manipulate, reconstruct or deconstruct it. I'm afraid that this is actually the core of the educational problem we are discussing,

¹ I have discussed the ontological-moral distinction of human nature in my book called *I když se nikdo nedívá: fundamentální otázky etického vychovatelství* (2015). Comp. chapter III, p. 25n.

and it is also the reason we must argue in favour of the rights of people who are handicapped or otherwise disabled. Together with Hobbes, Darwin, Freud and Nietzsche we have, first, stripped the human being of her dignity (“... we are nothing more than ...”), and consequently also of her ethics (“...we don’t have to do anything other than...”). And now we don’t know what to do—either with a morally illiterate generation, or with educational “exclusion” (Zilcher, Svoboda, 2019a). We are finding out that it isn’t good that many people don’t have an equal opportunity for education.

The purpose of this paper is to show that our humanity and humaneness is different. Our dignity isn’t fiction, nor is it a mere construct. It is real. And therefore the moral calling of a person is also real. And therefore also, a moral statement like “nobody should be excluded” has its place in human society. As much as our conscience can be loaded down by pathological demands put there by a “super-egotistic” environment, it is also true that in many cases the demands of conscience are quite healthy, legitimate and real. That is, what it solicits is truly good (or evil), not just good “for me,” or good “for the powerful majority,” or for some “interest group,” but good in its objective essence, good for the humanity of human beings—the advantaged as well as the disadvantaged. We can see this nonfictitious or non-subjective aspect of ethics in a variety of ways. Often in common everyday situations. Consider for example arguments or disputes. In such situations we hear, or say, things like: “How would you like it if the same thing was done to you?” — “Not so fast!” — “Aren’t you going to share it with me?” — “You should be ashamed!” — “Don’t you dare!” — and the like.²

Anyone who makes such a statement isn’t only trying to say that the behaviour of the other bothers them, but is appealing to an objective standard whose knowledge is presumed even by the other. Moreover this presumption is usually confirmed immediately, whether positively or negatively. The offender might be ashamed and try to fix what was broken, or explain her behaviour, or apologize. She asserts for example, that there was some extraordinary reason she needed, or was authorized, to go that fast; or that something happened which freed her from the requirement of keeping that law; and so on. In any case it is clear that both sides are invoking some kind of law or criteria of decency, fairness or morality as if they had previously agreed on it. However such an agreement was made completely silently, latently, without complicated philosophic verbalization, referring to an entirely realistic reference point—a moral law that applies equally to both, or all, participants.³ Without such a point no moral discourse would be possible. People could fight each other like animals in the Hobbesian sense, but they couldn’t argue in the human sense of the word. Quarrelling and arguing are attempts to show another person that they are wrong, or that they committed some offense. And it’s real. Yet something like this would make no sense if there didn’t already exist between the participants some criteria for distinguishing right from wrong. In the same way it would be nonsense to say that a football player fouled if there weren’t a fixed set of rules for playing football. If there are no rules for a game there is no game at all—or there is a very dangerous game.⁴

In addition to the persistent idea that we *should* behave in a certain way, there is still the experience that no one actually *does* behave that way. I want to say—in the words of C. S. Lewis—that, “probably just this year, or this month or even today we didn’t behave the way we expect from others (1993). In our defence we usually present a variety of “extenuating circumstances” by which we intend to somehow justify, excuse or stifle that relentless “you should/shouldn’t.” This kind of self-defence can take different forms: “I treated my wife badly, but I was so tired.” “I had to cover up the disputed transaction or they would have fired me, and then how could I pay the mortgage?” “I never would have made that promise I didn’t keep, if I had known how much work they were going to pile on me.” The issue is not whether the excuses are legitimate or not. The point of this illustration is that there is a voice we hear, something within ourselves that is real—the consciousness of a moral law. It is part of me as a human, it is with me, it’s in my knowledge, a con-science. If it weren’t part of us we wouldn’t need to defend ourselves when we do something against it (Zilcher, Svoboda, Kežovská, Říčan, 2017); on the contrary, we wouldn’t have the concept of a “clean conscience” when we behave according to it. The concept of a clean conscience is, understandably, notoriously problematic, because we humans have an extraordinarily wide range of psychological resources that enable us to consider our conscience “clean” regardless of the objective moral

² The following paragraphs have been freely paraphrased from the absolutely timeless Radio Discussions, which were given by C. S. Lewis in 1943 for the BBC, with the purpose of encouraging his sorely tried fellow citizens during World War II. They were later published together with other talks as the book *Mere Christianity*.

³ For a beautiful illustration of an intuitive experience of moral reality, see Čapek’s *The Scream* in his collection *Wayside Shrines*.

⁴ And readers who are football fans can easily imagine what the game would look like if they stopped following the rules of, for example, offsides, or automatic. Or if some player brought a baseball bat to help.

reality.⁵ That, however, presents even more clearly the need for an education which would properly teach pupils and students to relate to moral reality in the appropriate way.⁶ Is the concept of inclusiveness such an education?

To recapitulate: Humans are ambivalent beings. Ontologically good, but morally bad. Yet not fully, not always and not in everything. They have wonderful potential and often use it as it should be, but also often, if not more often, use it as it shouldn't be used, abusively or without sufficient will to use it well. If we raise the question of whether humans are inherently good, there is no simple or straightforward answer. Simple answers would necessarily be too simplistic, because they would have to ignore one or more dimensions of human nature.

J. J. Rousseau, for example—if I can outline the main anthropological alternatives—didn't want to see the moral depravity of the individual. If we listen to him carefully, we hear that humans are as good morally as they are ontologically. From this comes his non-education. The good is there within Emile⁷, so don't teach him, rather let him spontaneously—Rousseau liked to say *naturally*—flourish. But if a person is thoroughly good, how can we explain the evil deeds? It's one's surroundings, declining culture, others, Rousseau suggests. Of course, the others are also human beings. How can a good person morally corrupt someone else? Rousseau is silent. But his romantic appeal still lives. I think it is for two reasons. First, it strokes our human nature. That we are actually, inherently, okay and it's always someone else's fault (some nameless "them," or "culture") will always be met with a positive response. Modern variations of the culprit are "heredity," "hormones," "social impenetrability," or other determinative factors. And second, Rousseau's anthropology makes the lives of teachers and educators enormously easier. Education based on the assumption that children don't actually need to be taught, is really undemanding. It is a lofty rhetoric that legitimizes pedagogical inaction. All liberal educators approvingly accept it. And also the lazy ones.

At the opposite end of the anthropological spectrum is the concept that humans aren't good at all, either ontologically or morally. Among the first and most notable adherents to this idea were Niccolò Machiavelli and Thomas Hobbes, although they were followed by many more. In their view we are essentially animals, carnivores, admittedly evolving—humanoids, but beasts of prey nonetheless. In his famous work *Leviathan*, Hobbes describes humans as merely material beings which are subject to the laws of matter. From the first it loudly proclaims that people are controlled by instincts. A person looks for pleasure and avoids hardships, especially the greatest hardship, which is death. In one's way stand other people, rivals, with which one must fight for life. Each is a wolf, or beast, to others. All in all, human life is, in Hobbes' words, "nasty, brutish and short."⁸ If a person is to survive he must make (hypothetically) a deal with others. I won't eat you, you won't eat me and both of us will give up our freedom to a warden, ruler or guard who will make sure we each keep our side of the contract, else we are sanctioned. The warden or "sovereign" must have absolute power in order to tame the beast. All totalitarian regimes and authoritarian pedagogy will always cherish Hobbes. If Rousseau and all the romantics recommend that we not encroach on the natural development of the individual, Hobbes and his followers preach intervention as much as possible—to shape, mould, determine, tame, guard, punish. From the one perspective humanity is entirely good, from the other, entirely bad.

I believe that the concept of inclusive education is based on a different assumption—that people are ontologically noble, but morally decayed. This is not in any way a new or revolutionary anthropology, it is actually so old and traditional that it has become alternative. I believe that it both captures the state of human affairs very truthfully and realistically, and in a fundamental way, defines what and how it *should* be (or should happen) in educational reality. There is no doubt that this interpretation of anthropology has many educational implications; from the perspective of our argument there is at least one that should be mentioned: if it is true that humans are ontologically noble beings, they have a right to a noble education, i.e., they have a right to be included, even if they are disadvantaged or limited. Even a limited individual has value and should be valued, or could be, and education is one of the tools which can help develop that (albeit limited) potential. If it is further true that in their moral nature humans have gone awry (euphemistically speaking), then they need such a education even more, in order to cultivate their moral potential rather than neglecting it.

⁵ For an example of a very successful strategy to relieve one's conscience, see Freud's theory of the super ego, or Jung's theory of archetypes. When an individual commits something he really can't help it, he was conditioned to do it by someone or something.

⁶ On the issue of *conscience* see for example Anznebacher (1994, p. 14).

⁷ The title of Rousseau famous educational book: *Emile or On Education* (2002).

⁸ Quoted from *Leviathan* (1651, p. 58). Available online (1. 10. 2015), <http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/hobbes1651part1_2.pdf#page=1&zoom=auto,-229,445>

“THEREFORE LET NO ONE BE EXCLUDED”

COMENIUS EXCURSION: FROM “NATURALITY” TO “INCLUSIVITY”

Comenius has fascinated both theoretical and practical educationalists for centuries. The foresight, discernment, and orderliness with which he formulated his educational project still amazes us today. Does Comenius have something to say about our theme of inclusion? Not surprisingly, yes (in addition to educational context of Czech principals see Zilcher, Chytrý, Kežovská, 2016).

In Comenius' educational system the concepts of integrity, nature (i.e. human nature) and harmony play fundamental roles; these concepts—as we shall see—are relevant to our theme of inclusion. Comenius tirelessly repeated his triad *omnia, omnes, omne*, which express 1) that it is necessary for “every person” to be educated, because everyone—men and women, rich and poor, smart and dull—are created in the image of God and have the potential to nobly reflect that image. 2) Therefore they should be educated in “every thing” needed for that—again a triad: the knowledge, the will, and the ability to use what is appropriate (Godly). Which—in today's language—correspond to the cognitive, volitional and spiritual components of education. 3) Furthermore, all education should happen “by every means” which nature (i.e., the nature of the world as well as human nature) provides. A pre-established and evident harmony rules between the nature of the world and human nature: the world is a macrocosm and people a microcosm, what is written in capital letters in nature is written small in human beings (Darling, Nordembo, 2003; Zilcher, Svoboda, 2019a). If the teacher would pay careful attention to nature, she would find there everything necessary for education—because all reality is infused with educational potential, the world is a school.

For us here, of course, what is most interesting is Comenius' emphasis on the education of *all people*. And Comenius wrote of this very thing not only in the ninth chapter of his *Great Didactic*, but also elsewhere.⁹ He was the first to present the now well-known but at the time radical proposition, that “not only children of the rich and the nobility, but all children, noble and ignoble, rich and poor, boys and girls from every city, town, village and farm should be equally admitted to school.” He saw four reasons for this inclusivity.

First, because all people become human by “faithfully” bearing the image of God, it is necessary that all be brought to that goal: concretely that is, that they will be filled with knowledge, virtue and piety. Thus they will be prepared to live a meaningful, productive life both here on earth, and after, eternally.

The second reason Comenius presented as part of the first, but I believe it can stand on its own separately. God frequently asserts that in Him “there is no respect of persons” (that is, no discrimination, preference for or siding with one over the other; author's note), Comenius reminded his readers of this quote from the Bible. Therefore if we allow “only some to the culture of the intellect, excluding others, we commit an injury not only against those who share the same nature as ourselves, but against God Himself, who wishes to be acknowledged, to be loved and to be praised by all upon whom He has impressed His image.”

Comenius based his third reason on his own experience of the infinitude of human potential. He first warns of the fact that we simply “do not know to what uses divine providence has destined this or that man.” But then he immediately goes on to state that God often forms special instruments of His glory from “the poorest, the most abject, and most obscure.” Nature itself confirms this principle, and we—teachers—do well, Comenius said, when we “imitate the sun in heavens, which lights, warms and vivifies the whole earth, so that whatever is able to live, to flourish, and to blossom may do so.”

The final reason anticipates the objection that there could be some individuals who are “so dull and stupid” that they cannot be educated. To this Comenius emphatically responded: “The slower and weaker any man's disposition, the more he needs assistance, that he may throw off his brutish dullness and stupidity as much as possible.” And with his typical educational optimism he affirmed that it is not possible to find a person “whose intellect is so weak that it cannot be improved by culture.” This principle is illustrated by the simile of folk wisdom: As a leaky vessel, if you continually pour water through it, grows cleaner and cleaner although it cannot retain the liquid, [...] in the same way, the dull and weak minded, though they may make no advance in letters, become softer in disposition and learn to obey.” Comenius also reminded his readers that “from experience” we know

⁹ All of the following citations from Comenius come from the 9th chapter of his *Great Didactic* (in M. W. Keating's transl.). Comenius thematized the question of inclusivity, or “nobody left behind,” in other works. See for example the 17th chapter of his *Via lucis*, or the 2nd, 3rd and 4th chapters of the *Pampaedia* (the central section of *General Consultation concerning Restoration of Human Affairs*).

about people who in spite their “natural” slowness “have gained such a grasp of sciences as to excel those who were more gifted.” And in the same paragraph he revealed his own power of observation when he noted that “some men are strong as children, but afterwards grow sick and ailing, while others, whose bodies are sickly and undersized in youth, develop into a robust and tall men; so it is with intellects. Some develop early, but soon wear out and grow dull, while others, originally stupid, become sharp and penetrating.” True to his philosophy of harmony between nature and human nature, Comenius underscores his argument with the natural illustration: “In our orchards we like to have not only trees that bring forth early fruit, but also those that are late-bearing [...] Why, therefore, should we wish in the garden of letters only one class of intellects, the forward and active, should be tolerated? Comenius concluded his argument by raising that rhetorical question and answering it, from the perspective of our theme, unequivocally: “[Therefore] let none be excluded unless God has denied him sense and intelligence.”¹⁰

CONCLUSION

Human dignity is real. The moral calling of a person is also real. And therefore also the moral statement “let no one be excluded” must have its permanent place in human society. If an individual is excluded from the education process, it doesn’t touch only that person but all of society. We need those who need us. It makes us human. The shift from integration to inclusion should not be a shift merely in terminology, methodology or technology, but a shift in the philosophy of education.

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¹⁰ In Keatings translation the word „Therefore“ is missing. However, it is in both Czech original and latin version of *Didactic*. That is why I add it here. Comp. *Czech didactic*, chap. IX.

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