

The Meaning of ‘Human Education’ for the Modern World



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Education should become the ‘basis of the pyramid’ for solving the problems of the modern world. These problems have emerged due to a contradiction between the great powers of humankind and the weaknesses of our social and moral consciousness. First there is a need to problematize the hidden anthropological foundations of educational ideas and policies in order to clarify the understanding of a human and the education necessary for humans holistically not just for their cognitive intelligence. But today the narrow concept of ‘homo economicus’ dominates the basis of educational policies. We therefore need to expand the notion of the human in ethno-cultural and historical contexts, and also ‘human in general’ in order to understand the basic human problems. The theory of subjectnost’ (subjectness) has a special potential for such a consideration. The stated thesis is that education today needs a ‘turn to subjectnost’.

1 Modern World

If we try to outline the problems of the modern world, then, first of all, as the most serious, are those where the ‘world’ is understood as the *human habitat*—the Earth. Secondly, our ‘world’ can be understood as the *human species* so there are problems of providing for its survival. Are the first problems inevitably caused by the second group of problems, associated with the life and colossal growth of humankind? Thirdly, is the societal world with its problems of interpersonal interactions, within communities at the local, national and global levels. We see lack of mutual trust, contradictions, violence and wars, as well as the loss of faith in social and political ideals, including the demise of democracy under the influence of global financial

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(neoliberal) capitalism. The previous problems of survival and well-being are interconnected with the societal problems. Fourthly, the world of *human culture*, that is of our creation and self-creation, which underlies the above dimensions. The challenges here include the need to clarify attitudes towards knowledge and experience that have grown enormously, to preserve the depth and breadth of human heritage, to cultivate thoughts, knowledge, discourse and values that benefit humanity regarding the problems outlined above. Fifthly, the problems of the ‘inner world’ or ‘*humans with themselves*’, that is of psycho-physical self-regulation, and self-awareness especially in regard to emotional, cognitive, relational, activity, personal, moral, social and political spheres. This group is seen as the master link in the logical chain of problems since self-awareness is central for an ‘intelligent human’ and the focus of each person’s responsibility.

I am arguing that we need to correlate this entire logical chain to the objectives of education, so that education could form the basis of the pyramid of solving world problems, starting with the last group as the core.

Observing these layers of problems, we recognize a main contradiction: on the one hand, the material and technological growth and power of humankind, and on the other hand, the weakness or insufficiency of our social and moral consciousness. Heisenberg (1958) represented this with the metaphor: material power is like a ship so solidly built of steel and iron that the magnetic compass indicates only its own bulk, and humanity is like a captain who has lost its orientation.

Despite our evolutionary and scientific progress, homo sapiens, ‘intelligent humans’ who inhabit this planet, have not yet learned how to handle ourselves so that we can peacefully interact amongst ourselves and restrain our power with wisdom. Consequently, we have become the main danger to the Earth.

The concept of ‘cruel optimism’ (Berlant, 2011) introduced in relation to the historical, cultural and political aspects, when applied to the model of modern civilization, should be decoded as the indomitable and inexorable increase in the efficiency and pace of ‘progress’, in that disastrous race, guided by the power of our desires, which is devoid of awareness of the real state of affairs—of *what we humans are* and *what we truly want*.

2 ‘Human Education’

‘Human education’ has not been sufficiently problematized, especially regarding the ‘human’ who is to be educated. The need to problematize this is symptomatized by the aforementioned phenomenon of ‘cruel optimism’, especially regarding educational policy. Thus, the fruits of education obtained under its current priorities of commercialization, managerialism, accountability, etc., result in the growing power of humanity. However, this is accompanied with the continuing human weakness in relation to ourselves, both individually and socially, which dramatically demonstrated by the inability to resolve conflicts.

Not knowing what we humans are, and what we truly desire, reduces self-understanding to purely rational and technical approaches to ourselves, as if from 'the point of view' of machines and computers that were created by us, but which are not human. Such an approach is also adopted into education. This seems to be contributing to the potential victory of the machines over humans.

An additional reason to problematize the 'human' in education is that all educational ideas have hidden anthropological foundations which bring the struggle of different paradigms into policies. With this being recognized we ought to require that education policy-makers disclose and advocate their vision of humans and human society and allow a diversity of views.

Today, we can notice that the basis of modern educational policy is influenced by the concept of 'homo economicus', that is, a rational being, acting for self-interest, profit and personal advantage. It becomes a hidden construct. We can witness the established pattern that the processes of the social sciences turn into social actions (MacIntyre, 1981), and thus, social sciences are unified with social management (Fendler, 2006). This leads to 'economization' complemented by managerialism, which causes alienation on different levels, especially a loss of authentic motivation. In other words, this is the shift of actors attention and interest from purposes, processes, content and actual activities (cognition, upbringing, training, care, creativity) to external accountability measures (indicators, optimization, accountability, 'innovations', etc.).

For the sphere of trade and finance, the motivation of self-interest and rationality of 'profit' are useful, and therefore, the introduction of the notion of humans having economic motivations often ascribed to Adam Smith and its subsequent application is understandable. But for many other areas of human activity and life these two forces are disruptive, because they create a distraction, sidetrack of motivation. Due to these two, a gap arises in direct connection of a human with the world, others and even with oneself. This is especially evident in the area of education.

In addition, the concept under discussion itself has the disadvantage of being a limited and even closed model. And a conceptual model of a human can and should be such a multidimensional model, which is open to our own thinking and participation.

Thus, our task is to problematize 'human education'. In the past, education was associated with clearly articulated understandings of human nature (pedagogy was associated with anthropology) by Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Fichte, Hegel, Herbart, Humboldt, Ushinsky in Russia (1867, 1869), other European and American philosophers and educationists. In the twentieth century in Germany, starting from the 1920s, first works on philosophical anthropology (Scheler, Plesner, Gehlen) developed, and then, in the 60s, educational anthropology was based on them (Bolnov, Derbolav, Loch, Roth and others) and achieved 'culturally-historically determined prospects' in 'historical-pedagogical anthropology' as promoted by Wulf and others.

A view of the human in ethno-cultural and historical specificity, which is preferable to a view of 'man in general' in the spirit of our postmodern era, is more important for the 3rd and 4th groups of the problems listed above. Take for example Russia, where educational reforms started after *perestroika* and continued since then under the influence of Western educational policies. We find that it is necessary to take

into account the particular Russian mentality.¹ In other cases, also cultural-historical anthropological studies of national ‘profiles’ can contribute to specific educational models. But these views must be based on understanding ‘human in general’.

The phrase ‘human education’ first appeared in the title of the work of Froebel of 1826, in which he emphasized human nature, the integrity of ‘life’ and the unity of nature in all things founded in God and claimed ‘self-activity’ and ‘continuous growth’ as principles of education (Froebel, 1887). In India, Tagore linked the ideas of man’s nature, ‘the religion of man’, ‘universal man’, ‘creative unity’ as synchronization of humans’ inherent weaknesses, strengths, creative thinking with nature’s own creative ability and his ideal of education to bring about perfection of man (embodied in his school Shantiniketan and university Visva Bharathi). The next significant book, entitled ‘Human Education’ of 1953 by Montessori, examined the nature of the child and her main conclusions were the principles of ‘self-activity’, ‘freedom’, ‘help to life’ and ‘expanding education’ (Montessori, 2017).

The understandings that were developed by our predecessors often made comparisons about humans to animals or to God. Today in a cosmopolitan and globalized world, we cannot easily draw upon the terminology of religion (especially any particular religion), rather, we need to turn to more universal views such as scientific ones. And, since the relations of humankind with the natural world are aggravating, today it is more important not to distinguish between ourselves and all living beings, while the distinguishing comparison with complex machines, especially with artificial intelligence, comes to the fore.

As many argue, instead of humanism, based on anthropocentrism, the current context may likely correspond to the positions of naturocentrism, biocentrism and ecocentrism. Importantly, we need a kind of human-responsibility-centrism. We must acknowledge that we often create more problems than solutions and therefore ought to accept responsibility for the consequences for our own lives and for the world around us, that we have influenced. Thus, we should not miss the identification of ourselves as humans for the theoretical foundation of education. Indeed, we need this as the content of education itself because currently, even educated people do not think about what it means to be human. Such content of education will also help to convey the issue of self-identification to people themselves, thereby challenging the power of social engineering and informational manipulation. As for education itself, this approach to its entire content as to the study of ourselves, humans, together with the world with which we are connected and for which we are responsible, is an opportunity to create a holistic model in education itself.

With the growth of the human population and the complexity of societies, developing an understanding of the relationship between a human and humankind becomes more urgent. In the last decades of the twentieth century, humanism has been criticized not only for being limited by the framework of anthropocentrism, but also for being associated with the notions of individuality or individual subject. These

¹ The profile, with its archetypal principle of ‘space’ as an absence of a ‘border’, and archetypal nest (e.g. passivity, theorization, homogeneity, intuition, etc.) (Kozhevnikova, 2019).

notions are based on the concept of 'subject', which has also become problematic but which is traditionally essential for understanding 'human'.

3 Phenomenon of Human Being

As it seems, our main goal is to 'revive' the problematization of 'human', which is even more important than simply clarifying the concept of human. Recognition needs to be given to the huge variety of views which is partly due to the complexity of the topic and the diversity of cultural backgrounds. In addition it is impossible to arrive at a 'complete' definition of a 'human' because being human is an incomplete phenomenon of becoming.

For the purpose of such problematization, the construct of 'homo economicus' is a common counterpoint and therefore requires more attention. The objections to this construct consist of more than concerns about value and ethics. Its major flaw is that it cultivates untrue notions. Due to its original economic reading, it is proposed to completely decipher the 'man' only in *materialistic* terms, which has resulted in a seriously atrophied understanding.

At a more subtle level, extending to the non-material spheres, the basing of individual interest represented by hedonism and welfarism (the views in the Austrian school of economics: L. Mises, F. A. Hayek, etc.) still suffers from the limitation of an '*individualist*' scope. For example, happiness remains a fact of an individual life which tends to support an individualistic view. However, as a 'social animal' (Aristotle) humans do not exist in isolation from society, and consequently ought to be understood as social beings or relational beings rather than as separate individuals. This has important relevance for education.

And at the last level of discussion of this construct, even if we add the context of the community and think of a human as acting for maximum personal interest in the framework of the community's relations, understanding a man as the natural absolute *egoist* is still false, since in this case there is no room for empathy, ability to truly understand the Other, love, care, self-sacrifice. But we know that this is not true, from history and our own experience and, finally, from the findings and theories of ethologists and even geneticists (Dawkins, 1976).

Other shortcomings of the construct of 'homo economicus', hidden in the affirmation of the identity of 'pleasure', 'satisfaction of desires', 'happiness' and 'profit', should also be addressed in terms of relations with Others. Indeed, the problem field of desire is typically avoided within this concept, which reduces a person to an animated rational being programmed for profit and personal gains. As a result, manipulation takes place and the immature state of a human is cultivated or rather exploited to function within a consumerist society.

Now, I shall share some insights on these issues derived from ongoing research based on phenomenological and dialectical approaches which are Hegelian in origin.

The phenomenological examination of such a complex phenomenon as our experience of ‘being human’ was carried out sequentially according to the levels of experience, that in phenomenological discernment were distinguished by their essential differences as ‘system’, ‘living’, ‘living being’ and ‘specific human’. Thus it was discovered that the fundamental, simplest distinguishable layer is experience of an ‘order’ which was identified as a ‘praphenomenon of system’ inherent to all existing, animate and inanimate. Therefore, the notions of human as a system in sciences are understandable.

Maintaining ‘self’² is seen as the very meaning of the existence of a phenomenon (thing) in the relationship of ‘self’ and ‘outer other’ (system and environment). This relation as a contradiction resulting in the problem of ‘adaptation’ is felt by us as the main on this level.

But our experience cannot be limited to the systemic dimension, because it is essentially characterized as moving one. For us as the living identity is change. It is not ‘self’ equal to itself (like Fichte’s $A = A$, or absolute $I = I$), but rather the dynamic oneness of ‘self’ and ‘other’.

This understanding, resulting from the recognition of our identity as a dynamic phenomenon, is coined in the concept of *subjectnost*’ (Russian)—*subjectness* (an inherent property of the living ‘to be a subject’). This again returns us to the problem of understanding ‘a subject’, now in a different way which is not ontological or epistemological where the subject is opposed to an object or being located in a framework of self-consciousness, ‘I’, covered by the concept of subjectivity, but in a meaning associated rather with volition.

This approach is close to the ideas of many Indian and Western philosophers, from the ancients to Schopenhauer, and after him Bergson, Scheler, etc., all of whom paid great attention to the phenomenon of volition and interpreted it in various ways. Significant educational concepts are substantially connected with this phenomenon.

The term *subjectnost*’ was introduced by Russian psychologists in the late 1970s and 1980s continuing the Vygotskian tradition of activity approach (especially S. L. Rubinshtein and A. N. Leontiev), similar to the concept of ‘agency’. The basis for it was laid by Vygotsky’s late psychological views of a fundamentally dynamic structure of personality, activity and ‘directive consciousness’ (Vygotsky, 2005). The discussion below develops this concept in the theory of subjectnost’ being in progress (in Kozhevnikova, 2016a, 2016b, 2020 etc.).

Here, subjectnost’ is used to refer to the basic phenomenon of our experience, present in all states while we are alive, permeating our entire psychophysical entity and, thus, common to all living things. So, this is subjectnost’, which distinguishes us as living from other systems, from machines, from artificial intelligence. By phenomenological discernment of my experience as the living, is *such a self-identity which in interaction with the ‘other’ appears as setting its own vector of change. In this sense, this change constitutes a direction emanating from myself (the living) as the inexhaustible and therefore fundamentally indefinable source of unfolding.* Here,

² Here ‘self’ implies a general self-identity, counterposed to the ‘other’ as general alterity and the ‘Other’ as another subject.

'indefinite' as a dynamic oneness of 'self' and 'other' is in the core of it, leading to the *unfolding* as an expansion of the scale, opportunities and breadth of directivity.

Subjectnost' provides the parameters of our experience and our development to maturity during life. Above the *level of the system* in our human experience this gradual expansion manifests itself in the growth of various properties of subjectnost' itself, starting with those at the *level of 'living'*, continuing with *levels of 'living being'* and a '*specific human level*'. We recognize all these layers in our own experience, since all of them in unity simultaneously are the phenomenon of the human we are. A living organism as the 'self' relates to the 'other' just as to a possible object for itself, for example as food. (In human experience, we have various types of 'food', including emotional experiences, social phenomena, meanings, etc.) Subjectnost' of living being (animal) becomes 'open' to itself and to others, and is thus endowed with a 'light of intelligence', and intersubjectivity. An animal feels itself and it sees the Other as another subject, here the 'self - other' relationship becomes 'fight', 'competition'. Specific human subjectnost' has 'open embracing' character (we incorporate the motives of Others into our own, due to share with them interests; or to love for the Others; or concern for specific Others or for own nation or humanity, in general, or even other species, for example, when rescuing kangaroos, koalas, lizards, birds during a fire in Australia). And human subjectnost' is endowed with thinking ability and such essential characteristics, as self-expression and self-transcendence. Our 'self - other or Other' relationship is 'creation' ('project') and 'co-creation' ('cooperation').

The 'self - other' dialectic is crucial for human development to the state of maturity, the latter being mainly characterized by the abilities and position of responsibility in relations with the 'other' and Others. The 'Child people' are not aware of what they truly desire, since they do not recognize the nature of 'happiness' which is subjective and is essentially the very unfolding of their subjectnost' as such (Kozhevnikova, 2016b). And their attitude to collective Others is as to 'Adults', from whose hands directly or indirectly they receive the objects of desire.

Education in the light of this concept is to facilitate the expansion (growth) of subjectnost', that occurs through the relationship and interactions with 'other' and Other. The implications for education on human 'system' level refer to the field of issues that can be described in terms of 'fit in' and 'cope' (training, mastering clichés, subjecting students to the rules, etc.); on our 'living' level this is individualization, the search for one's own orientation; and for 'living being (animal)' level this is socialization in the sense of general ability to survive in a social world.

Regarding our 'specific human' level, the educational goal is to lead to a state of personal maturity, which *sublates* self-other/Others opposition (in thinking, motivations, emotions, actions). Instead of the relation of 'cope' with the 'other' or 'eating' it or 'fighting' with Others, people in their relations come in their development to the mature abilities and position of the Adult, that is, responsibility for themselves and care for Others (the care displays the 'embracing' subjectnost') and finally to the relation to the world, which is in the nature of a 'mission'.

And if we *keenly peer* at what rests the human world, subject to the problems listed at the beginning, it will become clear that even taking into account all the

advanced means of technology, science, communication, this is not only skilful integration into the environment (in general, the Earth), and not only the successful actualization of our subjectivity of the living in the sphere of survival, and not only wise competition with others. But this human world cannot hold on without the connecting power of cooperation, empathy and concern for the world and for the good of Others, generosity, dedication, altruism, without selflessness. It is worth recalling many things that people normally do, and the areas of professional activity in which all this is necessary, especially at the decision-making level. When these motivations are replaced by a pure selfish interest, both the relationships between people and communities are damaged, and the activity itself is damaged, because selfish thinking is too narrow in scope and therefore far from the actual state of affairs. Thus, our own state of an 'Adult', our mature position is so significant for ourselves and society.

Education always and today, together with the omnipotent Internet, even more than before fosters the formation of the image of collective Others as 'Adults', powerful in their rationality, knowledge and ability to influence the world. This is basically true since this power is accumulated by contributions from innumerable human beings. But this strength seems to be amassed outside of man as a kind of a 'store'. And this is in the line with today's scientific and technical vision of education as an 'extracorporeal' that exists in some technologies and information outside of any living person—teacher and student.

But moral consciousness, critical thinking and responsibility cannot in any way develop on any other basis than through a person's inward experiences. Moral strength and wisdom exist only in and through individuals exercising personal wisdom and strength. So, as a result of accepting collective Others as 'Adults' and adopting a personal infantile position, we are faced with the problem of today's 'Child-people', who are the target audience of populist mental goods of all kinds and desire industry, and the great aforementioned contradiction between human 'strength' and 'weakness'.

4 Conclusion

We need to recognize the responsibility of education to resolve the discussed contradiction, and its role as the base of the problems solutions pyramid. This will indicate that education ought to start with the group which is located within the crucial connection of the chain of all problems.

For education this is the "turn to subjectnost" that means the priority of the spheres of self-awareness and motivation, the development of understanding of oneself and Others and the development of the capability (in relation to Others), on the one hand, to resolve conflicts, and on the other hand, to maintain a 'counter-manipulative resilience'. Obviously, 'teachers in person', with their subjectnost', for all these tasks are becoming more and more essential.

As we have *indefiniteness* in the core of our human entity, we are the 'living cauldron', where all the processes take place, in particular, most important life meanings arise from integrated intentions, perceptions, emotions and thoughts. Thus, it seems that we should provide space in education for this '*indefinite*' as a resource of inner freedom, protect and cultivate it. All this demonstrates the need for a true 'human education' and humanitarian paradigm in educational policies.

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