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Credible human being - an anthropological (theological) approach *natura pura* and its impact on pedagogic thinking

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Anthropology as a new investigation of the human himself

In the year 1501 M. Hunt released a work *Antropologium de hominis dignitate, natura et proprietatibus* and since then the new history of European thinking has started to write: manuals which were trying to give an integrated theory about a human being outgoing of the human by himself.¹ This phenomenon was the consequence of well-known “anthropological turnover” of humaneness and renaissance. Scholastic methodology explained in *Summa* didn’t suit the new anthropology which was born at this period because the theory about the human being was dispersed into many questions and the solitary man was quasi disappearing in them. Also the metaphysical focus of scholastic wasn’t suited to it. On the contrary to emerging anthropology, the theory about human nature (*doctrina humanae*

1 Brambilla F.G. (2005), *Antropologia teologica*. Brescia, p. 45.

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naturae) at the beginning didn’t have a scientific, but descriptive, status, and it looked mainly into physically-affective dimension of a human being.² Later, in the second half of the 18th century, it has transformed into modernistic science and dealt predominantly with examination from the biological and cultural point of view.³ To this scientific profiling of anthropology another level was attached philosophical. Kant has set anthropology apart as an autonomous discipline of philosophy, in its wider or narrower meaning.⁴

Transcendental subject – new quality of human nature

As we have already suggested, the idea of anthropocentrism gradually worked into all spheres of thinking. But the “anthropological turning point” didn’t mean only “more time and energy” that human devoted to himself, or “a lot of new facts” which he acquired about himself. New interest in human didn’t relate only to “quantity” of investigation and thinking. We can also talk about “qualitative” news. By “qualitative” dimension we mean an appearance of a new degree of belief of human being to himself, towards

2 Ibidem.

3 Pelcová N. (2000), *Filozofická a pedagogická antropologie*. Praha, p. 11.

4 Since I. Kant we can talk about wider importance of anthropology as an autonomous philosophical discipline, while under closer one is understood a specific philosophical project of 20th century known as “philosophical anthropology”. Malík B. (2008), *Úvod do antropológie*. Bratislava, pp. 26-31; Brambilla F.G. (2005), *Antropologia teologica*, Queriniana, Brescia, pp. 45-46; Pelcová N. (2000), *Filozofická a pedagogická antropologie*, Karolinum, Praha, p. 11.

his own nature. The signs of such confidence we can identify as in the method of dubitation, which discovered indisputable basis in the evidence and truth of thinking (Descartes) as well as in the optimistic fascination of kindness and inner own power which is in the harmony with all the world (Rousseau).⁵ It was a new "situation" where the investigation of human took place, as well as the qualitative new clue of organizations of knowledge about him.

In the middle of anthropological paradigm known as *Imago Dei* a new anthropological paradigm *homo cogitans* was born. The gradual modification of paradigm meant leaving the principled and constitutive dependence of human on transcendent subject as well as the birth and development of a new subject which is called *transcendental*. This new subject had "two sites: the first is unusual wealth and wideness of I, ultimately involved everything, the second is (...) the right of inferring from subjective structures of individual mind to the character of humanity as such."⁶ The upraise of *transcendental subject* was closely related to a new method of creation narrations about human being. These "great narrations" were the narrations of expansion of human nature and represented a radical change of interpretation history. The main features include the following: rejection of the Christian metaphysical tradition, emancipation of cognitive/surviving entity, adaptation of religion to mind, ontology of freedom in the humanistic perspective of salvation.⁷

5 Solomon R.C. (1996), *Vzostup a pád subjektu*. Bratislava, pp. 9-15.

6 Ibidem, p. 10.

7 Rajský A. (2009), *Nihilistický kontext kultivácie mladého človeka*. Trnava, p. 20.

The conception *natura pura* as a condition for leaving the paradigm *Imago Dei* and the entrance of paradigm *homo cogitans*

The process that we have briefly indicated came out of the assumption that obvious and credible was only a human being with his abilities and the reality which he might cover by these abilities. This means a qualitative shift into the interpretation of human nature compared to the previous paradigm. While according to the paradigm *Imago dei* the reality of a human and his position in the world was explained in a dialogical way, in a God-man relation, the paradigm *homo cogitans* and its concept of *transcendental subject* explained a human from himself, thus monologues. The scheme where the human being was an organic part of the world was passed to the scheme which was based on the distance of a human to the world and which set apart from the world. The nature of human acquired a new quality because it became absolutely self-sufficient and independent from other subject (Subject).⁸

We can ask the following questions: How did it happen that philosophy didn't find a meaningful response about the human position and his nature in space defined by God-man relation? Why was it necessary to look for the new reasoning of the substance of human nature and its abilities? How did we come to the conviction that it is possible to think about human nature as about an absolutely autonomous reality?

Surprisingly we don't find the origin of an idea about independent and self-sufficient nature in the philosophy field, but in theology. Medieval scholastic theology knew the hypothesis about

8 Michňák K. (1969), *Ke kritice antropologismu ve filosofii a teologii*. Praha, pp. 40-122; Pelcová N. (2000), *Filozofická a pedagogická antropologie*. Praha, pp. 28-39.

pure nature (*natura pura*). This hypothesis was seen as a hypothetical possibility that if God wanted he could create a human being who didn't need a supernatural thus free given grace by God for fulfilling his aim. According to medieval theology this case had never happened, because of the fact that God arranged this in a way that a human being needed a supernatural grace for fulfilling his aim. Natural and supernatural were an indivisible whole and both were God's gifts. However, the hypothesis became the starting point mainly by the influence of Bellarmino (1542-1621) and Suárez (1548-1617).⁹ This shift was caused due to the effort of theology to reason the absolute freedom of God to give to a human to those who claimed that a human has the right to God's grace. A principle of Aristotle's metaphysics served to reason the freedom of God towards human being: the aim of every being must be adequate to the means of his nature. This application meant that to human nature fit only natural (original, essence constitutional) goals and a human being with his abilities is enough for their fulfilling. He could reach the vital integrity (*integritas*) if he followed inner and autonomous movement to the aims of his own nature. All that concerned God and transcendence was the part of supernatural world which was originally foreign and heteronomous to a human. It meant that supernatural goals weren't an original part of his nature.

This way later that scholastic theology defined and legitimized the dual order of the world (*duplex ordo*) not as a possible hypothesis but as a real situation where the human is situated. The world was in all its dimensions invincible divided into natural and supernatural. The whole

reality, not excluding man, was polarized. Any given order had its own mutually autonomous laws. Original world integrity disappeared which came out of the fact that nothing is independent and autonomous toward God.

The conception *natura pura* ensured absolute freedom of God to human being but also legitimized independence and self-sufficiency of human nature. A human being has no right to define and fulfil supernatural goals but at the same time he was reliant on himself and on his natural abilities. Theology itself reasoned autonomy of human being to transcendent subject (God). This way it enabled as well as directly required a possibility to think about human as about naturally autonomous subject which would have been independent to God and his historical proceeding in favour for human.

Update of the conception *natura pura* in the pedagogical thinking

Thanks to Jesuits theology this theoretical conception was transferred from theological faculties to practical thinking as well as to other faculties and to new sections which acquired their autonomous place at this period.¹⁰ In a simple way we can talk about two means of subsequent use of the conception *natura pura*:

- a. Theological use wasn't able to take up with the perspective of a human being without God on the basis of truth of faith and to nature it saw through faith and transcendence. Given conception "only" reasoned an absolute dependency of human on God in the fulfilling of supernatural goals. Autonomy of human nature was perceived

⁹ Both were key representatives of Jesuit theology in post-trident period. Essential influence of their theoretical schemes was presented in theology until 20th century.

¹⁰ Maturkanič J. (2009), *Človek na Boží obraz v optice teologickej antropológie ako predpoklad katechézy*. Bratislava, p. 31.

only secondarily as a needful consequence of God's freedom.

- b. On the other side stood the use of new philosophy and science which made from necessary consequence its basic starting point. To philosophy and science "pure brain" remained the only tool and thus it thought (if thought) about supernatural from the natural point of view. So a new theoretical space for new thinking about human being was created in the paradigm *Imago dei*. As we had already shown, it didn't take a long time and philosophy found a theoretical conception which was gradually formed into metaphysics of subject known as a *transcendental subject*.¹¹

In pedagogical thinking the second view was demonstrated in approaches that consider the human being as the first starting point. They were optimistic conceptions fascinated by a human and his abilities to such an extent that they didn't need any other facts beside his nature for determination of their whole vision about man.

J.J. Rousseau (1712-1778) was one of the key representatives of such pedagogical thinking. We want to introduce his ideas (only very briefly) because his work and the way of thinking demarcated the course of basic philosophical drifts of modernism¹² as well as post-modernism. The basic principle of his conception presented

11 In terms of chronology we could present following facts. In the year 1564 M. Baio (1513-1589) wrote a work *De prima hominis iustitia* which stimulated a birth of concept *natura pura* not as a hypothesis but as a real starting point. This was formed in the second half of the 16th century and was maintained by Jesuits theology. René Descartes (1596-1649) studied such doctrine about a human nature at Jesuits' school in La Flèche. Since Descartes we can talk about separate development of human nature—transcendental subject.

12 Solomon R.C., op. cit., p. 16-23.

in his pedagogical work¹³ was the enthusiasm for the accomplishment of transcendental subject. The key starting point of J. J. Rousseau was a conviction about good and universal nature of human that was closely connected with the reality that "a natural man is all in himself, is a numeric unit, an absolute entity who has the only relationship to himself or to peer."¹⁴ Thus his subject of investigation was how to become a real-natural man, not a man-citizen, a member of society. Being a human able to live his humanity under all circumstances and despite any culture, in congruence with original structure set by nature and accepting fate and circumstances enclosed by nature, was the basic task of education according to him. He didn't think about nature as an individual reality in its personal-historical dimension, but as about beyond-historical objective and ideal reality which was partially realized in particular personalities. An educated person was faced with the inevitable tasks which were given to him through his own nature and his only task was to respect and accept the fact who he is, what he was given by nature. The whole way of fulfilling his nature took place in the dynamism of becoming strong. For the author, this state of power was a synonym of realized ability of a human to be himself in every situation and to be self-sufficient according to specification and fulfilling aims of his nature and to be independent from others and society.

The need of self-transcendence as a basic element of educability¹⁵ and at the same time also a basic precondition of education was intended

13 *Projekt výchovy pána de Sainte – Márie* (1741); *Emil alebo O výchove* (1762); *Úvahy o poľskej vláde* (1771).

14 Rousseau J.J. (2002), *Emil alebo O výchove*. Bratislava, p. 20.

15 Nanni C. (2008), *Antropologia pedagogica*. [In:] Prellezo J.M. et al., *Dizionario di Scienze dell'educazione*. Roma, p. 83-87.

according to transcendentality of subject. Nature included both educability and education. It was a starting point and aim as well for both. Self-transcendence caused by presence and acting of external object wasn't a way of becoming a human according to the author.¹⁶ Horizon in which such thinking was getting around was a place of self-sufficiency of a human being which we also could entitle as solitude. It is interesting that Rousseau considered solitude not only as an ideal environment of education at the background of criticism of society but he perceived it also as an ideal way of realization of a human in adulthood. Then educability was not an openness for creating of community of people in which a new own value was explored but immanent tool of universal impersonal and objective definable human nature. Anyhow it was not either a precondition of free and creative realization of a person but only a place of discovering inevitable plan of humanity.

Impulses for contemporary pedagogical reflection

As we tried to point out the thing that joins optimism of modernism and post-optimistic¹⁷ nihilism of postmodernism is a creation of autonomous human world without the presence of transcendent subject which could enter the life of individual liberally and real and from which could fundamentally depend on the nature of human and realization of his goals. However, while modernism consider human in the context which exceed the individual, postmodernism stated the situation of malfunction, "the death" of *transcendental subject* and renounced an option of possibility to formulate any story about a hu-

man being which an element with prefix "trans" would be presented. A shift from a transcendental subject to a individual subject happened. Despite the fact of failure of emancipation project an ability of full realization was retained only in an anthropological horizon although in a weak¹⁸ form of personal limitation.¹⁹ This situation we consider a starting point for contemporary pedagogical reflection.²⁰

It is possible to take various attitudes to such "crisis" situation, for example to look for what is interesting and develop it, or to find possible focuses of overcoming the given state²¹, etc. From the detection of some facts we pointed out and which concerned some starting points of contemporary situation a new question is coming: if it is necessary to go deeply to the roots of its birth and if it is possible to overcome in a constructive way the crisis of contemporary education in this space which is defined by the same principles and starting points, which caused it.

16 Flores d'Arcais P. (2008), *J.J. Rousseau*. [In:] Prelezzo J.M. (et al.), op. cit., p. 1022-1025.

17 Halík T. (2005), *Noc zpovědníka*. Praha, p. 16.

18 I use the concept of "weakened" in analogy to the term of contemporary Italian philosopher G. Vattimo "weak thinking" (*pensiero debole*). Rajský A. (2009), *Nihilistický kontext kultivácie mladého človeka*. Trnava, p. 53-133.

19 Although we can agree with the fact that "attempts to delete religion out of the Earth surface resulted in a fiasco" and that "from the bottom of the crisis of modernism a new huge wave of postmodernism interest in religious and spiritual values got up", though "the interest of seeking is concentrated on the scene, to which a new denotation was given new or *inconventional religiosity*." (Dojčár M. (2010), *Medzináboženský dialóg II*. Trnava, p. 9-10). One of the basic principle of this new religiosity is its usefulness for individual.

20 Pospíšil J. (2009), *Filosofické východiská cílů výchovy a vzdělávání v období novověkého obratu*. Olomouc, p. 117-119; Gálíková Tolnaiová S. (2007), *Problém výchovy na prahu 21. storočia*. Bratislava, p. 15-23; Rajský A. (2009), *Nihilistický kontext kultivácie mladého človeka*. Trnava, p. 134-146, 157-169; Cambi F. (et al.) (2009), *Pedagogia generale, Identita, percorsi, funzione*. Roma, p. 17-96.

21 Rajský A., op. cit., p. 181-186.

As the first step the substitution of transcendent subject to transcendental was a choice and the second one the declaration of the death of *transcendental subject* and the birth of post-modern individual. As a consequence a question is coming whether a postmodern situation is not only an evidence about an impertinence of modernistic belief, of “confession” of helplessness to find the basis of strong belief in a purely anthropological horizon and pointing out on the fact where the way doesn’t exist. Nihilism would subserve an important role of reminding the failure of the modernistic project of human emancipation.

Pedagogy which was “born” in the middle of the crisis of society as an organic rational and critical reflection of education²² thereby is facing the real challenge to reevaluate the starting points of modernism and postmodernism and to reconsider if it is possible to think upon transcendent subject not only on the hypothetical level but predominantly as a real starting point of education.²³

22 Cambi F. et al. (2009), *Pedagogia generale, Identita, percorsi, funzione*. Roma, p. 11.

23 Halík T., op. cit., p. 127-147.

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Abstract

The “anthropological turning point” didn’t mean only “more time and energy”, that human devoted to himself, or “a lot of new facts” which he acquired about himself. We can also talk about “qualitative” news, by which we mean an appearance of a new degree of belief of human being to himself, towards his own nature. The aim of the author is to clarify that we don’t surprisingly find the origin of an idea about independent and self-sufficient nature in the philosophical field, but in a theological conception of the pure nature (*natura pura*). He points out the update of the new situation of the consideration of a human being in the pedagogical thinking of J. J. Rousseau. In the last part author alleges that despite the fact of failure of emancipatory project to human an ability of full realization was retained only in a weak form of personal limitation. A new question is coming from a detection of the facts which concerned some starting points of contemporary situation – if it is necessary to go more deeply to the roots of its birth. The author is convinced of the necessity to reconsider if it is possible to think upon transcendent subject not only on the hypothetical level but predominantly as a real starting point of education.

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