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Education between Utopia and Real World. Reflections with Regard to the Concept of Triunity: Family — School — Social Institutions[1]

ABSTRACT

The article refers to a threefold concept: family — school — social institutions (as presented by Professor Andrzej M. de Tchorzewski). The basic considerations relate, for example, to utopia and different ways of understanding this concept, as well as the utopian nature of the concept of triunity itself. This concept collides with many phenomena and processes that cause the deconstruction or reconstruction of its individual components (families, schools, social institutions). In addition, contemporary societies are faced — with greater or lesser success — with serious problems that also concern education and upbringing, and thus also the aforementioned triunity.

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[1] This text was inspired by the subject of the conference organised by the Department of General Pedagogy and Theory of Education at the Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow. This subject put special emphasis on the phrase "triunity: family – school – social institutions." I was invited by Professor Andrzej Michał de Tchorzewski – head of the above department, main organiser of the conference and chief editor of the magazine *Studia Paedagogica Ignatiana*. I was motivated to write this text, discreetly, but effectively, by Dr Marzena Chrost.

Education – which is also involved in this triunity – is located between a utopia and the real world. Against this background, questions and answers are formulated, something which should be done in order to make a more people-friendly (or to put it simply, more utopian) world. It is also an invitation to reflect on what must be considered as priorities in the educational process.

Introduction

Notions about the ideal social order have emerged for thousands of years. There seems to be more and more information about the ideas and their implementations in the cultures of the Far East and Americas (cultures of Native Americans), but our knowledge in this respect appears limited. What is usually referred to within the circle of European culture are Plato's views – known from his works,[2] sometimes St Augustine's views, but probably most often from the time of the Renaissance period, associated with the current of humanistic utopias.[3] As to the last ones, one of the most distinguished seems Thomas More. Nevertheless, it should be added it is usually a superficial knowledge of the figure, hardly connected with the author's views, and referring to the general knowledge – acquired in the process of school education – that the author thought up the idea of utopia.

On the understanding of utopia

Referring to More and above all to the notion of utopia shall be a background for the comments formulated in the article which allude to the concept of triunity: family – school – social institutions. This concept appears a noble pedagogic utopia. It is not tantamount to the popular understanding of this idea – as something impossible.

[2]   Cf. e.g. Platon, *Państwo. Prawa*, trans. W. Witwicki, Kęty 1998.

[3]   Cf. S. Kot, *Historia wychowania*, Warszawa 1996; S. Sztobryn, "*Historia wychowania*," in: *Pedagogika. Podstawy nauk o wychowaniu*, vol. 1, ed. B. Śliwerski, Gdańsk 2006; S. Wołoszyn, *Dzieje wychowania i myśli pedagogicznej w zarysie*, Warszawa 1964, and S. Wołoszyn, *Źródła do dziejów wychowania i myśli pedagogicznej*, vol. 1: *Od wychowania pierwotnego do końca XVIII stulecia*, Warszawa 1965.

The interpretation of this notion may be and is different. This has been emphasised by J. Szacki. According to this scholar, one may indeed understand utopia as something impossible to achieve, accomplish. This is the negative, pejorative understanding of the notion. Yet, it can also be interpreted as planning, predicting the (potential) future, and as an ideal that is worthy of effort. According to another interpretation, utopia is a kind of intellectual experiment. Last but not least, utopia may be seen as an alternative to the critically assessed reality. The Renaissance was a time which created favourable conditions for the production of the concepts today considered utopian.[4]

The concept of triunity: family – school – social institutions may be ascribed, with justification, each of the interpretations mentioned above. Perhaps it refers most clearly to the unique ideal showing the direction of endeavours and to an alternative in the face of the contemporary state of education. Each of the ways of understanding this concept (and utopia) offers an opportunity to reflect among other things on the conditions of its realisation and pedagogical values. In this sense recollecting the work by Thomas More entitled *A truly golden little book, no less beneficial than entertaining, of a republic's best state and of the new island Utopia*[5] and the suggestions included in it may inspire to take action to improve education in the current century, in fact as soon as possible.

Ideas concerning the cooperation between different institutions – including both family and school, as well as other subjects of social life – seem to be constantly propagated in the pedagogic theory and emphasised in different educational or socio-educational situations. Worthy of note among other things is for example Florian Znaniecki's educating society idea or the concept, promoted at a different time and for other reasons, calling for "the uniform upbringing of young people." The uniformity of effects was sometimes based on different assumptions, it was motivated by different factors, and its results were not the same.

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[4] Cf. J. Szacki, *Utopie*, Warszawa 1968; S. Sztobryn, *Historia wychowania*, op. cit.

[5] T. Morus, *Utopia*, trans. K. Abgarowicz, Warszawa 2001.

On triunity: family – school – social institutions

Family problems

One of the social subjects of triunity is family. A relatively clear reflection of whether the family is traditionally regarded – generally speaking – as a stable element of triunity are the changes observed in defining and in legal regulations concerning this particular social group. According to a brief encyclopaedic entry, family (from a sociological perspective) "is a basic social group found in all historically known types of societies and cultures; it consists of spouses and their children (also foster children) and relatives of spouses (in the case of polygyny – each of the wives, in the case of polyandry – each of the husbands); plays an essential role in the process of socialisation."[6]

This definition puts emphasis on family bonds – a married couple and children, as well as relatives. Cultural differences are included.

For the purpose of the language adopted in pedagogy the perspective is broader. Family is a "social group consisting of parents, their children and relatives; parents have a marital bond, parents and children – a parental bond, which forms basis for family upbringing, and a formal bond specifying parents' and children's obligations towards each other. The main functions of the family include: (1) procreation, (2) preparing children to start social life, taking care of them and bringing them up as well as providing them with an appropriate start in life, (3) running a household satisfying the needs of the family members, (4) being responsible for the lives of the family members, their behaviour, culture, health and life hardships. The contemporary family undergoes fast transformations, the former type of patriarchal family, in which the father was the only breadwinner and authority, gradually replaced by the democratic family, in which usually not only the mother but also older children also work; in such a family the relations are of friendship character, characterised by understanding and cooperation. At the same time the division into male and female duties vanishes. In the democratic family rearing conditions are more favourable. Due to the need to keep the uniformity of upbringing

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[6] *Encyklopedia popularna PWN*, Warszawa 1982, p. 665.

influence exerted on the young generation the cooperation between parents and school seems indispensable."[7]

The above definition takes into account certain changes and calls for cooperation between the family and school, that is two out of three subjects of triunity.

As emphasised by J. Mastalski, changes intensifying in the latest decades "contribute to the sort of deconstruction of the family environment."[8] The author cites St John Paul II,

> … in some countries permissive legislation based on partial and erroneous conceptions of freedom has recently created favourable conditions for the development of alleged alternative family models, no longer based on the irrevocable decision of a man and a woman, wanting to build a relationship for the whole life. Special rights the family, the original social cell, deserved before, have been extended onto other forms of relationships, onto actual relationships and civil contracts on mutual help made taking into account individual needs and interests, and in response to the demand for the social sanctioning of behaviours presented as the achievements of freedom. Who cannot see that the promotion of legal-institutional models of this kind by force gradually leads to the greater and greater weakening of the family's original right to have its status of the social subject fully accepted?[9]

Views on the family have varied considerably lately. It seems the dispute and social reality do not bode well for the uniform understanding of the family, one of the basic elements of the postulated triunity.

What complicates the situation considerably are such phenomena affecting the condition of families as: the already mentioned deconstruction of families (including the Christian ones), consumerism, global "fashions" and trends (emancipation, gender, idols), mediatisation of life (including the "adaptation of life for the purpose of screening," mixing what is real and virtual together, the screen

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[7]   W. Okoń, *Nowy słownik pedagogiczny*, Warszawa 2004, p. 337.

[8]   J. Mastalski, "*Wyzwania współczesnej rodziny w dobie przemian społecznych*," in: *Wychowanie – socjalizacja – edukacja*, ed. M. Chrost, K. Jakubiak, Kraków 2018, p. 597.

[9]   John Paul II, "Address to the lecturers and students of the Pontifical Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family" (Rome 31 May 2001), *L'Osservatore Romano* 2001, no. 9 (as cited in: J. Mastalski, "*Wyzwania współczesnej rodziny w dobie przemian społecznych*," op. cit., pp. 597–598).

triad: television, Internet, mobile phones), alternative relationships, psycho-dysfunction and spirit-dysfunction (disruption of psyche, weaker mental resistance, degradation of the transcendent factor in human life, lack of reflectiveness, trend of seizing the day, growing religious indifference, suicidal tendencies.[10] The bishop, connected with Krakow and successfully fulfilling among other things his duties of an academic, described the phenomena and processes earlier known as the construction of the family environment accurately and clearly. Bishop Professor Janusz Mastalski has specified the challenges the contemporary family has to take on. These are: retaining human dignity, affirmation of spirituality, consistent educational programme, healthy lifestyle, affirmation of marriage, and detoxification.[11]

All this shows the amount of effort required to allow the family environment to fulfil its functions in social life – including the real and considerable contribution of the assumed triunity.

Problems of school /with school

The second element of triunity is school. School is defined as:

(Gr. *schole* – leisure, free time meant for learning); (1) an educational institution designed to educate children, youth and adults and bring them up in accordance with the aims and tasks and educational /upbringing conceptions and programmes; meeting these aims is possible thanks to the properly educated teaching staff, educational supervision, premises and furnishings as well as budget guaranteed by the state treasury local authorities and other sources….[12]

Further on one reads that:

As an institution school underwent long evolution – from individual teaching in Greece, Roman school which introduced collective education, mediaeval school to the school of modern times, gradually undergoing democratisation. The contemporary school system in many countries is based on the principles of democraticness, universality, that is availability to schools of all kinds, being free of charge, uniformity and

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[10]   Cf. J. Mastalski, "*Wyzwania współczesnej rodziny w dobie przemian społecznych*," op. cit., pp. 598–604.

[11]   Ibidem, pp. 604–609.

[12]   W. Okoń, *Nowy słownik pedagogiczny*, op. cit., p. 383.

a broad scope of education. However, there is a duality of education in numerous countries....[13]

Referring to the main fragment of the definition, it must be noted that the politico-administrative control of schools tends to be over-used in our country, basic aims and tasks are changed or formulated so generally that it lays the ground for a variety of manipulations, changes in the curricula, demands of students and teachers, which triggers opposition. Formulated thirty years earlier, during the politi-cal transformation, the suggestions of preparing curricula and greater care attached to the education of teachers[14] were not treated with proper care and they did not lead to the planned result. The last dec-ade of the previous century was a time of struggle for the socio-po-litical and economic-commercial model of the state, and the issues of education – as often was and is the case – were not considered with enough care. The educational chaos was growing. The announcements of "good and modern school" proliferated, the change in the school system (introduction of the 4 x 3 years system) led to the destruc-tion of high schools, the best schools, and resulted in the four-time adaptation (at the beginning of each, 3-year-long cycle) and going through the period of studying for examinations four times (at the beginning of each cycle). The consequences of this pseudo-reform are well known. After nearly twenty years, when the situation was gradually getting more under control (among other things thanks to the effort put into the overcoming of numerous weaknesses of junior high schools), the 8 + 4 system has been restored. It is accompanied by problems with teaching staff and conflicts with parents. What has been increasing is the phenomenon of moving students from public to non-public schools. And so has homeschooling. In many respects schools are dysfunctional, and the conviction they are a place of com-prehensive development is a myth.[15] Teachers are protesting, they do not accept successive changes, they demand that work conditions are improved and remuneration increased. Chaos is still getting greater

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[13] Ibidem

[14] Cf. *Edukacja narodowym priorytetem. Raport Komitetu Ekspertów do spraw Edukacji Narodowej*, Warszawa–Kraków 1989.

[15] Ibidem, as well as: M. Dudzikowa, *Mit o szkole jako miejscu "wszechstronnego rozwoju" ucznia*, Kraków 2001.

and greater. In fact, it is the word "chaos" that is usually mentioned in associations concerning the condition of schools.

Of course, in the education system which involved hundreds of institutions and millions of people one can also see positive examples. This happens as if despite the weakness of the entire system – through the effort of men and women of passions, people developing the conditions of education on their own. Nevertheless, the general picture appears exceptionally unfavourable.

School perceived in this way – as the only institution providing compulsory education to almost all people, an institution high expectations of which are justified – arouses criticism, loses social esteem, wastes many chances for the development of individuals, and consequently the whole society.

Including school in the concept of triunity reminds of the planned role of this institution in rearing. It is at the same time a chance to offer critical evaluation of the real function of contemporary schools. At present one cannot say they are a strong, positive element of education triunity.

Social institutions

Triunity is completed by social institutions. The number, scope of operation and methods of such institutions are so varied and rich that it is hard to define their significance within triunity. An immense number of them enhance positive, pro-social educational influence, many others have different intentions and effects. What is worth-noting is the more and more frequent establishment of the institutions independent of the state structures. To some extent it shows the ineffectiveness or limitations of these last ones, and to some – greater civil activity, increased sense of the prime mover and the willingness to decide about important matters.

On the different scopes in triunity

I reckon the general picture of triunity observed in social practice allows to say that the compliance of educational programmes and influences, one is more or less aware of, can be observed in the

situations when e.g. parents make a choice concerning schools offering educational models accepted by parents. It is similar with the choice and involvement in social institutions (or using these institutions). Usually, or at least very often, these choices are motivated by religion and the outlook on life. However, other motives are not an exception. In one of the regions children from Catholic families attend schools run by evangelicals, taking the level of teaching into account above all. They remain faithful to their parents' religion, they are practising Catholics. There are also other examples. They show mutual receptiveness to otherness, maturity and responsibility, and at the same time the stability of one's own identity.

Practical manifestations of triunity probably most often concern selected issues, values, views. Common scopes may be very different. In very diversified family, school and other environments, the "unity," that is common influences, is hardly possible. What is different is also the reception of influences, the interpretation of intentions and messages. Thinking about triunity – and other similar concepts – one must remember about the systems of uniform education known from the past which brought a lot of harm. What is necessary is constant effort to make sure noble ideas won't be perverted or used against people.

Triunity – like utopia – has a variety of connotations. It is a call for better upbringing, maybe an ideal concept of education, an alternative to dispersion, chaos and incoherent upbringing influences, as well as an incentive to analyse contemporary educational processes.

Other – apart from family, school and social institutions – areas of the non-utopian world

Education is in the situation of dissonance not only between the utopian (understood as ideal) picture of the family, school and social institutions and the non-utopian reality of these subjects of social life. The world that may be described as non-utopian encompasses considerably more areas. These include the dominance of a distorted picture of history in talking about history and tradition, the reinforcement of stereotypes dividing people into the idealised Us and bad Others. What tends to be emphasised in teaching are historical

armed conflicts. A store of bad experiences determines thinking about other people, especially about Others. It is important to draw lessons from the past, but the picture of history should not veil the perception of to the present or our conceptions of the past.

The distorted picture of the world has not changed for centuries among other things under the influence of toxic policy. Policy is treated above all as an area and way of achieving power.[16] What is vanishing is getting involved in policy regarded as an activity in which useful social aims are pursued and circumstances making it possible to achieve these aims are assured.[17] These aims should take into consideration the needs and benefit of citizens and not above all of the elite, party or other social groups in power. What has been forgotten is the fact that in the past people would think policy should serve the country, make people happy. Currently it is used to bring people into conflict with one another. This can be observed both in individual communities and on an international scale.

The opposite to utopia is the activity of people involved in what is simply referred to as the armaments, primary and financial sectors. Instead of making the lives of the majority of people better, reducing poverty, improving many spheres of life, the struggle for riches, influence and world domination leads to wars and tragedies. Only a few people, the unscrupulous ones, can take advantage of the situation. The conflict between the rich and the poor, is increasing, both on the local and global scale. The wealthy, who became rich very often at the expense of the poor, do not feel like helping, they are not moved by the idea of solidarity, either. This can be seen now among other things when it comes to the problem of refugees.

The world is plagued by pathologies which are sometimes treated as a source of big (illegal) profit. This is how drug dealing and sex business – which are examples of the most lucrative businesses – proliferate. Others include the armaments and primary sectors. Is it normal that world's "gendarmes," nuclear powers, have at their disposal arsenals that are enough to destroy our globe several hundred (!)

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[16] Cf. W. Okoń, *Nowy słownik pedagogiczny*, op. cit., 299.

[17] Cf. e.g. *Mała encyklopedia wiedzy politycznej*, ed. M. Chmaj, W. Sokół, Toruń 1996; T. Lewowicki, "*Polityka oświatowa – od demona przeszłości, przez okres przemian ustrojowych – ku nowej polityce oświatowej*," in: *Edukacyjne drogi i bezdroża*, ed. R. Kwiecińska, S. Kowal, Kraków 2002.

times? If there is a need for the balance of powers which is supposed to discourage from starting a conflict, perhaps the arsenals that could destroy humankind several times would be enough? The means saved in this way could be spent on health care, eradication of poverty, supporting economy, education, culture and other useful objectives? Perhaps weapons of mass destruction are unnecessary at all? Control systems are becoming fail-safe. Can't the world be liberated from the threat of (self-)destruction? This is the utopia that billions of people do not want to/are not able to/can't imagine it could happen.

Unfortunately religion was and still is an area of conflict. It has been happening for millennia. Religions are an important areas of human activity. The motto of numerous religions is to do good, love other people. Certain religions have the same God. At the same time conflicts happen for religious reasons; religious wars are fought, terrorism has intensified recently. As can be assumed, the majority of rational beings, who take care of their relatives, want to live with dignity and in peace, harm other people in the name of the same God from time to time. It is a painful, touchy issue, which good people – as it seems – can't cope with. So far religion combined with politics, not infrequently poverty, prejudices, ambitions of spiritual leaders – as they tend to be referred to, is sometimes used to do evil. Isn't it high time one finished it? Is it necessary for the good messages taught by religion to remain the utopia that cannot be obtained?

What contributes to the consolidation of traditional areas of the non-utopian world and the creation of the new ones are the media of mass information and communication. The subject of messages, approach and language create a deformed, not infrequently consciously distorted, picture of the world. This exerts a destructive influence on recipients, fills them with anxiety, and triggers aggression. It is a well-known fact that a great number of media messages have a negative effect on the ability to think, concentrate and maintain a mental balance.[18]

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[18]　More information on the issues mentioned above can be found among others in my texts: "*Edukacja wobec odwiecznych i współczesnych problemów świata – konteksty edukacji międzykulturowej,*" *Edukacja Międzykulturowa* 2013 (2), pp. 19–37; "*O szkodliwości współczesnego języka sfery publicznej,*" in: "*Gorące*" *problemy edukacji w Polsce*, ed. T. Lewowicki, Warszawa 2007, pp. 43–50.

A problem on a global scale is a progressing degradation of natural environment. In certain regions of our globe these problems decide about life (e.g. the lack of water). What is harmful to health in Poland is air pollution.

These are examples of problems which to a large extent are generated by humans. In fact, it is often because of them that the world, the life is far from the utopia – understood as a project of reality enabling humankind to live with dignity and in peace, and in possibly good conditions.

On education – between the utopia and the non-utopian world

How should the place and duties of education be perceived in this not easy situation? There are and can be more answers to this question. In short, I believe that in education – both school and beyond school education – it is necessary to present the abovementioned problems (and the other ones regarded as important), their genesis, history and contemporary factors. These problems and people's behaviours should undergo a critical analysis. A critical examination allows to show motives, ways of behaving, areas of pro-social incentives, but also areas of pretending, lie, hypocrisy. Education should help get to know and understand the world. What is important is the preparation to use information provided by the mass media in a critical and judicious way. Education should prepare people to select valuable content and to manage in the chaos of cyberspace, mould sensitivity to manipulations and ability to perceive the issues as a whole. Of course all this should happen taking into account the possibilities, age, and level of the preparation of education participants.

So far education has fulfilled these functions to a limited degree. Disputes about the content of education concern issues that are completely different from the problems, issues and matters mentioned above.

The second area of influence should be the preparation for activities aiming to solve problems, adoption of an attitude to seek positive proposals, effective ways to change the situation for the better. It is not enough to say that schools in our country teach creativity, innovation, focussing on the reproduction of outdated or distorted knowledge. Education participants must have a chance to think in the categories

of the desired, possible and probable future, to formulate hypotheses and ask themselves questions of how to improve the situation (make it more effective, cheaper, more beautiful). These questions – posed in the Dewey School and transplanted to other schools – contributed to the development of the American innovative society. Today other nations draw a lesson from that, yet Poles hardly ever.

The above-mentioned approaches are in compliance with the doctrine/concept of critical-creative education formulated by me.[19] It seems that three decades after the political transformation education, in particular school education, in our country does not teach criticism and creativity. However, it is possible, and in my opinion necessary if education is to serve a wise and happy life in the contemporary world.

An area giving the sense and direction of efforts to education are/should be values. Passing over the disputes concerning the source, authorship and the feeling of the sort of possessing (right to) axiological perspectives, I want to use the term of universal values. Hardly pretending to define the set of all these values (which is probably not possible), I want to refer to the ones which in the reflection on values appear to be most often listed and accepted, broadly and unanimously. These include, among other things, the right to life and freedom, the subjectivity and identity of man, civil liberties, the life free of the threat of war, democracy, religious freedom, political and ideological pluralism, tolerance, education, work and health.

The values mentioned above concern various matters, different spheres of human life. They are sometimes called differently depending on the approach, sometimes combined (so to speak aggregated), organised in different ways, hierarchised. They above all convey the general picture of the sought-after values, which tend to be emphasised when reflecting on values. Most of these values are in compliance with religious norms, with Kant's principle of not doing to others what you do not accept, with the old humanistic ideas. Respecting the convictions concerning various geneses of the values, I assume that is its essential – to put it mildly – to accept these values almost

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[19]   Cf. T. Lewowicki, *Przemiany oświaty*, Warszawa 1995.

universally. It is on this, provided there is goodwill, that education may be based.[20]

The above remarks could be considered utopian, in the meaning of rejecting the fulfilment in practice. However, much depends on the people taking up educational activity, as well as on other individuals that are not indifferent to the issues of education. Numerous examples show it is possible to overcome the pattern, to offer reliable support in getting to know and understand the world. Nevertheless, there are still too few examples of this, above all in school education. Criticism, independence in thinking and courage are not infrequently undesired – both by teachers and students. Therefore it is necessary to shelter and support manifestations of unhampered education, which develops personality.

I reckon that to a large extent similar intentions could be ascribed to the author of the triunity conception. Perhaps values are also of fundamental significance there. Works by Andrzej M. de Tchorzewski, devoted to selected values: freedom, integrity, responsibility, tolerance and more general axiological reflections seem to testify to this, too.[21] This gives hope for education orienting people to the world of values, the world of fulfilled noble utopias, or perhaps – expressing it in a different way – the world liberated from the dominance of groups avid for power and riches, appropriating different areas of life, the human-friendly world.

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[20]   Ibidem.

[21]   Cf. works by A.M. de Tchorzewski cited in the bibliography.

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