

# COLLOQUIA

ANDREJ RAJSKÝ

*Faculty of Education*

*Trnava University*

*Trnava (Slovakia)*

Forum Pedagogiczne  
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## TOWARD A PHILOSOPHY OF MORAL EDUCATION<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** The paper focuses on one project of moral education that is taking place in Slovakia in a form of a school subject. Ethics Education has been implemented in Slovakia since 1993/1994 as a school subject in the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade of primary schools and since 2004/2005 in the 1<sup>st</sup> grade of primary schools. The subject Ethics Education is based on education toward prosociality in the intentions of a Spanish prosocial psychologist Robert Roche Olivar. The aim of the paper is to examine a philosophical connection between moral education and education towards prosociality.

**Keywords:** prosocial moral reasoning, prosocial behaviour, Ethics education, prosocial education.

It is perhaps not even needed to account for the fact that moral education has been a substantial part of education since the beginnings of its conscious reflection and scientific research. Johann F. Herbart, the founder of pedagogy as a modern science, considers teaching (German: *Unterricht*) and moral education – refinement of a personality (German: *Zucht* = “Bildung sittlichen Willens”) to be mutually determined and inseparable educational processes, “I confess that I cannot imagine education without teaching and *vice versa*, I do not accept teaching without education”<sup>2</sup> (Herbart 1894, p. 7), or, “Teaching without moral education is just a tool without an aim, moral education without teaching is an aim without a tool.”<sup>3</sup> (Herbart 1876, p. 347) Even though the above mentioned duality seems to be logical, natural and indisputable, in the late-modern present we often face a belief that education should

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<sup>2</sup> German: “Ich gestehe gleich hier, keinen Begriff zu haben von Erziehung ohne Unterricht, so wie ich rückwärts [...], keinen Unterricht anerkenne, der nicht erzieht.”

<sup>3</sup> German: “Unterricht ohne Zucht würde Mittel ohne Zweck, Zucht (Charakterbildung) ohne Unterricht Zweck ohne Mittel sein.”

be separated from moralism and that the dimension of moral education should be excluded from the school environment and left to the private sphere of upbringing.

The paper focuses on one project of moral education that is taking place in Slovakia in a form of a school subject. Ethics Education has been implemented in Slovakia since 1993/1994 as a school subject in the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade of primary schools (Lencz, Krížová 1993) and since 2004/2005 in the 1<sup>st</sup> grade of primary schools. The subject Ethics Education is based on **education toward prosociality** in the intentions of a Spanish prosocial psychologist Robert Roche Olivar. The aim of the paper is to examine a philosophical connection between moral education and education toward prosociality.

### **Reasons of Questioning the Correlation between *Morality and Prosociality***

Morality as a set of norms, patterns of thinking and behaviour, a required and expected action and evaluation, is fundamentally connected to a social framework: social behaviour cannot be separated from ethics. However, the question is whether and to what extent there exists a direct correlation between prosocial behaviour and moral acting, or moral education and prosocial education.

This presupposition has been challenged in theoretical discourses. There are two types of arguments in the core of this challenge:

1) The first one is based on classical moral theories, according to which, authenticity of moral attitudes is decided in interiorised consciousness independently of outer motivations or legitimisations of moral deeds. Thus, the criticism of prosocial education points out the putative flatness, superficiality, social dependence of moral norms and factual separateness of the aspects of sociality and morality in human's behaviour. Such a designated program (prosocial education) can even arouse, in classical moralists, a reflexive warning against dangerous social determinism, where autonomous morality is dissolved in anonymous current norms of changeable socio-cultural reality or a warning against collectivism, where an individual totally submits to the will of a society, a "Great Being" (A. Comte's *Grand-Être*) by socially conformist behaviour. In this sense, the warning against the identification of ethics (morality) and prosociality is logical and the issue needs to be accepted and understood. Therefore, even a greater attention needs to be paid to analysis of the quality of its connections;

2) The second type of arguments is based on a generally widespread positivist scientific foundation, within which a proved (meaning "scientific") relation is such a relation of social phenomena that can be reduced to a causal relation typical of natural sciences. Therefore, criticism of the correlation **morality – prosociality** is based on an assumption that there are no other motivations of behaviour than the ones determined by own benefits and thus, prosociality is a desired value, however, not as an ideal *telos* of moral behaviour ("pure altruism") but as a wide-ranging beneficial rule of activity ("reciprocal altruism").

After more than two decades of implementation of ethical education as a school subject in Slovakia I decided to prove the connection of morality and prosociality in educational context, both from a theoretical perspective and the perspective of empirical verification.

### **Philosophical References to the Link between Prosociality and Morality**

The issue of social and socio-ethical relationships, in their different configurations and variations, has been a key subject of philosophical discussion already from the times of the first anthropological turnover of Greek Antiquity and it remains a key subject even at present, although, it was not covered by the concept “prosociality” and derived expressions. Therefore, it would be factually incorrect to assert that prosociality as a certain characteristic of human behaviour is beyond the interest of philosophy, more precisely, ethics, or even more precisely, social ethics and pedagogical ethics. It is possible to discover contact areas of socio-ethical conceptions with a content circle of the currently used notion “prosociality” in the history of philosophy.

Among the classical sources of philosophising on “prosociality” are the most important representatives of Greek Antiquity (Plato, Aristotle), Christian Middle Ages (Greek and Latin Church Fathers, Scholastic teachers), as well as selected representatives of modernism (e.g. I. Kant, A. Smith, H. Bergson) or even postmodernism (G. Vattimo, J. Caputo, J.-L. Marion). A particular group of inspirational sources is represented by selected philosophical movements of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the present: philosophical personalism (E. Mounier, J. Lacroix, J. Maritain, R. Guardini, L. Stefanini, M. Scheler, G. Marcel, L. Hanus, etc.) and philosophy of dialogue (M. Buber, F. Rosenzweig, F. Ebner, E. Levinas, B. Waldenfels, J. Poláková).

Plato's Socrates, in the work *Republic*, explains that people focused on themselves and their profits will never be uplifted to the truly “higher”, “like the cattle look only down, bowed to the ground and tables, they only feed and mate, out of greed for these pleasures they kick and crash into each other with iron horns and hooves and kill each other” (Plato 2006, [586a]). Rejection of selfishness in favour of generosity can be found in many places in texts where Plato and Aristotle write about the value of friendship. Plato, in one of the early dialogues *Lysis*, writes about friendship as the most valuable thing for a human, more valuable than any material good (Plato 2003c, [211e]). He discusses a question whether friendship is true due to a benefit or compensation of one's own lack of something (the rich to the poor, the strong to the weak, the ill to a doctor; Plato 2003c, [215d]), or whether true friendship exists between two people who do not lack anything and their mutuality is based on something else. In the first case, it is a positive relationship of mutual help, cooperation; in the second case, it is a relationship of gratuitous friendship, altruism, following the higher good, “something that is kind first and that is [...] the purpose of all other friendship relationships” (Plato 2003c, [219c]). Plato does

not exclude the element of benefit from a prosocial relationship, but subordinates it to the virtue of reason and temperance (cf. *Symposion* 206a, 207a, *Laws* 731e). In *Laws* he openly supports prosocial attitudes, “He who wants to be a great man, must not like oneself, nor his things, but things that are just, whether they occur in greater extent in his acting or in someone else’s” (Plato 2003a, [732a]).

Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics* emphasises selfless love that “has nothing to do with the example of a relationship between a debtor and creditor” (i.e. with a both side benefit), because “philanthropists love those whom they showed benefaction, even though they are not useful to them at all and they cannot be even expected to be” (Aristoteles 1979, [1168a-b]). This statement can be cited as Aristotle’s definition of altruism. In VIII and IX book of *Nicomachean Ethics* there is a number of statements that emphasise the virtue of friendship and selfless love, e.g., “There is no need for justice where there are friends, but among the just, friendly love is also needed” (Aristoteles 1979, [1155a]), or, “Do people love the real good or only what is good for them?” (Aristoteles 1979, [1155b]); “A friend is the one who wants to act truly or seemingly good for the sake of the other or the one who wants to be and live for the sake of the other” (Aristoteles 1979, [1166a]).

According to Aristotle, we create close social bonds that ensure “what is good or pleasant or beneficial” (Aristoteles 1979, [1155b]), and thus, he differentiates among three levels of a “prosocial relationship”: a relationship for the sake of pleasure, a relationship for the sake of a benefit, a relationship for the sake of the good itself. The first two levels are utilitarian (cf. “reciprocal altruism”, or cooperation), that is why they tend to be unstable, changeable; they easily turn into jealousy or animosity. Perfect (altruistic) friendship, however, is among those who “wish the goodness, because they are good [...]; those who wish goodness to their friends due to their person, tend to be good friends” (Aristoteles 1979, [1156a]). Those who act prosocially due to altruistic reasons are not only good, but also beneficial or even pleasant (Aristoteles 1979, [1156; 1157]). In the work *Rhetoric* he returns to specification of true friendship, “We may describe friendly feeling towards any one as wishing for him what you believe to be good things – not for your own sake, but for his” (Aristoteles 1980, [1380b-1381a]). Considering Aristotle, generosity toward the other is not opposed by generosity toward oneself, they actually determine one another.

A similar balance is also contained in biblical teaching. Already in the Jewish third book of Moses we find, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Lv 19, 18). Jews understood this commandment as one of the greatest, since through its application they were supposed to liken to God, who loved a human “as the first”. Specific social norms encouraged people to care for those in need generously to help them in a selfless manner (anonymous care of orphans, widows, the elderly, the poor, etc.). In the Judaic environment, however, “a neighbour” was exclusively a member of the Israeli nation. A universalistic dimension of this commandment occurred in Christianity. Jesus repeated the primacy of this commandment and extended its applicability to all humans, “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love

your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matth 5, 43-44); “But love your enemies, do the good, lend and expect nothing in return” (Lk 6, 35). In the well-known parable about the Good Samaritan (Lk 10, 29-37) it is shown that a “neighbour” is every human who needs help. Christ’s disciple Paul writes in his hymn on love, for instance, “If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing” (1 Cor 13, 3). Selfless charity (Latin: *caritas*) has become a social norm thanks to Christian teaching that is a part of our general cultural codex even at present. The theme of charity, the help to the other and altruism became one of the central themes of theological and philosophical treatises of the Christian Middle Ages and in writing of the Greek and Latin fathers. Well-known is the statement by Augustine Aurelius, “People’s actions differ only on the basis of love. A lot of things can happen that have a semblance of good, but are not derived from the root of love (*caritas*). (...) Once and for all, therefore, I give you a brief commandment: Love and do what you want! If you keep silent, keep silent by love; if you speak, speak by love; if you correct, correct by love; if you pardon, pardon by love” (Augustine, *Tractatus* 7, 8).

Since the beginning of modernism two philosophical branches that differed in methodology and content while approaching the issue of love and charity developed in the European tradition. An intention to interpret interpersonal affection on the basis of induction and within considerations about political and social consequences of variability of relationships dominated the British empirical line. In the continental line of philosophical thinking, it was pure reason that was considered to be the source of moral behaviour, while the extrarational forces in a human (affects) are blind will that needs clairvoyant guidance. Selfless love is possible only as an outburst, an act of spirit, exempted from selfish lust. Among ethical theories that are relevant in regard to altruism and prosociality within the modern continental philosophy, it is necessary to highlight “ethics of duty” of Immanuel Kant. The so called second formula of moral law appears fundamental, “So act that you use humanity, as much in your own person as in the person of every other, always at the same time as an end and never merely as a means” (Kant 1990a, p. 91). This formula is also called a “personal norm or personal principle”. It states that a relationship to another human has to be a “non-useful” relationship, completely freed from instrumentality and selfishness. Personal norm is not a result of induction (nor mediated by empathy, compassion), but is an autonomous imperative given beforehand that configures our morality. It founds dignity and “sacredness” of the other no matter their opinions, performances and wishes. Kantian ethics, thus, avoids the risk of “immoral compassion”, criminal empathy, which is often used to excuse immoral acting based on altruistic motives.

### Toward Authentic Prosocial Ethics

Kant's "personal principle" (stated above) is followed by a personalist thesis, according to which, a personality of an individual is the final goal of any activity. A person cannot be objectified without ceasing to be a person. Max Scheler claims that we can participate in the lives of others only by following and co-realising their free acts. This effort enables to reach an attitude of spiritual love that is an opposite of all objectification (Scheler 1969, p. 75). A person is not a neutral substrate, a potential bearer of values, on the contrary, "maieutics of a person is a maieutics of a value. A person does not have a value, it is a value, the only value that ever existed. Everything that is not a value itself in its being, can have a value only in a relationship created with it by a person" (Stefanini 1954, p. 25). Philosophy of dialogue is a narrower specification of personalist philosophy. Its basic thesis is stated as follows: A space for constituting a human as a human is a dialogue. Dialogic principle (H. Cohen, F. Rosenzweig, F. Ebner, M. Buber, E. Lévinas and others), unlike the analytic-synthetic or dialectic method, propounds its own dialogue, own relationality as an irreducible and non-transferable existential condition of everything that happens within the relation or through the relation. It does not anticipate or substitute the role of the other, it does not reproduce the tendency to speak for the other, it transcends the "realm of the word It" (M. Buber) so that the original otherness and infinity is kept, dissymmetry and unpredictability (E. Lévinas), iconicity and distance (J.-L. Marion) of the other toward me. A relationship to otherness is always an asymmetric relationship; a human is always just "tracing" the other. This mysteriousness of the other as the other, however, does not cause isolation of persons; on the contrary, it represents an ethical challenge toward responsibility for the other, unconditional dialogic respect to the other amidst plurality of free beings. The first movement of a human, since early childhood, is a movement toward the others, "face to face" (E. Lévinas), openness to addressing and the addressing – a dialogue is, in the first place, a testimony of itself. A real communication, which constitutes a human as a human, is a communication of two You that are exposed to the other, not hiding their vulnerability; actually, mutual "hurting" (invasive intervening) encourages personal identification of the other.

Phenomenological analyses of "the other" (E. Husserl, E. Lévinas, M. Merleau-Ponty, B. Waldenfels, A.J. Steinbock) provide us with a prolific framework of interpretation to grasp the phenomenon of the other (and strange) without disturbing the continuity of the humane, and at the same time, with a strong ethical message of care and responsibility for the others. "Strange" is everything that lies beyond the borders of what Husserl calls "sphere of ownness". However, when a dialogue changes the order of discourse, when it is no longer an exchange between the known and the unknown ("strange"), but when it is a joint exploration of the unknown and the new "interspace", then the delineation of the own and the strange is disturbed.

A dialogue (relationship) regards mutual accompaniment of the own and the strange (Merleau-Ponty) outside territorial comparisons and territorial symmetry. Even the “own I”, in a dialogue with the other, maintains “the rest of anonymity” that is strange to its consciousness (E. Husserl). In a dialogue there is always a certain “excess of otherness” (M. Bahktin), which disrupts the territoriality of the own and the other and thus, it remains a challenge to an infinite dialogue.

B. Waldenfels (1998, p. 67–78) identifies three forms of management of the relationship to the strange: (1) appropriation, (2) expropriation and (3) interconnected experience. **Appropriation** is typical of the Western rationality – it is based on separation of the own and the strange and a placement of own view angle to self-consciousness that holds invincible primacy. It is manifested in egocentrism, logocentrism, ethnocentrism and colonialism. Moral consequences of appropriation are devastating: there is no “others’ land”, we seized it through our own viewpoint, we turned their sacred symbols into weird museum exhibits. **Expropriation** is a reaction to appropriation. It is actually voluntary surrender to the strange, disintegration of reason into polysemy of interpretations and norms, setting out for a journey without home – acquisition of the approach of the postmodern nomadism. In a relationship to the other we abandon our own identity and thus, own responsibility and ethical insistence. From the position of moral indifference we leave “the others” at the mercy of their fate, our tolerance to the others stems from the lack of interest. Coping with the other and the others within the sphere “on the border”, which enables joining and harmony among the experiencing, the co-experiencing and what is being experienced, represents a way out of this opposition of unauthentic attitudes. This **experience of interconnection of the own and the strange** is the genuine dialogic relationship that can be expressed also as “interaction with the strange”. It does not mean a fusion in a homogeneous (and demoralising) non-differentiation, nor separatist (and discriminatory) disjunction, but a certain differentiation in a joint field, simultaneous overlapping and non-overlapping like in a fabric – the one who would like to unbraid the fabric, would destroy the pattern.

The interaction with the strange is a dialogue, i.e. an alternating game of questions and answers in speaking as well as in acting. The act of speaking reaches further and deeper than the content of the declared – it is turned to the ear of the one listening, in whom we suppose initial togetherness despite difference. How to answer toward the other so that our response is authentic, i.e. respecting his being and at the same time “caring”, i.e. ethical? B. Waldenfels proposes the answer to this question in *Der Stachel des Fremden* (Waldenfels 1998, p. 255–268). The answer to the challenge and the claim of the strange, with which we meet in a relationship, is an asymmetric and antihomogenisation event: we still owe something to the other. Each I cannot be directly labelled as “the first person”, because as a born person finds himself/herself in the world that he/she did not create; he/she has a name that he/she accepted from the others; he/she discovers himself/herself in the eyes

of the others... I is always contextual and bears in itself features of unchangeable difference. The basic word I – you (M. Buber) cannot be logically seized, which is from the perspective of the Western rationality proprietary (appropriation or expropriation). Responsive phenomenology teaches us about a strange claim as “illegitimate” challenge that “does not make sense” to us, because it disturbs our ordinary styles of creating sense and conventional rules of thinking. The answer, therefore, should not be an answer of our contents, because it would efface the difference, but it should be an answer of acceptance of the claims of the other that are strange to us. “In each speaking there lies a promise that is beyond consensus of a bilateral dialogue and conformism of acting according to the rules” (Waldenfels 1998, p. 262).

Responding to claims that are directed toward me, in the sense of responsive ethics, does not fill any gaps, but accepts the offers of the other. Such responding gives what it should not, but what it finds in the responding itself. Therefore, responding is always an act of giving not from excess, but from lack and it can never be an outcome of an algorithm set beforehand like a machine for responses. Responding to strange claims is not exhausted in speech acts, but it changes to acting. Ethics, responding to the claims of the other, is included to the responsive attitude, which does not have prefabricated solutions in reserve. Ethical counterpart to the Aristotelian definition of a human as “an animal understanding and speaking” is a definition of a human as “an animal that responds”.

### **Educational Consequences**

The most influential educational impact occurs in the intimacy of a relationship between the educator and the educated, in communication of mutual testimony, in dynamics of mutual worry. In a meeting and a relationship with the other we cannot stay “neutral”. This non-neutrality against other people signifies the asymmetric responsibility (Stinkes 2013), which takes place in the environment of relationships, amidst the activity of education, care and protection. Morally justified prosocial education is reaching some educationally significant consequences:

1) it leads to a belief about a value of human that is not based on efficiency. Economical reduction of a value of human to an equivalent of their efficiency (usefulness) is the reverse side of modernism, which sees the basic paradigm of social rationality in economical calculation. Not even the experience with totalitarian regimes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is a sufficient reason to appreciate the value of “non-usefulness” in the so called hypermodern times. The will to power, predicted by Nietzsche as the main force of the future humanity, is being fulfilled in a degradation-like general acceptance of an equation “you are what you can do”. The role of prosocial education is to inculcate a holistic vision of a human, in which their value is not based on a calculation of empirical capabilities, but on dignity of a human person stemming from the “fact of being a human”;



2) it supports acquisition of socio-ethical principles: solidarity, sharing and subsidiarity. In a society, solidarity crosses the border of interests and creates a space for personal development of individuals according to their own particularities. Mutual interdependence does not mean a burden that is needs to be disposed of, but it means a challenge from which it is necessary to benefit mutually. The principle of solidarity and shared good are followed by a necessity to care for one another, while a synergic contribution is the long-term outcome. The culture of prosociality cannot be established from the above, but it is fundamentally formed by moral awareness of togetherness. The principle of subsidiarity could be re-formulated into an educational rule “I help you to help yourself”;

3) it teaches to look for answers together. In the sense of responsive ethics, the educational relationship requires a position of a co-pilgrim who does not have expert answers to questions and problems prepared beforehand, but tries simply to be-with-the other. The responsibility for the other cannot be appropriation (dominating, egocentric), nor expropriation (seeming tolerance in a way of *laissez-faire*), but it has to be coping with the strangeness of the other in the process of shared experiencing and dialogue. Asymmetry of a relationship transcends the law of the market (should give – gave); it enables to accept the other “at my home” without charging them a rent.

If the spiritual uplifting of an autonomous subject is considered to be the highest moral act, the above stated notes show that such acts are authentic only in the space of a dialogue – the nakedness of a face, fragility and fruitfulness of a creative relationship. Prosocial education, education through a dialogue and to a dialogue appears to be not only compatible or complementary with moral education, but even an eminent way of moral education.

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## KU FILOZOFII EDUKACJI MORALNEJ

**Streszczenie:** W artykule zaprezentowano rozważania teoretyczne dotyczące edukacji moralnej, która prowadzona jest na Słowacji w formie obowiązkowego przedmiotu szkolnego. Lekcje etyki wdrożono na drugim etapie kształcenia ogólnego (szkoła ponadpodstawowa) w roku szkolnym 1993/1994, natomiast od roku szkolnego 2004/2005 są one prowadzone również na pierwszym stopniu (szkoła podstawowa). Osnową edukacji moralnej w słowackim systemie oświaty jest koncepcja prospołeczności hiszpańskiego psychologa Roberta Roche’a Olivara. Celem niniejszego opracowania jest zbadanie związku zachodzącego między filozoficzną ideą edukacji moralnej a kształcenia w kierunku prospołeczności.

**Słowa kluczowe:** rozumowanie prospołeczne, zachowania prospołeczne, etyka, wychowanie moralne.

**Andrej Rajský** – doktor habilitowany nauk społecznych w zakresie pedagogiki, docent na Wydziale Pedagogicznym Uniwersytetu Trnavskiego w Trnawie (Słowacja), kierownik Katedry Studiów Pedagogicznych. Adres mejlowy: [andrej.rajsky@truni.sk](mailto:andrej.rajsky@truni.sk).