

Mateusz Melchior Mazurek  
ORCID: 0000-0002-7662-1423  
Pedagogical University of Krakow

# The Pedagogical Implications of Theological Anthropology

## ABSTRACT

The author claims that the theological conceptions of humans, even though they are empirically unverifiable (as is the case with all theology), can be inspiring for pedagogical theory and practice. According to the author, one of the most important and inspiring theological statements is the creation of the human soul directly by God.

Understanding and treating people as directly created by Infinite Love suggests that interpersonal relationships (love) are the most important things in a human life. This perspective allows the author to construct an appropriate hierarchy of aims, objectives, and instruments in upbringing and education. The ability to create deep, lasting, interpersonal relationships should be treated as the most important aim of upbringing. One should never forget that interpersonal relationships are a crucial factor (we may even say the most important instrument) in education. Paying too much attention to technological determinants and information technology tools in education while disregarding more important issues such as the personality of the teacher/educator, would be a grave error.

## KEYWORDS

anthropology, family,  
upbringing, Christianity,  
responsibility

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## Introduction

Does Christianity have anything else to tell us? Can postmodern society expect any refreshing impulses from studying old, holy books? In the author's opinion—yes, definitely. Moreover, this invigorating spirit can extend far beyond the strictly religious spheres of life. For the development of our knowledge, mainly knowledge about ourselves (with all the social changes that stem from this development), a critical look from a perspective that takes into account the experiences of past generations can be very valuable. A human being is always a child of his or her era: usually imperceptibly steeped in the cultural atmosphere and thinking along the lines of its categories, he or she naturally accepts its widespread beliefs—and sometimes superstitions—as true. It is extremely difficult to notice a mistake in our beliefs that we take for granted, so we usually do not even thematize them. This issue is even more pronounced with the spread of the linear understanding of progress (Postman, 2002; Sztompka, 2012), i.e., the belief that the present is better than the past by definition (and that the future will be even better). In such a situation, looking at things from a completely different standpoint is of great merit. Religious circles or institutions, such as the Church—which not only feels that it is a depository of revealed truths (and thus, essentially, timeless truths), but also has a very long tradition, having accumulated the experience of many generations that have experienced and somehow filtered out these revealed truths through their lives—may be a source of such invigorating, critical impulses. These truths often offer a radically different view, conditioned by different presumptions derived from another axiology, and further fortified by religious authority. This authority (of course for those who accept it) may, however, make it easy to repudiate some views or concepts, only because they are dissimilar to contemporary ones, although, on the other hand, it may also prompt a deeper understanding of contemporary educational concepts and a critical look at them (or even at the assumptions underlying them).

These remarks correspond to the general assumptions of this text and the beliefs of the author, who agrees with Marian Nowak's claim that Christianity has great potential to inspire pedagogy (Nowak, 2001). The detailed aim of the article will be to show one of the

theses of theological anthropology and to analyze its pedagogical implications in the context of contemporary determinants and educational trends. It is the author's conviction that, on the one hand, the concept of man which is derived from the Revelation (and pondered over many times by many generations) can be a source of animating ideas for pedagogical thought and practice, and, on the other, that it can also be inspiring for people who do not share the faith in the Holy Trinity or the two natures of Christ. These beliefs will be reflected in the structure of the text: the starting point will be theological reflection and an outline of the anthropological thesis, but its pedagogical implications will be analyzed through the lens of the social sciences and the contemporary socio-cultural determining factors of education.

### Love as an ontological basis of human existence

In the most general terms, the thesis considered here is that man was created by God. However, more precisely, one can say that each person was created directly by God, in the sense that at conception, God creates the soul of a specific person, which theology describes as direct animation (Dogiel, 1992). This approach has very far-reaching consequences, including for education. Since every person at the beginning of their life came into contact with Infinite Love, which called them into existence and which constitutes the ontological basis of their being, it would be difficult to assume that this would not affect them later in life. A direct encounter with God must leave a mark in a person, even if it was not recorded in their consciousness (and it could not have been, because the brain had not even started to form). This mark lies deeper, and from this deeper, not necessarily conscious or rational level, it influences a person's behavior, even by virtue of (often unconscious) longing.

René Habachi, a Lebanese thinker with Egyptian roots, when exploring the issue of paternity, stated that if we assumed someone's appearance in the world was a matter of chance, then their existence as a human being would be absurd. It is different when we posit that someone's birth was the result of a free, loving decision of the parents. Thus, the genesis of a person's life has an impact on their existence (Habachi, 1968). Considered at the psychological level,

the statement that the circumstances surrounding the beginning of a person's life affect their later existence is true, but quite banal. What inspires Habachi's thought is looking at this problem at the ontological level. Importantly, from the point of view presented here, it is a one-sided approach, because it only considers the human side of being brought to existence. Taking the view of direct animation, apart from human parents (whose contribution is undeniable), another factor must be taken into account: the creative action of God, which is never accidental and whose motivation is always love. However, the actions of parents may result from a whole range of motivations, sometimes fundamentally different from the divine one (which, as has been said, is always the same). In this situation, we are dealing with a certain dissonance, a rift at the ontological level, which—as one might expect—will also manifest itself on the existential level (psychological, emotional, or moral).

If it is true that every human being bears an imprint of Infinite Love and of longing for it, then a lot (if not all) of human behavior can be interpreted in terms of searching for love. For example, is the aggressive behavior of a gang member subject to this interpretation? Of course! This young man, with very short hair, dressed in sportswear, at his own level (below the rational level), likely reasons as follows: "If someone is afraid of me, it means I am somehow important to them and I feel 'a little loved.'" This category of "a little loved" is relevant for further discussion, for which the point of departure is the thesis that the search for love is the fundamental, deepest driver of human action. Someone else may wear a business suit instead of a tracksuit and reach higher and higher positions to gain power over other people and thus feel important (a little bit loved), while another person may devote all their energy to making money, reasoning (subconsciously) that when they earn money, they will be admired by the people around them—that is, they will feel a little loved. Behaviors which are sometimes diametrically different can be explained by the same need. This search for love manifests itself in billions of very individual ways, among which the most common one seems to be the accumulation of resources that has had a utilitarian as well as a symbolic dimension for centuries (Baudrillard, 2006).

For these considerations, it is important that this search may be more or less intense (sometimes it may be desperate) and may take

on distorted forms, i.e., reveal itself in various deviant behaviors. We are dealing with a search for substitutes. There is a whole spectrum of realities in which a human being seeks fulfillment of their existence (happiness), and an almost infinite number of strategies and methods of this search. The answer to why a particular person chooses these not others is always very complex. A whole range of socio-cultural and individual factors influences this. Very generally speaking, it can be said that the more unmet this need is, the more desperate the search will be and the more likely it will turn to looking for substitutes, i.e. it will manifest itself in deviant behavior. In many cases, ontological dissonance (mentioned earlier when discussing Habachi) can explain this, especially since it is often amplified by later experience. In short, a person who was not wanted and loved by their parents at the beginning of their life also very often does not feel wanted and loved later on. In such a situation, they probably will not believe that love exists at all. This will not cause this person to lose the longing in their heart, but it will probably cause them to deviantly try to satisfy this longing or at least drown it out.

“Deviance” is understood here more broadly than under the term “deviant behavior.” This desperate search for surrogates for love embraces the entire field of deviant and risky behavior, but is a broader concept. It also embraces behaviors which are socially acceptable or even morally good in themselves, but which become pathological because of unsuitable motivation. One example is professional work (a socially acceptable and morally good activity) carried out with such intensity that it turns into an obstacle in pursuing other values, i.e., it destroys the family life and the health of a workaholic. In light of the anthropological concept discussed here, what can explain this pathological intensity is the illusion, the false belief—usually not fully realized—that professional and economic success can bring a person a sense of accomplishment, and satisfy their deepest needs. An attempt to meet a spiritual need with material goods is destined to fail. This can cause a twofold reaction, though: either a paradigm shift or following the “more of the same” principle—the fact that the material goods I acquired did not make me happy can be interpreted as proof that I must obtain many more.

This deviant search for love is obviously close to the meaning of the category of sin. The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines its

effects as an “unhealthy attachment to creatures” (CCC, 1472). In the Hebrew Bible, the noun *ḥaṭṭā’ī* (translated as sin) most often occurs in the sense of “missing the target” (Kręcidło, 2007). Both of these approaches, though in different ways, accentuate the idea of a fundamental error. In existential terms, sin can be defined as the pursuit of love which is deformed in such a way that when searching for it, the person actually moves away from it.

Before proceeding to discuss the detailed pedagogical implications of the statement that love is the ontological basis of human existence and the main human need, it is worth stopping for a moment to justify this thesis, also because this discussion is guided by the ambition to go beyond the confessional framework. The claim that the human soul was created by God is just as unprovable as the very existence of God, which must be an empirically unprovable (or unfalsifiable) reality. The point is not only that we should leave space for faith, but also that if the opposite is true, that if we had to accept that God is a finite being, we have created an adequate (i.e., wholly encompassing him) intellectual apparatus. God’s infinity, thanks to which he eludes the cognitive tools constructed by finite human reason, did not stop a whole host of thinkers (including St. Thomas) from formulating arguments for the existence of God. Their efforts were not pointless, because the use of reason can produce arguments used to show that the claim that God exists is more likely and better justified than the opposite.

The situation is similar with the statement that love is the ontological basis of human existence.

## Arguments for the concept of direct animation in the discoveries of specific sciences

The following section will be an attempt at sketching a few examples from various social sciences, which, in the author’s understanding, seem to confirm the concept of direct animation. Of course, this is not evidence *sensu stricto*. Rather, they will be examples that can be interpreted in this way: we are not certain (in the sense of empirical evidence) that a human being was created by Infinite Love, but he/she functions in many areas as if he/she was.

Sociology at its birth brought the discovery of the relationship between the strength of social ties and the number of suicides (Durkheim, 1897/2006). Of course, this is not the only factor, but it turns out to be a crucial one on the macro-scale. Almost a century and a half has passed since Émile Durkheim's research, and since then we have observed one more regularity: the number of suicides increases with the development of civilization in a given community (Zwoliński, 2013). Thus, it turns out that as living conditions improve but social ties simultaneously weaken, the percentage of gravely unhappy people rises. From the point of view of the anthropological theory which is discussed here, the explanation seems simple: a person feels happy, feels that their life makes sense, when they love and feel loved. This is our rudimentary need.

Social psychology, i.e., the science that deals with the study of mutual interpersonal influences, already confirms with its existence and with every discovery that man is a social being by nature (Aronson, 2002). The many mechanisms that tune us in to the expectations and behaviors of the people around us can be interpreted in the following way: a human being spontaneously seeks acceptance and a sense of community with others, because thanks to this they feel a little loved.

Transactional analysis describes school interactions as a game system, resulting in a "carrot"—prizes and praise—or a "stick"—punishment and reprimands—for the student (Jagięła, 2007). My observations as a teacher have repeatedly confirmed that, indeed, students (especially those who rarely receive "carrots") actively seek "sticks." Punishment is a form of reward for them, because when they are punished or reprimanded, someone pays attention to them, they feel noticed, i.e., a little bit loved.

Research on prevention shows very clearly that family ties are the most important preventative factor which best protects a child against the entire spectrum of risky behavior (Wojcieszek, 2019; Grzelak, 2009, 2015). This has already been mentioned: the more a person feels loved, the less desperately they look for a substitute for happiness.

## Direct animation and school education

Understanding a person as a being for whom interpersonal relationships are absolutely fundamental could contribute to a reversal (in my view, in the right direction) of the hierarchy of educational goals. The tasks of the teacher and school are defined in terms of didactic and educational activities, while in practice, the former is assigned incomparably greater importance. The reasons for this are complex, for example, the results of didactic work are much more easily measurable, so teachers are mainly held accountable for them and focus on them. This leads to neglect of the most important matters because the majority of one's energy is invested in secondary matters. From both an individual and a societal point of view, it is much more important what kind of person our student will be in the future (and hence what relationships they will establish) than what kind of knowledge and skills they will possess. For example, if we equip a person with solid IT skills but they become a drug addict, what is the use for them and society? Furthermore, if we provide someone with extensive knowledge of chemistry and physics and they become a psychopath, then their abilities may be harmful to society.

It is also worth wondering how much space in the educational process is devoted to cultivating this absolutely key skill: the ability to create deep interpersonal bonds. This is not about learning to work together (which is currently being discussed more and more), but about something much deeper. Collaboration, i.e., joint effort to achieve a practical goal, is obviously an important and useful ability, but I can collaborate (sometimes I have to) with people with whom I have no deep bonds (I do not love them nor do they love me). If this leads to a young generation who will cooperate efficiently as adults, thus accelerating economic development, but at the same time they become a collection of alienated people who do not love anyone, I believe that we will fail as a society. The suicide rate will be the measure of this society.

The state guidelines for the implementation of educational policy do not instruct educators to “develop the ability to create deep and lasting interpersonal relationships.” This may, however, testify to the humble prudence of the decision-makers. Unfortunately, or fortunately, schools have limited influence on young people. They are



not able to shape a student's growth freely and in every field. Some express the quite common belief that a properly planned education will be the cure for all the evil of this world (Postman, 2002), but I think this is extremely naïve. School is not the only—or even not the most important—educational setting. In the area referred to here, the family has an incomparably greater role to fulfil, since it is the most natural space where a person can experience deep ties with others and thus learn to create them. This topic will be discussed in more detail below, because for the clarity of the argument, it seems beneficial to discuss one more issue related to school.

Another area in which adequate anthropology can be helpful and inspirational in thinking about school is the issue of specific tools and their importance in didactic and educational activities. In education, the crucial factor—one can say the most important tool—is the teacher's personality (Kupisiewicz, 1994), and forming this is the first task indicated by pedagogical deontology (Tchorzewski, 2016). Indeed, it is hard to expect that a dependent teacher should shape independent personalities of students (Śnieżyński, 1995; Kawecki, 2004). Teachers, even if they think that they only teach, always raise children, although not always consciously (Mastalski, 2005). Moreover, it has been known for a long time that a teacher's personality also significantly influences the effectiveness of their purely didactic work (Okoń, 1968; Kupisiewicz, 1972; Márquez & Rossa, 2019). With the advances in the knowledge of the human brain, we learn more and more about the significance of interpersonal factors in the learning process, about the social nature of the brain, and about the existence and functioning of brain modules which become activated only in contact with another person (Márquez & Rossa, 2019; Żylińska, 2013). We are discovering more and more about the paramount importance of a teacher's personality traits, but do we draw relevant, practical conclusions from this knowledge? Are personality factors made a priority in the system of preparing and then selecting candidates for the teaching profession? To everyone who knows the reality of Polish education, this question will probably seem only rhetorical. One may also wonder whether pedagogical theory pays enough attention to these issues.

## Direct animation and family upbringing

The utmost importance of the family in education and its fundamental impact on a child's development is quite obvious in psychology and pedagogy. New branches of human knowledge (e.g., interpersonal neuroscience) broaden our understanding of the mechanisms of this influence (Márquez & Rossa, 2019). It is worth noting that in addition to all psychological factors that predestine the family to the role of the primary educational setting, another factor (which can be called ontological) originates from the concept of direct animation: it is the space of this first encounter with love (which created man). The main thesis of these considerations could be summarized as follows: love is the ontological basis and the deepest meaning of human existence, so it is love that should be both the goal and the method of education. In other words, upbringing (if it is to aid the development and achievement of the fullness of humanity) should help the student and teach them to love others through the experience of being loved.

Does the modern family adequately fulfill this educational mission? Does it pay proper attention to it? The diagnosis is extremely difficult. Even overlooking the problems of establishing the criteria and indicators (what is an adequate degree?), in analyzing upbringing in a modern family, we come across a huge variety of attitudes. The research of the Mom and Dad Foundation [*Fundacja Mamy i Taty*] has identified four basic types of families. One is the “designing family,” which places great emphasis on the child's future career and transfers a typically corporate incentive system based on short-term goals and awards to the family. The polar opposite is a family (usually with many children), in which parents try to support children and compensate for their low material status (Woliński, 2016). As a result of the segmentation of social life which resembles a honeycomb (Nowak-Dziemianowicz, 2012), we are dealing with an increasing variety of approaches. In addition, we can observe not only different rates of change in different areas (Bell, 1998), but even opposing trends in different segments of society. Speaking about the modern family, we can very often notice that the parents' basic expectation towards children is that they should be as little absorbing as possible (Nowak-Dziemianowicz, 2006). On the other hand, one can also notice the phenomenon of “micro-control,” that is, the attitudes

of parents who, using vast resources of time and energy, carefully plan and control almost every step of the child's life, most often focusing on developing skills which they perceive as being helpful in a future career (Honoré, 2011). Despite the fundamental differences between these parental attitudes, it can be assumed that the effects of upbringing in preparation for love will not be very good. All generalizations referring to such a complex issue as family relationships run the risk of exclusion of significant issues and trends which contradict the dominant ones. If we were tempted to delineate the basic tendency (remembering the above), it would be rather pessimistic. In general, instrumental relationships are displacing those deeply human, autotelic ones (Sztompka, 2012); even in the case of intimate relationships, contract and exchange are replacing ties based on loyalty and gratitude (Woliński, 2016). Compared to previous generations, today's children are much better off, but have worse conditions for learning to love.

So what can we do? Considering that these harmful trends come from powerful social processes (such as the development of consumerism), counteracting them will be extremely difficult, which does not mean that we should not try. Social campaigns promoting the value of parenthood and appropriate attitudes are such a commendable effort. Also, schools should continue the extremely difficult mission of pedagogizing parents and sensitizing them to the importance of cultivating relationships with their children. The state—to the appropriate extent—should strengthen the institution of the family and ensure its durability. Finally, the Church, by carrying out its fundamental mission—an element of which is to promote a hierarchy of values that places love above material goods or professional success—can play a significant role. Just as the state has the tools to create suitable conditions (one can say external conditions) for the proper functioning of families, so the Church has its own tools (and task) for shaping a human being primarily from within, i.e., their beliefs and attitudes.

It is also a challenge for theoreticians, and although their theories do not have a direct impact on parental attitudes, in the long run, scholarly reflection affects the views and, in consequence, the attitudes of the masses. If the views presented above are correct, then love should become a key category in educational discourse. Perhaps,

thanks to this, it will be possible to slightly de-professionalize educational activities. Such a postulate may seem absurd at first glance, but the point is not educators behaving less professionally, but to put children's education on the shoulder of professionals to a lesser extent. We can witness education being treated as the domain of specialists and the tendency to assign educational tasks and responsibilities to them (Woliński, 2016). It seems advisable to counteract this disappearance of parents' sense of educational responsibility.

The disappearance of the sense of educational responsibility is worth considering for a moment. It has many dimensions. First of all, we can observe a growing reluctance to undertake such efforts at all, which can be seen, for example, in the decreasing birth rates. In the consumer culture of eternal fun, to many people the threshold of maturity—which ought to be understood as transcending responsibility for oneself and extending it to other people—appears not as an opportunity for development and actualization of their humanity (Ablewicz, 2003), but rather as a threat to their highest values, such as being carefree and having fun (Nowak-Dziemianowicz, 2006). The philosophy of individualism, in which autonomy is the prime value (Nowak-Dziemianowicz, 2012) and the primary commitment of a self-reliant person is to look after themselves mainly (Tchorzewski, 2002), is certainly not conducive to taking responsibility for others, i.e., parenthood.

These processes also affect people who are already parents and sap their willingness to take parental responsibility, in the sense that they weaken their involvement. The reasoning (probably most often not conscious, but rather subconscious) may go as follows: "I can no longer avoid becoming a parent and the losses (in terms of convenience and pleasures) and obligations associated with it, but I can always minimize these losses and make the commitments less acute. I can do this in a simple and socially acceptable way, by handing over my child's upbringing to experts. Anyway, it will be better for everyone—especially for my child!" The modern man may honestly believe this. First of all, in consumer-centered axiology, what is easy and pleasant is equated with what is good and right. Secondly, the ubiquitous cultural message in which a person is responsible only to themselves and for themselves, and self-fulfillment and self-development (considered in professional rather than moral or spiritual terms) is not

only the highest right, but even a duty. It may cause some discomfort or even harm in a person burdened with responsibility for others and commitments which consume time and energy, and thus hindering the fulfillment of the most important commitment (towards oneself and one's own self-fulfillment). Parenting and its requirements can therefore be seen as a situation that should be avoided in the name of responsibility (for oneself).

The causes of dwindling parental responsibility may also be different. The axionormative chaos in which we live, without fixed points of reference, also causes confusion in parents. Paweł Woliński discusses the issue of transferring educational responsibility to specialists, citing research wherein nearly 40% of parents declared that they completely abandoned any attempts to raise their children, and 30% indicated that the reason for this was the feeling of being lost, expressed by the statement, "I don't know how to live myself, so how can I bring up a child" (Woliński, 2016). This social sense of being lost is also overlapped by the specific sense of being a parent. Many modern parents not only get lost in the fluid world of fuzzy values, but they also feel lost on strictly educational issues. In other words, they feel they do not know how to live, even less how to raise their children. This can influence the normative overload (affecting all educators), i.e., knowledge which contains a huge degree and scope of valence (Nowak-Dziemianowicz, 2012). Indeed, one can get the impression that a modern educator should always be beautiful, young, smiling, and relaxed, and should have a lot of time and inexhaustible patience. If they fail to meet any of these conditions, they cause irreparable damage to the students' psyche. The disposition for raising children is further weakened by the suspicion, which was successfully instilled by anti-educators, as to the legitimacy of any influence on the part of adults (Śliwowski, 2004). It is worth noting that anti-pedagogical anthropology—claiming that a child is a wonderful and complete being who knows their own needs best, and therefore there is no legitimate responsibility for others—is always a harmful usurpation (Tchorzewski, 2017) and harmonizes well with the philosophy of individualism. Therefore, a modern parent hears, on the one hand, that the only commitments one cannot shirk are those which one has towards oneself, and on the other hand, that perceiving oneself as a person who is responsible (and therefore also authorized to decide)

for a child constitutes an attack on the child's autonomy, dignity, and fundamental human rights. It is not surprising that many parents proclaim, "I give up, then."

The technologization of our lives can be another reason for the weakening of parental responsibility. We are increasingly surrounded by devices which—especially in the event of a failure—require specialized care. To illustrate this change: my father repaired his Polonez using simple tools. I would not attempt to repair any failure on my car without the help of an expert (armed with professional knowledge and professional tools). Due to this technologization, an increasing part of our everyday life consists of technical devices which operate based on algorithmic principles, and which require the intervention of a specialist when they break. Perhaps, in a way we are transferring this everyday experience to the human world (including upbringing). In pedagogy, you can find such treatment of upbringing methods or techniques as if they were to constitute an algorithm reliably leading to the achievement of a specific goal (Tchorzewski, 2016). In educational practice, unfortunately, you can also see this type of thinking: the child is "broken," is not functioning properly, so let a specialist "fix" them. This expert may be a professional educator or a doctor applying the appropriate pill. Is the exponentially growing number of prescriptions for Ritalin—the "magic pills" turning hyperactive children into "good little angels" (Giddens, 2012)—not the result of such thinking?

This thinking contains a fundamental error: the child is not a device whose "operation" can be algorithmized and (for the benefit of all) entrusted to specialists, but a person who first of all needs to feel loved.

## Conclusion

The foundation of every sensible pedagogical reflection is—a more or less specific and clearly expressed—answer to the question of who a human being is. Christian anthropology sees humans as being created out of love and called to love. This view allows us to restore the deeply human character of education.

Retrieving this profoundly human dimension not only of child upbringing, but also of life in general—meaning restoring the

primacy of mankind over a thing and the primacy of love over comfort or pleasure—can be a remedy for many social crises. These crises are so severe that if we, as a society, do not find a way out, future generations will desperately lack environments where they can learn to love. In any case, future generations will probably be acutely missing.

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## ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE

Mateusz Melchior Mazurek, MA  
 Pedagogical University of Krakow  
 Faculty of Social Sciences  
 Institute of Educational Sciences  
 e-mail: anawim.j@gmail.com