

# Social maladjustment as a result of exclusion from social life. Reflections from the point of view of the neo-thomistic philosophy of education

## Disadattamento sociale come esito dell'esclusione dalla vita sociale. Riflessioni dal punto di vista della filosofia neo-tomista dell'educazione

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*This article constitutes an attempt to answer a question about the causal relationship between social maladjustment and exclusion. The analysis has been conducted in the light of the Neo-Thomistic philosophy of education with the use of works by mainly Polish representatives of the notion. The research is introduced with a reflection upon human beings and the specificity of community relations created by them. Upon these foundations, the author has attempted to characterise social exclusion and maladjustment in the light of Neo-Thomistic thought. The author's reflection reveals the key meaning of an individual's recognition, appreciation and her striving for the common good for the sake of the process of his/her social inclusion. Consequently, the author has raised the issue of moral education as a process aimed at teaching an individual how to recognise and realise the common good. Understood as the development of moral virtues, representatives of the Polish tradition of Neo-Thomistic philosophy think that moral education is connected with actions. The quality of an action depends, in turn, on the good, for which a community surrounding a developing individual will strive. The author's research has led to the conclusion that, in the light of Neo-Thomism, social exclusion is a primal phenomenon that leads to social maladjustment.*

Key words:

**social maladjustment, social exclusion,  
common good, moral development, Neo-Thomistic pedagogy**

*Questo articolo costituisce un tentativo di rispondere a una domanda sulla relazione causale tra disadattamento sociale ed esclusione. L'analisi è stata condotta alla luce della filosofia Neo-Tomista dell'educazione considerando principalmente opere di studiosi polacchi in questo ambito. La ricerca viene introdotta da una riflessione sugli esseri umani e sulla specificità delle relazioni comunitarie da loro create. Su queste basi, l'autore ha tentato di caratterizzare l'esclusione sociale e il disadattamento alla luce del pensiero neo-tomista. La riflessione dell'autore rivela il significato chiave riposto nel riconoscimento, nell'apprezzamento e nella ricerca del bene comune da parte dell'individuo in nome del suo processo di inclusione sociale. Conseguentemente, l'autore ha sollevato la questione dell'educazione morale come un processo volto a insegnare a un individuo come riconoscere e realizzare il bene comune. Intendendo quest'ultimo come sviluppo delle virtù morali, si i rappresentanti della tradizione polacca della filosofia Neo-Tomista pensano che l'educazione morale sia connessa con le azioni. La qualità di un'azione dipende, a sua volta, dal bene, per il quale si impegnerà una comunità che circonda un individuo che sta crescendo. La ricerca dell'autore ha portato alla conclusione che, alla luce del Neo-Tomismo, l'esclusione sociale è un fenomeno originario che conduce al disadattamento sociale.*

Parole chiave:

**disadattamento sociale, esclusione sociale,  
bene comune, sviluppo morale, pedagogia Neo-Tomista**

## **Social maladjustment as a result of exclusion from social life. Reflections from the point of view of the neo-thomistic philosophy of education**

The article is an attempt to analyse the phenomena of social maladjustment and exclusion from the point of view of Neo-Thomistic philosophy. It is, consequently, an attempt to answer the question about a causal relationship between the phenomena. Social maladjustment and social exclusion are two interlinked phenomena which, in a sense, constitute two aspects within a single reality. However, one can also differentiate between the two and pose the question of which of the two appears earlier: maladjustment or exclusion?

The afore-mentioned question has been posed due to educational problems. The task of education is, amongst others, to introduce an individual into social life. Social maladjustment and social exclusion may be deemed a failure of education. One answer appears earlier to the question of which of the phenomena (maladjustment or exclusion) may indicate the areas to be searched to find educational failures. Does a mistake involve exclusion of an individual from social life, which makes him/her unable to function among other people, or may an individual not have gained appropriate skills and competences, which makes her unable to find her own place in the life of a community?

When analysing the phenomena of social maladjustment and social exclusion in the context of education, one proceeds to build a theoretical relationship between them. According to this relation, social maladjustment proves to be a source of exclusion. This relationship becomes an assumption lying at the foundations of educational activities. Activities aimed at social inclusion are then designed to be aimed directly at social adjustment through the development of the social skills and competencies desired by an individual in social life. However, the fact that the initiative has only been minimally effective raises doubts as to whether, as a result of social maladjustment, the assumption of the appearance of exclusion, although indiscriminately accepted, is still correct.

This reflection is to be located in the sphere of the philosophy of education and refers both to Neo-Thomistic philosophy and pedagogy; in particular, Thomistic personalism. It is considered within the system of thought which, on the one hand, means that there is no discussion of other aspects of the problem. However, on the other hand, it allows for greater precision in considering the problem. The starting point for analysis includes a brief description of community relationships created by human beings and an analysis of the terms indicated in the article; namely 'exclusion' and 'maladjustment'.

## 1. Introductory notes about a human being and a community

Although a social group requires indication to complement the terms of ‘maladjustment’ and ‘exclusion’, analysis of the terms also needs to be preceded by a reflection upon human reality, because social relations are secondary to human beings, their existence and characteristics. After all, it is people that create a society. Without going deep into anthropological thought, let us focus only on a certain number of issues, which are important from the point of view of the question posed above. These are the fundamental theses of Neo-Thomistic philosophy.

Firstly, a human being is not only a physical individual with sensual cognition and sensual desire, but in using the data provided by the senses, she is capable both of rational cognisance and rational desire. In other words, her reason and will can recognise goods, which are imperceptible to the senses, where the choice of rational goods is an aim to be accomplished (Gilson, 1971; Krąpiec, 1983; Starnawski, 2008). At the same time, mental power is not always manifested in specific acts. Sometimes a human being does not choose goods recognised by reason because she succumbs to desires appearing at the sensual level or to emotions connected with functioning in a group and the pressure exerted by a group. In such acts, a human being does not reveal her thoughtful nature (Woroniecki, 2000; Maritain, 1968; Maritain, 1990); Wojtyła, 1994; Horowski, 2016, pp. 231-244). An act resulting from sensual desires is evaluated as negative from the perspective of the Neo-Thomistic philosophy. Representatives of this philosophy emphasise that a human is a rational being and, therefore, her acts should start with a rational evaluation of the good and not be realised beyond reasoning and at the sensual level (Maritain, 1950; Michalski, 1984; Starnawski, 2012).

Secondly, the spiritual character of mental power – i.e. reason and will – constitutes a prerequisite for the assumption that a human being has a particular dignity. Instead, it is something more than a part of a group; it is both an aim and a person herself. This leads to an argument of an ethical nature that a human being should be treated individually and with respect for her dignity. In other words, she cannot be treated instrumentally and as a tool for satisfaction of its own needs (Maritain, 1945; Gogacz, 1998; Crosby, 1996; Chudy, 2009; Wąlejko, 2017, pp. 113-128).

Thirdly, the argument of acting thoughtfully, as well as for personal and non-instrumental treatment (with respect for dignity), becomes a source of dilemmas relating to social relations, especially to the construction of a community by people in a group. When approaching a community, one may ask the question of whether in a situation where an individual sacrifices her time, effort or even life for the sake of a group, does the individual become an object and is so treated instrumentally i.e. does the individual allow herself to become an object in this situation?

According to Neo-Thomistic thought, there is no risk of instrumental treatment when there is a common good, towards which all the members of a group strive (Maritain, 1951; Wojtyła, 1994; Gogacz, 1985). In this case,

they do not use one another to obtain personal goods, but they complement one another in striving for the good, which they would not be able to obtain as individuals or would prove more difficult to obtain; hence, every individual contributes different goods and skills. If there is no common good, cooperation involves the coordination of two sets of aspirations for two different goods; a scenario in which individuals use one another.

The pattern indicated is best seen through particular examples. For instance, cooperation between spouses striving for the provision of best care and education for their child is both conditioned upon personal decisions and focuses on common good, which means that there is no objectification in this case. In contrast, cooperation between a prostitute and her customer may be conditioned upon the thoughtful permission of both individuals. However, it does not constitute an aspiration towards the common good, i.e. both persons treat each other instrumentally. Their acts are meant to obtain two different goods; namely, sensual pleasure and specific material goods.

The afore-mentioned examples are schematic and easy to judge. However, the judgement of specific causes is much more difficult in everyday life. People also marry to obtain specific advantages, while spouses strive for various goods and use each other in everyday life; for example, when a woman wants to marry because of the other person's property and the other person chooses her because of her physical appearance.

In concluding and considering further deliberations, it should be emphasised that a community is established only where a common good is chosen (thoughtfully and freely) collectively by all the members of a group. The existence of a community does not mean the existence of relations in which an individual is deprived of subjectivity, entailing that they are not able to make decisions in accordance with the truth revealed by reason or relations, in which such decisions lead to mutual objectification of cooperating subjects. Hence, the theses outlined above are particularly important for further analysis, as part of which an attempt will be made to determine the nature of social exclusion and maladjustment.

## **2. An attempt of description of social exclusion in the context of Neo-Thomistic philosophy**

In his work entitled 'A Person and Act', Karol Wojtyła refers to attitudes he characterises as either attitudes of participation in a community or attitudes of alienation from a community (Wojtyła, 1994). In reference to this differentiation, I will try to explain the meaning of social exclusion.

According to Wojtyła, attitudes combining participation in a community and the preservation of the subjectivity of one's own activities are attitudes of solidarity and objection. A man showing solidarity with others makes a decision to act with others being convinced of the value of the good, for which members of a given group strive and wish to support members of the group in their aspirations. The attitude of objection is also a manifestation of

concern for the common good. However, this attitude is adopted as a consequence of a conviction that, without selected methods and means, it will be impossible to achieve the good that unites people in a community.

Excluding elements such as participation or subjectivity, the attitudes to be considered here are attitudes of conformism or avoidance. A man who is not interested in the good that unifies a given community, for instance, resigns from participation in a community adopting the attitude of avoidance. However, conformism is an attitude of apparent participation in a community. This is because, on the one hand, an individual belongs formally to a group but, on the other hand, she is indifferent to the good for which others strive. As a consequence, he/she is not a subject, but merely a tool for the accomplishment of aims set by others.

The above observations lead to the identification of two types of exclusion. One of them involves positioning oneself out of a community, while the other involves resignation from subjectivity. Wojtyła's analysis is made from the point of view of a solitary person. Wojtyła does not specify conditions for participation in a community which a community creates itself. For the purposes of our analysis, such a specification is extremely important. It should be noted that a community may stay open to participation of an individual or it may not be interested in cooperation with a given individual. Therefore, the first type of exclusion – i.e. leaving a community – may result from avoidance of a situation where a community is interested in cooperation with a given individual it may be or a consequence of the activities of a community to reject cooperation with the individual.

The other type of exclusion is the deprivation of subjectivity, i.e. exclusion of thoughtful and free activities of a given individual. This may be a result of the passivity of the individual or the community, depriving the individual of the right to make decisions which leads to the individual being treated instrumentally. Hence, upon adding a variable connected with specificity of activities of a community, we obtain four types of exclusion, namely:

- avoidance, i.e. leaving a community regardless of whether a community is interested in cooperation with an individual or not;
- exclusion from a community even if an individual wants to participate in it;
- conformism, involving indifference to a common good and thus reducing activity in order to adjust to it;
- deprivation of subjectivity connected with the existence of structures that do not permit decision-making.

It is worth noting that in social life one can distinguish, above all, between the first and second type of exclusion; here, the unemployed, homeless and prisoners are perceived as excluded. However, the third and fourth type of exclusion is disregarded, even if a many members of contemporary societies or professional communities are subject to these types of exclusion.

In reference to the fourth type of exclusion, let us stop and analyse the

principles of activities of a social worker. Here, we can state that a social worker is barely able to make decisions and her activities involve following procedures. Hence, a social worker uses her reason exclusively instrumentally in her work and is not authorised to make decisions of a moral nature. We could take the example of the social worker dealing with two families, one of which includes parents who want to work, but whose earnings are barely sufficient to make ends meet and provide for their children (their earnings exceed their income criteria by very little). If none of the members of the other family even think of working and choose to live on funds obtained from welfare, then the social worker cannot help the first family in any way. For example, she cannot offer the children brought up by the first family a vacation trip organised by welfare services, in spite of the fact that their parents will never be able to pay for such a trip.

Instead, the social worker should ensure that the children brought up by the second family should be sent on the trip. Although she is convinced of the injustice of her actions in this case, she cannot follow her reason but may only undertake actions in compliance with procedures. We may find many more examples like the one outlined above if we search for them in areas connected with following procedures generated in various types of professions.

### **3. An attempt of description of social maladjustment in the context of Neo-Thomistic philosophy**

Having identified the various types of exclusion, it should be possible to determine what social maladjustment should involve. Thus, when describing social maladjustment, one should refer to the four types of exclusions indicated in the preceding section.

In the case of avoidance, an individual is subject to self-exclusion. An individual makes her own decision not to belong to a community, but it is difficult to give the specific reasons for the decision. They may depend on an individual who is not interested in the common good for which a community strives and who may not even be able to appreciate this good. The reasons may also result from the quality of the good that unites a group. In these deliberations, one should restrict analysis to a situation in which an individual is not able to appreciate the good uniting the members of a community.

The restriction results from an assumption that not all the goods uniting people are worth striving for. Consequently, avoidance is good in a situation where a community strives for goods of doubtful quality. In a separate case, maladjustment will involve an inability to appreciate and strive for the good for which others strive.

In the second case, we are dealing with a situation in which an individual would like to participate in the activities of a group, but she is rejected by a community. There is a reason for such attitudes of community members. An individual does not comply with criteria for participation in a community,

which means that he/she is maladjusted. Such criteria may include, for example, possession of specified skills and competences. However, they may also be connected with the moral profile specified of an individual, i.e. her interest in the common good. Hence, the members of a community may not discern the interest in an individual suspecting that she may want to use activities of a community instrumentally, i.e. be willing to strive for her own advantages only as a result of which such members may exclude an individual.

The third type of exclusion is connected to a conformist attitude. This attitude involves adjustment to a group and involves indifference to the common good, for which other members of the group strive. This statement is ambiguous. The indifferent attitude may result from an inability to recognise the common good or it may be connected to a lack of interest in the good once it has been recognised. In this case, the willingness to remain a member of the group leads to a situation in which an individual is not an object of common activities, but a tool for the achievement of common good.

The fourth type of exclusion is caused by structures and procedures functioning within a community. On one hand, an individual appreciates the value of common good, which constitutes the objective of a community and the attainment of which an individual participates; on the other hand, an individual has somehow been deprived of her right to make decisions. Furthermore, this individual is not able to enforce his/her rights as a subject, which means that she is not prepared sufficiently for participation in a given community. Hence, she does not have the appropriate skills to overcome fixed patterns. The last manifestation of exclusion may be connected to maladjustment involving a lack of competencies for subjective activity. However, in a lot of situations, an individual may just prove to be too weak to act beyond activity that follows fixed patterns.

In the afore-mentioned classification schema for the participation and exclusion of an individual from a community, the term 'maladjustment' has two basic meanings. Firstly, it is an inability to identify (and, consequently, appreciate) the common good for which a community strives and, secondly, it is an inability to strive for the common good, which results from a lack of appropriate skills and competences. Looking at the two meanings of the term of 'maladjustment', it is easy to see that an ability to discover and appreciate the good for which a community strives is fundamental for participation in a community and its consequence is an ability to strive for common good, which otherwise requires specific skills and competences. Thus, in speaking about maladjustment, one should connect it with an attitude to the common good and it should first be a cognitive attitude which can only lead, as a secondary attitude, to an aspiration requiring an appropriate development of a subject.

The proposition that combines maladjustment and attitude of an individual to a common good leads straight to the issue of the morality of an individual. The ability to discover and realise a common good, which extends beyond personal good and can even sometimes require the sacrifice of some

personal goods, is an effect of moral development. If a person does not discern the common good and her activities are only focused on personal interest, then the individual's maladjustment and exclusion from activities of a community is involved. Thus, when pondering social maladjustment and social exclusion, particular attention should be paid to the moral development of an individual.

#### **4. Moral development and its patterns in the context of Neo-Thomistic pedagogy**

The issue of moral development is remarkably extensive and any attempt to present it briefly in this article will only lead to simplifications. Therefore, this presentation will only attempt to outline the situation of some parents connected with moral education as identified in the context of Neo-Thomistic pedagogy.

Firstly, moral development is conditioned on the development of skills to recognise moral good. This is the good that does not result directly from objective good. Moral good requires the consideration of several subjective goods: the good of an object of reference, the good of a subject and the one who performs an act and upon whom the act also has influence. Here, the good of third parties has sometimes also to be considered.

In reference to moral good in the context of the activities of a community, it can be claimed that a moral good can, in a sense, be identified with the common good, i.e. the good which has been performed by all members of a community. The ability to recognise the moral good is not easy to acquire and it sometimes appears in the context of the mistakes made during one's life. Prudence may be taken as an excellent manifestation of this ability is, being the first of the cardinal virtues (Pieper, 1966; Woroniecki, 2000; Pa puch, 2002).

Secondly, moral development may not only be reduced to intellectual development. In its essence, it involves simultaneous development of the will and feelings and improvement of the same by virtues, entailing that the ability to recognise moral good does not lead to an activity that is morally good. Some people know what to do in a given situation and what is morally good; nevertheless, they still perform bad actions. Thus, moral development is the development of the will in the love of good and the development of feelings that have been "educated" to be obedient to reason and not to succumb to the desire for material goods. The effects of such moral development include cardinal virtues such as justice (involving aspirations to do good), temperance (involving an ability to resign from material goods if this is required by an aspiration to do greater good) and courage (which involves overcoming fear and other negative feelings involved when one aspired to difficult goods) (Woroniecki, 1961, 2008; Pieper, 1966; Wojtyła, 1994; Horowski, 2015).

Thirdly, virtues are developed through acts. In other words, it is when doing a given act and recognising its consequences that a subject is assured



that she does good or bad. Hence, it is under the influence of the act that she finds out that sacrifice of a material good leads to satisfaction. If, as a consequence, more valuable goods can be achieved, it is, finally, when performing the act that a subject overcomes her own fears and negative feelings. Jacek Woroniecki, a representative of the Polish movement of Neo-Thomistic pedagogy referred to this scenario briefly, when stating that one grows up to do heroic acts over the years, but he who has never sacrificed his/her own good for another person will never be able to perform such actions (Woroniecki, 1961, 2000, 2008).

Fourthly, it is the community in which a given person lives that determines the quality of an act. In other words, by living in a community a person participates in doing common good for the community. In committing to the performance of the good, she gets to know it and recognises its value; she is also satisfied with achievement of the good and learns how to resign from various types of goods which are less valuable for the realisation of common good. The quality of morality of people growing in a given community depends on the quality of the common life (Woroniecki, 2000; Bednarski, 1982; Górski, 1936).

The afore-mentioned pattern can be best illustrated in certain examples. A child's moral development is connected, above all, to her participation in ensuring the common good for her family. Hence, the quality of common life depends on the commitment of all family members. Growing up, a child assumes ever more obligations and experiences the consequences of her own commitment. She learns about the good that can be achieved only through common activities, so learning about its value and experiencing satisfaction with the activities involved in its attainment.

Moreover, the child also learns how to deny her own pleasure for the sake of common good. It should be noted that what a child would not do so for a stranger; she makes this sacrifice for the sake of her family members. For them, a child is ready to sacrifice his own time and efforts. The experience gained in a child's family leads to his participation in other communities; first, in professional communities and then, in national or state communities. The participation in such communities is certainly a source of experience and will contribute to his moral development.

Now let us apply the afore-mentioned statements to the question at hand, which should then constitute a foundation for this reflection and thus relates to the relationship between social maladjustment and social exclusion.

## **5. Exclusion from social life as a path to social maladjustment**

At the beginning of this article we stated that conditions for social exclusion are usually seen in social maladjustment. However, the above analysis has first reconstructed community relations built by an individual, then indicating patterns of moral development which, according to the Neo-Thomistic thought, are connected to participation in the aspirations of a community

for the realisation of the common good. Therefore, they seem to suggest a change in the colloquial way of thinking about the issue.

In the light of this analysis, it is exclusion from a community that results in the maladjustment of an individual because an individual undergoes moral development when, during her development, she is included in the common life involving realisation of a common good. Hence, it is only as part of the common aspiration that an individual begins to discover the meaning of a common good to a fuller extent; that is, by acquiring competencies and moral virtues. Preventing an individual from her participation in the realisation of common good will prevent her from achieving moral development. An individual who does not understand the value of common good fully will not appreciate it and will not be able to strive for the same; she is thus resigned to seeking less valuable personal goods. In this situation, exclusion becomes a source of social maladjustment and she becomes an individual unable to build a community.

This pattern is best illustrated if we refer again to the above example of participation in family life. In the light of the above analysis, it should be stated that a family excluding an individual and contributing to her social maladjustment is a family that, in its construction of common good, does not include a child growing in the family. It is hence a family that does not entrust a child with any obligations or supporting the child in any activities, i.e. a family commonly considered to be one that does not provide the proper conditions for a child's development. In such a family, a child does not learn how to realise common good with other members of a community. As a consequence, she does not mature morally, but learns to be 'cared for', thus being convinced of egoism. Such 'excluding' conduct may result in social maladjustment involving an egoistic focus on personal goods and, consequently, the inability to build the communities in which an individual sometimes must sacrifice her personal goods for the sake of the common good.

From the above statements, we may also perceive a critical perspective on the model of social life developed in the Western culture and founded on principles of liberal individualism. This criticism relates to two issues. Firstly, as part of this model, building communities has an instrumental character i.e. such communities are not based on striving for common good, but they are merely communities of coordinated individual interests. This approach does not lead to moral development of members of the communities, but contributes to the development of egoistic attitudes and greater effectiveness in aiming at satisfying one's 'own interests'. Secondly, people with the lowest competencies are eliminated from community life; therefore, the means of support they have obtained have not been earned by them, but acquired as charity. This situation does not create a space for their participation in a community and moral development. Thirdly, the conditions of work can exclude individuals and lead to social maladjustment.

Hence, a person doing a given job does not make moral decisions and her task is to act in accordance with strictly specified procedures. This is what a professional attitude of such an individual should involve. An individual

will also be prepared to act like this during her education, which may include specialist courses above all. The upshot of this tendency is the fourth type of exclusion, which occurs when an individual is deprived of her right to objective activities and is key to the process of social maladjustment focused on the inability to build communities.

Jacques Maritain, one of founders of personalism (in its Neo-Thomistic form) made an attempt to criticise social relations, in which there is no place for free activities for the sake of another person. In his work on human rights, he wrote: "The person is a whole, but it is not a closed whole, it is an open whole. (...) It tends by its very nature to social life and to communication. This is true not only because of the needs and the indigence of human nature, by reason of which each one of us has need of others for his material intellectual and moral life, but also because of the radical generosity inscribed within the very being of the person, because of that openness to the communications of intelligence and love which is the nature of the spirit, and which demands an entrance into relationship with other persons. To state it rigorously, the person cannot be alone. It wants to tell what it knows, and it wants to tell what it is – to whom, if not to other people?" (Maritain, 1945, p. 7). He concluded by stating that the task of the mankind of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is not only to specify the individual rights of an individual (formulated as part of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights), but also social rights, amongst which he included such rights as the right to set up a family and to work to create social groups directing the activities of such groups under conditions of autonomy or freedom.

## Conclusions

The reflections presented in this article have been an attempt to answer a question about causal relationship between the phenomena of social maladjustment and exclusion. Being a reflection rooted in the philosophy of education, it constitutes an attempt to overcome a rational stereotype involving the perception of exclusion from social life as a consequence of social maladjustment. In educational practice, the stereotype leads to attempts to combat social exclusion by equipping an individual with various social and moral competences to make him/her attractive from the point of view of a community. However, the analysis conducted in this article raises doubts as to the method of thinking and leads one to see that social exclusion results from social maladjustment. Thus, it should be admitted that the basic method of fighting social exclusion is not by acquiring skills or competences, which someone else may want to use, but including individuals in community activities. Such inclusion allows for the identification and appreciation of the common good and so contributing to the acquisition of skills and competencies useful in community life.

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