

THE HUMANITIES AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

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The Politics of Inclusion in Multicultural Societies

"A Comenius Lecture"

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Let me first thank the Humanities Center of Wayne State University for inviting me to participate in the symposium on *the Humanities and Civic Engagement* and the European Symposium on Voluntary Associations for presenting me with the *Comenius* award, named after one of the great Humanists of the European Enlightenment.

In this symposium on *the Humanities and Civic Engagement* my presentation will deal with the politics of inclusion in multicultural societies. I will look at *inclusion* from two, somewhat separate angles of vision: the inclusion of youth in the current American political reality and the inclusion of civic literacy and lifelong learning in the process of globalization. Once this has been presented we will consider the relation of these views to the tradition of *Comenius* and the role of *the Humanities in Civic Engagement*.

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The first symbolic inter-action between the Republican Party in its choice for Presidential candidate, through the media, to the public was its self-definition as the party of *inclusion*. The Democratic Party was quick to follow by means of naming its Vice Presidential candidate and carefully presenting the story of his youth and his commitment to the politics of *inclusion*. Thus, as the American polity determined its candidates for President (our key national decision making position) through its party conventions, the politics of inclusion became a common and key *symbolic* act. The first major American election in the third millenium saw, at the symbolic level, the acceptance of Woodrow Wilson's oft derided concept of the *right of self-determination*. Governance in multicultural America would now be *symbolized* by the concept of *inclusion*.

The concept of politics (*politea*) itself comes from the need to develop laws (thus constitutions) which allow people from different traditional (customary) legal system to live continuously with each other, to be **included**, in the process of governance of the social/cultural environment. Inclusion or exclusion are thus key concepts for the functioning of the modern nation-state and of the inter-state, international, system. At the formal symbolic and legal level - internationally, nationally and locally - the notion of **inclusion** seems to be accepted. But how close is this symbolic acceptance to the behavioral reality with which we have to deal?

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The role of the humanities:

*"Next, then," I said, "take the following parable of education and ignorance as a picture of the condition of our nature. Imagine mankind dwelling in an underground cave with a long entrance open to the light across the whole width of the cave; in this they have been from childhood, with necks and legs fettered, so they have to stay where they are. They can not move their heads round because of the fetters, and they can only look forward, but light comes to them from fire burning behind them higher up at a distance. Between the fire and the prisoners is a road above their level, and along it imagine a low wall has been built, as puppet showmen have screens in front of their people over which they work their puppets."*¹

Thus starts Book VII (The Analogy of the Cave) of Plato's *Politea* written some 2,400 years ago. Socrates and Plato saw humanity as an **experiencing species**, dependent upon its symbols for dealing with reality. Both our survival and our development require the use of these symbols. But this dependency on symbols creates the basic dilemma which humanity must **always** deal with.

Our love for the power and beauty of the symbol and our fear and confusion in dealing with reality are at the core of the basic human existential and experiential dilemma³. Our only means for managing this dilemma is the development, by means of education, of our ability to use experience, thinking about experience, and thinking about how we think...to theorize. It is in using the combination of these three means of dealing with reality, in the form of systems analysis³, that we can manage the contradiction and the process of change in a wise and just manner. The development of these skills and their interrelation is the task of the humanities. Without it there can be no real **civic engagement**.

Book VII then presents a complex system of education, which still serves most educational systems of the world. The Academy, out of which the institution we call the

¹ Book VII of *Politea* (the Republic), Great Dialogues of Plato, translated by W.H..D. Rouse, The New American Library, 1956.

³ See *Genesis* in the Old Testament. The apple being the power of knowledge and the expulsion from the Garden of Eden being the start of our experiential journey to the wisdom required to use it.

³ Or as Plato calls it *the dialectic*, or in the modern period *the scientific method*.

University has developed, is the key institution for this educational system - for the learning with this curriculum. It thus appears that for at least 2,400 years we have been able to know this inter-relation between *civic engagement, the humanities and education*.

We will consider this relation of *symbol to reality* in relation *to inclusion* from two different perspectives related to the humanities: first in relation to the younger generation in America and civic engagement and second the relation of lifelong learning to the current process of globalization.

At this moment in time, the gap between symbol and reality is being seen as a behavioral and educational problem of the younger generation. It has been declared a crisis area and there is a strong movement among the leadership in the academy (higher education) for working to resolve it.

On April 27, 2000 the Presidents of three hundred and seventy three higher U.S. higher education institutions in the formation of the National Alliance for Civic Education articulated the following proposition:

"As Presidents of Colleges and Universities, both private and public, large and small, two-year and four-year, we challenge higher education to re-examine its public purpose and its commitments to the democratic ideal. We also challenge higher education to become engaged, through actions and teaching, with its communities."

"We have a fundamental task to renew our role as agents of our democracy. This task is both urgent and long-term. There is growing evidence of disengagement of many Americans from the communal life of our society, in general, and from the responsibilities of democracy, in particular. A chorus of studies reveals that students are not connected to the larger purposes and aspirations of the American Democracy. Voter turnout is low. Feelings that political participation will not make any difference is high. Added to this is a profound sense of cynicism and lack of trust in the political process".

"This country cannot afford to educate a generation that acquires knowledge without ever understanding how that knowledge can benefit society or how to influence democratic decision making. We must teach skills and values of democracy, creating innumerable opportunities for our students to practice and reap the results of real, hard work of citizenship."⁴

The university, descendant of the ancient Academy, has been called upon to renew its commitment to the knowledge required for the wise and just governance of the process of change and of society. This crisis in the politics of inclusion for youth does not seem to be limited to the United States. An international project involving European and American Universities, and now expanding to other areas of the world is being funded by the European Union and by the U.S. National Science Foundation, administered through

⁴ *Presidents' Declaration on Civic Responsibility of Higher Education*, signed by the President of 373 US Higher Education Institutions on the 27th of April 2000.

the University of Pennsylvania, over 450 universities are involved. The first European Group meeting of the *Project on Universities as Sites for Citizenship and civic responsibilities* occurred on the 17 September 1999 at the Council of Europe in Strasbourg sponsored by the Directorate of Education, Culture and Sport. It was agreed to collaborate with the U.S. universities around the Wingspread Declaration⁵ :

"In the post war years, American research universities have seen an explosion in numbers of students, in fields of study, and in international prestige. Questions of diversity and justice, issues of who universities choose to admit and serve are central to the democratic spirit. On these grounds our schools have made clear advances. Today research universities are more richly varied in the cultures, economic backgrounds, and outlooks of our students. Our curricula are more inclusive of diverse cultures, traditions, and ways of knowing. Fields of research and scholarship have proliferated, and path-breaking advances have been made in areas scarcely imagined a generation or two ago. Research universities today evidence renewed engagements with communities. Many have joined the service-learning movement that involves students in real world problems and issues."

"Though incomplete, such changes nonetheless represent substantial progress toward a more inclusive and a more just system of higher education. Yet despite such gains, few leaders in research universities would make Eliot's⁶ claim that their fundamental mission is to serve democracy or that they are filled with the democratic spirit."

*"Today, higher education mirrors the democratic discontents of the larger society. Nowhere is this truer than in our great research universities. T.S. Eliot's haunting question in his 1937 poem *The Rock* -- "**where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge, where is the knowledge we have lost in information?**" -- has become the question of our age. Research institutions are subject to the same force in the society that focus on "efficiency of means" and neglect continuing discussion about civic purposes and public meanings of our individual and collective work. Ends are regarded as fixed. Even when debated they are separated from the larger tasks of democracy."*

*"Such dynamics take the form of proposals to make colleges more responsive to the demands of students redefined as "**customers**" and the community redefined as the "**market**". Allocations of resources are pushed toward the most remunerative uses with a slighting of other institutional values. A powerful trend is the "**virtual university**". Public service today often has a commercial cast."*

⁵ Coordinated by the University of Michigan Center for Community Service and Learning, with sponsorship by the Association of American Universities, American Association for Higher Education, American Council on Education, Association of American Colleges and Universities, Campus Compact, New England Center for Higher Education, University of Pennsylvania Center for University Partnerships, the Johnson Foundation, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation with Barry Checkoway of the University of Michigan, Elizabeth Hollander of Campus Compact, Stanley Ikenberry of the American Council on Education and Harry Boyte of the University of Minnesota.

⁶ Charles Eliot, President, Harvard, 1908

"All of these developments can have value as parts of a larger whole. But they cannot be taken for the whole. Students are far more than "customers"; they need to be understood as co-creators of their learning. Universities are far more than data banks for distance learning; they are places where students, faculty, and staff interact in multi-dimensional ways, and at best, learn and develop together. And communities are far more than sites of economic growth; they are places where a variety of public and private values need articulation, recognition and cultivation."

We find in this statement not only a concern for the ***inclusion*** of younger citizens in the process of political participation and in the learning of political knowledge, but a concern for the evolution of the Academy itself. It is a concern of what will not be ***included*** in the development of knowledge and knowers if the process of globalization turns students into consumers, learning into a commodity, and the University into a producer creating knowledge only in response to the short term needs of the global market. It is a direct concern for the role of the ***Humanities*** in the process of learning, in the environment of the Academy.

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In 1994 the Ministers of Labor of the major industrial nations, members of the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), stated that the ***globalizing*** world economy will result in human beings having to change their professions, not just their jobs, but their professions, seven times during their working lives. In response to the dramatic increase in the development and application of knowledge, education would no longer be necessary before entering the work force, but would have to be a continuous process, lifelong learning, if the worker wished to remain included in the work force, included in the consumer society. While the concept of ***Lifelong Learning*** was already operational in the symbolic rhetoric and the reality based behavior of certain sections of higher education for more than a generation, it has now become central to the mission statement of nearly all institutions of higher learning. But beneath this symbolic commitment lay a brutal reality which often escaped the ***strategic planning***, which was becoming a central activity of the Academy.

The educational system which was developed in response to the ***age of industrial production*** was based on education for work and citizenship before the person entered the world of work and politics. It was designed to address two conditions, that of the young learner in preparing him or her for life, and that of the society of having a new generation that would implement the basic changes brought on by the new knowledge and its applications. The biological cycle of our species - 25 - 50 years per generation - matched the cultural cycle of the industrial age.

But the ***new age of the communications/information system*** functions on ten to seven year cycles. Could the concept of ***lifelong learning*** alone cope with this existence of different biological and cultural cycles ? Would the symbolic meaning of lifelong learning deal with the reality gap between the two cycles ? Do we need to ask the following questions ? Does an educational system only educate the student, or does it

also educate the teacher, and does it also educate the educational institution and system itself ? If the globalization process is *the great transformation* from production/ industry to information/communication which will force changes in profession seven times in one persons life-time, what does it do to the organizational structure and mission of the professions, of the institutions, of the institutional systems, of the entire culture ?

But something strange has happened in the process of developing *lifelong learning*, of developing the education of adults.

In July 1997 the UNESCO Institute of Education organized *CONFINTEA V*, a major UNESCO international conference on the education of adults. It was co-sponsored by the major regional and international inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations in the world, including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Its basic theme was lifelong learning in the new global world.

Thousands of governmental and NGO representatives participated in the meetings in a major process of *inclusion*, the NGOs (though without the right to vote) did have the right to participate. It was an effort, as one of the delegates put it, Professor Eric Bockstael of Wayne State University, "to see the needs for education from a global perspective, keeping in mind that while we have one globe, we also have many worlds".

Not only were the educational needs of adults in the various regions of the world identified, but existing policies and best practices were also reported. A new form of international collaboration, closely related to the concept of *inclusion* was widely discussed. Local actors would initiate calls for assistance from international networks of experts and where possible resources, to help address local needs, a direct and new type of international collaboration, based on *inclusion*. Enthusiasm for implementing the findings of *CONFINTEA V* was extremely high among the local, regional and national delegates from both the governments and the NGOs.

But, since then the Institute of Education has been informed that it will be dissolved and therefore the findings of *CONFINTEA V* will remain in reports. Is this just an odd case of institutional politics, where the institution working on an *inclusive* concept of the education of adults, a concept which *includes* the learning of poetry as well as the learning of the latest skills requested by the market are *included*, or is something happening at the systems level of *inclusion* where the concept of *inclusion* is being taken over by the practitioners of *exclusion*⁷, further complicating the relation between symbol and reality at this critical moment.

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The rapidity of change, which we already associate with the process of globalization, and the social/political consequences of this change, suggest a multi-faceted conception of *inclusion*. The *inclusion* of the citizen in the political process should be seen as an essential feed-back into the system of change about the cultural, the humanist and

⁷ Where certain types of adult education, like job training are funded and others excluded.

humanities, consequences of this change for the individual, the society and the culture. The *inclusion* of peoples' agendas into the agenda of the society. The changing of the concept of *main-stream* from an exclusionary concept whereby the majority has to change itself in order to be part of the main stream to a *main stream* which includes all those who live in a society and must interact with each other along a system of mutual respect. It is in this context that we should revisit the question of the *inclusion* of the youth. Will the educational process, the sites for democracy as proposed by the leaders of higher education, practice *civic education* or *civic literacy* ? Will the youth have the literacy skills to *include* their realities into the political, into the civic, agenda ? Or will they be educated to accept the *symbols* rather than the *reality* of *inclusion* ?

This was the warning in the much read books *Animal Farm, 1984* and of the entire anti-utopian literature from H.G. Wells *Time Machine* to the recent films *The Truman Story* and the *Matrix*. In nearly all of these anti-Utopian predictions of the coming of the communication/information system, of globalization, the only force capable of either saving the involved individuals or the society is the basic relation of inclusion, human love.

THE SECOND COMING

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
When a vast image out of the *Spiritus Mundi*
Troubles my sight; somewhere in sands of the desert
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
Reel shadows of indignant desert birds.
The darkness drops again; but now I know
That twenty centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born ?

William Butler Yeats (1924)

Some Brief Information on Comenius

Jan Amos Komensky was born in 1592 in Nivnice, Moravia, now in the Czech Republic. He died in exile in 1670 in Amsterdam. A contemporary of Galileo, Descartes, Rembrandt, Bacon and Milton. He published 154 books, mostly dealing with educational philosophy and theology. He postulated the need for universal education, including the education of women to meet the human needs of modern society. A leading educator of his time, he was also an important theologian and Bishop and President of the Moravian Church during the Thirty Year's War (1618-1648). As educator he was called upon to restructure the school system of Sweden and there is evidence that he was asked to become the first President of Harvard. At the close of the 30 years war Bohemia and Moravia were ceded to Rome in the Peace of Westphalia and the members of the Moravian Church had to either renounce their religion and become Roman Catholic or leave their homeland. Comenius led a small group of fellow church members into Poland. The key periods in his life were as follows:

- 28.03.1592 born in Nivnice, Southern Moravia Father leading member of Unity of Bohemian Brothers
- 1608 student in brotherhood Latin School Prerov
- 1611-14 student in Herborn and Heidelberg
- 1616 Unity priest
- 1617 Leader and teacher of Brothercommunity in Fulnek, marries
- 1621 Spanish troops occupy land, flees to Fulnek
- 1621-28 Underground life - remains of Unity Brothers to Poland, Brandenburg and Holland *The Labyrinth of the World* written at this time
- 1627 Edict of Empror expels all Protestants
- 1628 Emigration to Lissa (Poland) teacher in Gymnasium
- 1628-30 Major work in Czech
- 1631 Language and Learning in Latin
- 1634-36 First sections of Pansophia
- 1641-42 First stay in England
- 1642-48 Lives in Elbing
- 1648 Return to Lissa, elected Bishop
- 1650-54 Lives in Hungary
- 1654-56 Return to Lissa, War of Swedish succession destroys Lissa
- 1655 Exile in Amsterda (Erasmus)
- 1670 Dies in Amsterdam

Johann HUS 1415 burned

Augsburger Religious peace 1555 Rousseau 1712-1778