

## THE HUMANIZATION OF THE HELP OFFERED TO THE DISABLED

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Modern development of rehabilitation is guided by humanistic ideas. The problem is that many specialists cannot define the term "humanism" itself. This article analyses the concept in terms of its application in the rehabilitation practice. Two aspects of humanism are distinguished. The first one refers to the perception of the disabled and the other concerns humanization of the rehabilitation process.

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The subject discussed below is so broad that a whole book could be written to explore it. Thus, this article will only outline the solution to the problem signaled in the title. Therefore, humanism will be treated here in a non-humanistic way i.e. very concisely. In principle, I will confine myself to providing the basic theses which are the effects of my reasoning, each of them presented as a separate point. I hope such a form of presentation will not make the reception of the article more difficult.

I. After the end of the year devoted to the problem of providing help to the disabled, it can be easily stated that social concern for this category of people is gradually rising. The evidence for this phenomenon can be observed in: improving professional, medical, movement, psychological and social rehabilitation; the change in social attitudes towards the disabled; increase in the number of volunteers taking part in the rehabilitation process, the development of the scientific research concerning the issue of the help provided to the disabled; the ever growing standardization of the lives of the disabled (Ostrowska, 1994). The situation of the disabled is far better when compared to that of the recent past. It is especially important now as community of the disabled is growing significantly.

II. I would like to present several arguments which can serve as the evidence of the progress in the care provided to the disabled. Firstly, more and more categories of the disabled are being integrated in the rehabilitation activities. For instance, before the Second World War rehabilitation via movement was used on a limited scale and was provided only to patients with orthopedic, ophthalmic or neurological problems (Seyda, 1965). Presently, numerous forms of physiotherapy are being applied to various kinds of illness or disability (patients with organ transplants, geriatric patients, pulmonary patients etc.). Secondly, special education for the disabled children and teenagers is developing rapidly. According to the American data from the nineties 655\$ were spent

on the education of a healthy child, whereas 897\$ on an intellectually disabled child, 2336\$ on a deaf child and 2516\$ on a child with sight impairments (Sherrill, 1998). One can predict that the educational expenses in Poland are divided in a similar manner. What is more, it is noteworthy that in the last 20 years the forms of educating disabled children have been enriched, and special school's teacher training system has been improved (Doll-Tepper, 2001). Thirdly the growing number of people has a chance to participate in professional sport activities. The popularity of sport for the disabled is growing among the disabled, and, moreover, such activities are widely accepted by the rest of the society. The number of participants taking part in Paralympics Games proves that the popularity of the sport among the disabled is growing. In 1985, only 48 individuals participated in the Games, 30 years later, in the next Paralympics there were as many as 3950 disabled participants (Paciorek, 2000). What is more, the involvement of the disabled in community life is increasing gradually. According to Duckworth (1995), due to the development of the internet, the disabled find employment much easier, form international organizations, which are lobbying groups, or take part in the activities of self-help groups.

III. Taking into account the above mentioned facts, one can state that there are good reasons to feel satisfied among both the disabled and people responsible for the development of rehabilitation. At the same time numerous concerns appear pointing to the fact that the standardization of the rehabilitation service results in the disabled being treated not as subjects but as objects. The disabled individual withdraws from the community life because of frustrations caused by social rejection and discrimination. Integration of the disabled children in schools and kindergartens is too superficial, social rehabilitation is directed only towards the elite of people with lesser disabilities or those who are better off

(Kowalik, 1996). These voices show the demand for humanistic approach towards the disabled, introducing humanistic values to the whole process of rehabilitation, the change in special education so that it would meet the needs of the disabled children. The effect of these insistent efforts to introduce a more humanistic approach towards the help offered to the disabled is surprising. My own research allows me to draw the conclusion that people professionally involved in rehabilitation process (including teachers in special schools, social workers and physiotherapists) hardly ever know what humanistic approach should look like (35% are not familiar with the issue, others form vague definitions and statements related to the issue). Usually, humanism is thought of as humanitarianism, understood as providing care to the disabled.

IV. Before we want to improve the quality of the help offered to the disabled we should realize, however, what humanism really is. It is definitely not enough to state that most people are familiar with the term and use it on every-day basis. In this way we will not avoid the issue of definition and understanding of the term. Moreover, these ideas, unlike many people would expect, do not boil down to popularization of humanitarianism, often expressed in the form of charity activities. A thorough analysis conducted by specialists concerned with this issue is required, since the clear-cut stands on that matter are missing. Philosophers, art theoreticians, historians usually have their own view on that matter, pertinent to the discipline they represent (Backer & Barnes, 1964; Kuderowicz, 1989; Suchodolski, 1985). Quite often they want their own interpretation of humanism to become a universal concept. In my opinion not enough attention is paid to the fact that the humanistic ideas have been undergoing various transformations throughout the ages. Not being aware of this fact could be the cause of many misunderstandings related to the concept of humanism. Thus, it is often the case that scientists, professionals relating to different versions of humanism are right though their views can be varied. There is a need for defining humanism in such a way which will meet the needs of rehabilitation and special education.

V. When analyzing the literature on the discussed topic, I came to the conclusion that it is possible to distinguish three major versions of humanistic views. Esthetic humanism is the oldest of them. It originates from Renaissance and Petrarch, who is considered as its creator (Kuderowicz, 1989). He was the first to discover the culture of Greek Hellada and the idea of giving human being a special place. In accordance with the ideas offered by this culture, Petrarch promoted the cult of the values, connected with the beauty of the human. Esthetic humanism lost its significance quickly. Its new version appeared in the Netherlands in 17<sup>th</sup> century. There are doubts as to who created it. Spinoza is thought of as

one of its main propagators (Tatarkiewicz, 1990). Ethic humanism put emphasis on different human values from esthetic humanism. In brief, according to ethic humanism every man was obliged to make the most of his developmental abilities throughout his whole life. Each individual was responsible for performing this task and later was accounted for it by the society. Social response to the ethic humanism was relatively insignificant. It was accepted in protestant societies, but humanistic ideas were impoverished there. Finally, in 19<sup>th</sup> century a completely new concept of humanism was formed. Its ideas were the response to the actual social need. That is the reason why we can call this kind of humanism a pragmatic one. The exceptional popularity it gained has twofold meaning: a) many societies in the world recognized it as their own ideology and b) it is characterized by exceptional durability. It seems that the ideas of pragmatic humanism influence the shape of the life of the societies in the contemporary world. For this reason it is worth analyzing this concept in more detail.

VI. The outstanding Polish sociologist - Florian Znaniecki (1991) points to three sources of the revival of humanistic ideas in 19<sup>th</sup> century, namely evolutionism, cultural relativism and positivistic variant of social studies. I would add one more very important factor to the above mentioned set of elements - the industrialization of productive activities. Darwin's theory of evolution induced, quite unexpectedly, the growth of interest in the search of special attributes characteristic of human being - as the highest stage of evolution. It was expected that Darwin's humanized ape should have more human than animal features. Therefore the need for contrasting human being with the rest of organic world appeared. This, in turn, resulted in attributing certain unique features to human beings and putting emphasis on those special qualities of every man. On the other hand, the discoveries of ethnographers, studying different exotic peoples in Africa, both Americas and Oceania, challenged the traditional stereotypes concerning these civilizations. The research shows that the representatives of these exotic societies are not as primitive as it was generally thought. They have their own cultures, complex norms of behavior which determine relations within the society, skills and abilities necessary to satisfy their needs etc. Thus, common convictions regarding the poor level of development among those peoples were denied by this research. However, on the other hand, the evidence justified the thesis concerning diversity in developmental capabilities of human being. Consequently, ethnocentric attitudes were weakened and in their place tolerant attitudes, which regard distinctiveness as a valuable emerged. These conditions were greatly favorable to the development of humanistic thought. It is worth noting that social studies of the 19<sup>th</sup> century modeled on sciences. Positivistic methodology dominating at that

time rejected the possibility of including value issues to scientific consideration. It was soon revealed that without including those issues it was impossible to answer such questions as: What is social progress? What are the goals of the civilization? What is social norm and what is pathology? What personal pattern should be promoted? Therefore, the need for a field of study which would deal with those difficult issues appeared. As a result, humanistic thought – complimentary to positivistic social studies – was developed. Finally, it has to be emphasized how important the dynamic development of industry is for the increase in the demand for humanistic ideas. The industrial revolution from 19<sup>th</sup> century resulted in significant changes in the organization of production. Discovery and popularization of the assembly-line type of work, hierarchical management, concentrating on executing more and more ambitious tasks led to objectifying the workers, who became like cogs in the machine, totally subordinated and incapacitated. The situation of a man participating in such an organization became difficult. The development of humanism could change this situation (Giddens, 2003).

VII. Pragmatic humanism met social demands in two ways. First of all, it attributed certain features to people, features which made them more worthy. These attributes were varied: spiritualism, rationality, creativity, wisdom, noble intentions, responsibility for one's actions etc. This ennoblement of man was unconditional and there were no exceptions to it. The process of assigning those special qualities was automatic. This view is characteristic of pragmatic humanism. Ethical humanism, on the other hand, requires a lot of effort and self-development of man and proving to the society that human potential is not wasted. Only then could a human being deserve the respect accordingly to the cost one had to bear or results one achieved. In pragmatic humanism, in contrast, man's special social value was determined by the simple fact of being born as a man. I do not want to judge if the process of unconditional attributing features to every human being is justified, or if it is only the expression of peculiar megalomania. In any case it would be difficult to settle this dilemma of philosophical nature. However, it is worth analyzing social and individual consequences stemming from the discussed way of introducing humanism to social practice. The other way of satisfying social need for humanism consists in organizing human activities which are characterized by special features. Moreover, the activities should be organized in accordance with strictly defined rules. Thus, there appeared the demands for humanizing work, sport, medicine, or martial service. The problem was that the slogan "to humanize" was applied to every domain of human life, for instance it involved healthy relations between people, eliminating conditions which encourage social alienation etc. Generally speaking, humanizing actions is an ideologi-

cal proposal of enriching every social practice which is conducted in such a way which relates to a collection of humanistic features characteristic of people taking part in the practice. This ideology consists in formulating hints which direct actions of people who participate in executing common social goals. Unfortunately, particular specialists exploring humanizing actions are not unanimous in what should be the desired way of human co-operation.

VIII. It seems that the idea of pragmatic humanism is still valid since some of its functions from 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century need to be continued in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. There is one aspect of living in the society, providing help to the disabled, where the necessity of popularizing humanistic ideas is very significant. In the light of the interpretation of humanism presented above, the consequences of implementing its ideas could be considered in two dimensions: a) unconditional assigning features mentioned above to the disabled, b) adjusting assistance service offered to the disabled in a way which would reflect humanistic image of a disabled person.

IX. Boosting the self-esteem of the disabled by unconditional assigning specific characteristics to them might be considered as controversial. It is worth emphasizing that humanizing the disabled is the procedure which distinguishes this group of people in a special way (constant repeating of the phrases: "you deserve social respect", "you are equal member of the society"). We can ask: "Is it necessary to distinguish the disabled from the rest of the society?" In this way prominence is given to their distinctiveness. Such actions are meaningful as long as we are of the opinion that the life in the community is still characterized by the unfounded devaluing of the disabled. Then the process of boosting the self-esteem of the disabled may level negative attitudes towards this group of people. However, the normalization of those attitudes should be accompanied with gradual eliminating the special form of promoting nobleness of the disabled (Ostrowska & Sikorska, 1996). There is also another reason for assigning humanizing features to the disabled. The 20<sup>th</sup> century can be characterized as the glorification of corporality of man (Grogan, 1999). We can assume that the more important those values are, the harder the psychological situation of the disabled and without employing preventive measures (humanizing which boosts self-esteem), their self-esteem may debase. It should be noted that continuous deluding somebody into how worthy he/she is, can lead to abandoning self-development and, what is more developing demanding attitude towards other people. Both these types of behavior render providing help to the disabled. To sum up, the above analysis suggests that boosting self-esteem of the disabled is pertinent, because it protects those people from the cult of the body characteristic of our civilization and counteracts the existing

discrimination; at the same time it is wrong because it can emphasize their distinctness and reduce the motivation for independent improving quality of life.

X. There is no doubt that the process of humanizing help offered to the disabled is necessary (Kowalik, 2003). However, as I noted before it is not yet clear what this process should consist in. It is often emphasized that humanizing is about removing distortions occurring in rehabilitation (e.g. eliminating the situation where they are pampered and protected or discontinuing rehabilitation process before it is actually completed). It can also consist in enhancing social sensitivity to problems experienced by the disabled (which could make their social integration easier). Finally, humanizing can lead to the increased involvement in solving problems by the disabled themselves (by developing abilities to decide about their own lot). Undoubtedly, the list with different interpretations of the idea of humanizing help is very long. I would like to present in this place my own suggestion of understanding this term. To this end I am going to use an inspiring distinction, introduced by Nagel (1997).

XI. According to Nagel (1997) it can be assumed that the people who offer professional help can choose between two attitudes. The first one is characterized by professionalism. People with this attitude make use of scientific knowledge in their job, do not get personally involved in their work but are very effective in what they do. Adopting this attitude results in making their work and the work of other specialists very alike. The help service offered by people representing the first attitude, can be called offering help out of nowhere, i.e. the help is provided here in a standard manner and the disabled are treated in a standard way. The second type is in direct opposition to the first one. It involves offering help which is their own initiative. The individual offering help determines his/her own perspective of looking at the problem of a disabled person and acts accordingly. Thus, he/she can treat such a person in an individual manner. This is an example of subjective action, based on individual experience. The help of this kind is unique because it cannot be compared with the help provided by other individuals. It encourages deeper involvement in the help process.

XII. The first attitude is becoming more common as far as offering help to the disabled is concerned. We try to accept different criteria which help to make an objective recognition if any individual is disabled, to what extent, finally, what kind of help is required. We also obey the standards defining rehabilitation. It is harder and harder to introduce the individualized procedure of activating a disabled person and all that is done in the name of improving effectiveness of rehabilitation. The objective perspective on rehabilitation is supposed to guarantee more complete knowledge about the disabled

and their effective rehabilitation. However, a question should be asked here: "Are we not going too far in imposing objective standards providing help to the disabled?" The demands to include humanistic ideas in assistance help programs offered the disabled, can be understood as efforts to provide better balance between the distinguished attitudes. In other words, not only outer standards should decide about relations between givers and receivers of help but both parties should have a chance to influence the nature of help and derive satisfaction from the helping process.

XIII. In the light of the presented analysis a problem of effective but individualized help arises. "Unspecified help" is perceived as the desired rehabilitation procedure due to its apparent better effectiveness. In the "specified help" the particular individuals, who often are not qualified to provide professional help, are responsible for the effects of the helping process. Many years of work with the disabled allowed me to formulate a few rules which rehabilitation therapists should follow. These rules are strictly connected with the ideals of humanism.

XIV. The first rule could be formulated in the following way: "Be self-confident". This rule refers to the essence of humanism, which makes people feel more worthy by attributing certain features to human beings. In this way man's self-confidence is growing, he becomes more optimistic in evaluating the effects of his actions and is more resistant to possible failures. The therapist who trusts his professional skills is more successful in work with the disabled. First of all, he can instill his optimism in other people and, in consequence, they become more confident, are more persistent in overcoming difficulties, challenge ambitious rehabilitation tasks and engage more in independent solving their own life problems. The second rule is as follows: "Take into account the point of view of your partners when you act". This rule is also a consequence of humanistic approach to man. It is assumed here that we recognize the reality in a rationalistic way, judge it accordingly and take actions which are beneficial to us. Thus, a rehabilitation therapist should not underestimate the views of the disabled. He cannot hold opinion that only he knows the truth about how to improve the quality of life of the individuals who are offered help. In this way the help to the disabled has individual character and is adjusted to the needs of the disabled. According to the third rule the communication between the parties working together should have an open character. It is, to a large extent, the consequence of application of the previous rule. Not only should a therapist take into account what view the disabled have on the rehabilitation process but also negotiate with them how to solve the problems. In this way the relation between the giver and the receiver of help will be based on partnership and a disabled individual will feel like an equal subject in this relation. The conse-

quence of such an attitude might be a full involvement of a disabled person in self-help activity. The fourth rule states as follows: "Take advantage of the good moments in the process of giving help". It seems that it is least of all based on humanistic ideals. However, in truth, it refers to those ideals and is mainly based on the thesis that human being is an autonomous individual standing in opposition to the environment. This autonomy is relative, obviously. Sometimes human plasticity is greater in relation to outer influences and sometimes an individual is totally resistant to any influences. A disabled person like any other individual has fluctuation of moods, is characterized by greater or smaller motivation to take action, can change the significance assigned to a given situation in a short time intervals. Thus, the same form of help may be perceived in different ways by the disabled. One time it will be accepted and an individual will make the most of it, while the other time it will be totally rejected. The point is to deliver help when the person is fully aware of existing deficiencies. It cannot be offered either too early or too late. The last, fifth rule can be formulated in the following way: "Don't force anybody to be happy". Humanism emphasizes how important it is to protect human freedom and refrain from bringing pressure on people. We got used to thinking of pressure only in relation to influencing other people. It should be remembered, however, that, the acceptance of our help can be enforced too. A disabled individual can think that accepting our help can put in jeopardy the feeling of dignity. Thus, providing help should never be imposed. A disabled person should always have the right to choose whether to accept it or resign from it. He/she should also feel respected by the person offering help.

XV. My individual conception of interpreting humanistic ideas and introducing them to rehabilitation practice can be considered as controversial. The fact of placing pragmatism alongside humanism may seem to be a misuse of understanding the role that humanism should play in the life of the society. However, I am not of the opinion that the presented here conception of the humanization of the help offered to the disabled denies the value of humanistic attitude. On the other hand, it proves that it is possible to combine the effectiveness of action with respecting values assigned to human beings. It can be easily noted that applying the presented above rules to the practice of helping the disabled should contribute to a better coordination of actions of people working on solving problems of the disabled and it should enrich the purpose of those activities.

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**HUMANIZACE POMOCI NABÍZENÉ  
OSOBÁM S POSTIŽENÍM**  
(Souhrn anglického textu)

Moderní vývoj rehabilitace (léčebného cvičení) je řízený humanistickou myšlenkou. Problémem je, že mnoho odborníků neumí definovat termín „humanismus (lidskost)“. Tento příspěvek analyzuje návrh v rámci jeho aplikace v rehabilitační praxi. Rozlišujeme v něm dva aspekty humanismu. První odkazuje na vnímání osob s postižením a další se týká humanizace rehabilitačního procesu.

*Klíčová slova: rehabilitace (léčebné cvičení), osoby s postižením, humanismus.*

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