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Inclusion in a polarised world

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Abstract

This paper on inclusion was presented to the at the 2005 summer school of DEEEP (Development Education Exchange in Europe Project), Hårnösand - Sweden, 5 - 12 June 2005.

See http://www.deeep.org/english/about_deeep/summer_school/2005/DEEEP_contribut.doc

It addresses the significance of the concept of world civilisation. It assesses how meaning may be attached to the concept of inclusion in an economically polarised world. It develops a critique of the conception of economic inclusion, by means of an exploration of linguistic inclusion and the notion of 'disability'.

Inclusion in a polarised world

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Alan Freeman

In this talk, the main question I want to ask is what the term 'inclusion' adds to the old ideas of justice, human rights, or equality? And what, alternatively, does it subtract from them?

In the opening discussion, we established that the smallest represented language here was Turkish; in fact the only Turkish speaker was from Kazakhstan. I begin with a simple issue – why and how did we manage to include so few Turkish people?

This leads to the first of my three 'dilemmas'. A 'dilemma' is a term I will use for a problem which has no correct solution – no legislator, no economic expert, no technician can come and tell you, like fixing a computer 'this is the way you do it' The answer is a choice. Our task as educators is, I think, not always to make choices, but rather to create the fullest possible understanding so that others can make the choice for themselves.

My first dilemma is: should Turkey enter Europe?

I suspect that if Turkey was a country of five million people, perceptions of its relation to Europe could easily fit with the rather comfortable idea of inclusion. Actually, this inclusion would result in a new country with more mother-tongue speakers of Turkish than any other language and this, for many Europeans, is not so comfortable. It does not allow them to speak as possessors of a privileged superior culture, which they will graciously allow others to share in, subject to conditions which they will dictate. It forces them to make real and deep-going changes to customary practices. They regard this as a sacrifice, as a loss.

A society of many cultures, of many faiths, of many sexualities and many abilities, is more than just an addition to what already exists; it is the creation of something different. Unification would transform the identity of Europe. We might not even choose to call it Europe. The problem is bigger for Europeans than for Turks who, since 1921, have considered themselves part of European civilisation. Widespread hostility towards Turkey reveals an un-stated assumption that Europe is in some sense a union of Judaeo-Christian lands, whose identity would be lost in any wider unification.

So is 'inclusion' just permission to access what already exists, or does it create something new? I will illustrate with references to two problems of ecology – one in Andalusia, in Spain, the other in Mendoza, in Argentina.

Andalusia is technically desertified – it is arid, barren, when it does rain, the water is not retained. Yet it was the jewel in the crown of Islam, a fertile green oasis. How? Because the Moors, who were driven out of Spain during the Reconquista, possessed a superior technology of irrigation which combined with a way they organized socially, so that society redistributed water to places which did not have it, creating green where there was none. The Reconquista, regarded as a triumph of civilization over barbarity, lost that technology and it has never to this day come back. Nor is it just a question of knowledge. It is an issue of social organisation. Technically, we know how to irrigate – but to date no Spanish society since Islam has used that knowledge to hold back the desertification of Andalusia.

Mendoza is a natural desert at the base of the Andes, a very high range which receives much rain and snowfall. The runoff goes largely into two or three rivers, which evaporate before they reach anywhere – they run into a very low water table inaccessible to normal drilling.

Yet it is now a green, fertile area, full of trees, full of rivers, canals and fountains, home to some of the best wine-growing areas of the world. It was created by humans. Every plant in Mendoza is there because a human put it there, and stays put because human technology and human society waters it. Alongside every street in Mendoza is a channel through which water running off from the mountains is funnelled, and every tree is planted so its roots are moistened by that water. There is regular mass distribution of water to the fields, to the trees, to the alhambras which are absolutely everywhere, and there is a very deep understanding in the people of the region that this de-desertification depends entirely on their actions.

That technology was created by people who were there long before the Spaniards arrived – the indigenous peoples of the region – at the very time when deserts were arriving in Andalusia. When the Conquistadores arrived, although many of the things they did were brutal and barbaric, they did learn from and did integrate the technology they found. So, the result of a fusion of the two cultures was the creation of something present in neither – they learned from peoples who were considered more ‘backward’ – in fact they were not backward at all – two cultures simply met. One was happy to call itself superior because it conquered, but conquest is not always the best definition of superiority.

I now want to move to a theme which I know this summer school is particularly concerned with – disability. Learning from the example of Mendoza, is there a way in to conceive of disability not as ‘access’ to an existing ideal but as an enrichment, a fusion?

I will illustrate with my second dilemma: should old people work until they are seventy five?

According to substantial campaigns about the demographic time bomb, the number of old people is getting larger because of advances in the treatment of diseases, leading to the prospect that the aging population of many northern countries will be substantially larger than in the past.

These people are supported by the work of young people. Our typical model is that the ideal worker is young, probably white, probably male, certainly not caring for children, and certainly not disabled. This relatively dynamic sector of the population who can be relied on to work the longest, be sick the least (which we should not confuse with the quality of their output), and the problem of inclusion is posed in this context: how can these dynamic young *übermenschen* help the elderly, the disabled, the less educated, the childcarers (who are someone perceived as not themselves working or producing) and so on.

Again, the notion is that there is a superior class of being, and the problem is posed as a necessary sacrifice which they must make so that the the less ‘gifted’ may graciously take part?

In relation to age, however, there is a slight difficulty, namely *everyone* gets old. Old people do not come from a different planet. They are not a different species. They are simply young people who have been around longer. If, therefore, we speak of inclusion as a necessary sacrifice which the young make on behalf of the old, we are very close to the idea that the most socially constructive behaviour is early death.

Consider some simple demographics. In the population of Britain which is now sixty three million, twenty three million are working – that is a minority, So, already we see the idea that in some sense a majority of people are ‘normal’, and that their privilege must be extended to the marginal remainder, does not actually hold.

This leads to another way of thinking about disability. Disability is considered as in some sense an exception, as socially abnormal. But as people get older and older before they die, disability ceases to be the condition of a small minority of the population and becomes a

stage through which everybody will pass. The most disabled person of all is a baby, who can do practically nothing for itself, except breath and cry. Who could possibly see a new life as a social burden?

We do not pose the issues that we confront in talking of disabled people in the same way that we think of people at different stages of their lives. If we did, I believe a lot would be gained. Let me give an example – if people of age seventy five, who will contribute enormously in terms of their learning, their understanding, the breadth of their knowledge, their historical experience, the quality of what is produced by any employer, are to continue to make that contribution, they will not be able to work at the same pace, they will not be able to work necessarily the same number of hours, they will not necessarily be able to work the same number of days, they will require more possibility for taking time off for medical attention than will the target population of today's employers.

Will we not learn best how to tap that resource of society by harnessing the experience of people who have been disabled for a rather longer part of their lives? The real problem is to harness the full potential of people whose working patterns are different due either to the stage of their life, to the role they play in society, such as child carers, who I missed out, or to their physical state of being.

In both these two dilemmas, a basic question has arisen, namely 'who is included in whom?' The mental mindset associated with 'inclusion' is the idea that the 'excluded' are a minority. But when the 'excluded' are a majority we then fall back on the less comfortable idea of superiority. Our unanalysed perception is always that that includes already possess what is good for everyone, so that the only discussion is how much of this we should give to others.

This leads, perhaps, to the most basic question of all. Does the notion of 'inclusion' rest on a defence of privilege? If we are even toying with the idea that a privileged minority has the right to discuss 'how much' of its wealth to distribute, then we are conceding a fundamental issue of justice, namely, it has the right to this wealth in the first place?

I will approach this through my third dilemma, the dilemma of development. In order that the world can be more just, is it sufficient for the rich to include the poor? By 'just' I mean nothing ambitious: simply the attainment of rights: to fix ideas, those codified in the United Nations, which is the nearest thing to a world ideal that the human race has so far codified.

We can look at this from two angles: first, who is the majority? And second, is universal justice compatible with privilege?

The basic mental and social conception of the Third Way, from whose discourse the term 'inclusion' issues, is that most people are all right. An existing, or shortly forthcoming, superior civilisation is quite general in the world, and the problem is to perfect it by extending it to a remaining unfortunate marginal minority.

Unfortunately, when we examine the material wealth of the population of the world we find the poor are not marginal and are not a minority. They are four fifths of the population of this planet. Actually, the marginal population of the world consists of the rich.

They are the minority, but they run the world. They have established therefore a political, social, cultural, and intellectual order founded on the values and the experiences of a minority of the people of this world. Well, could they possibly be missing out on something? Is the problem perhaps how to 'include' this privileged minority, with its power, its weapons of mass destruction, its strange hesitations before the frightful prospect of social justice and a world of universal rights, in the materially poorer but culturally richer world of the majority?

This raises the central question of whether wealth is a begetter of universal human values. *A priori* this seems unlikely. Leo Tolstoy once said that the human being will do anything possible to bring the benefits of his own life to a fellow being – except get off his back.

Suppose we were to analyse slavery, in classic times, as a problem of inclusion. We would come across the following paradox: the world was run by the slaveowners. If, therefore, the problem of inclusion was to extend their privilege to the slaves, we would have to conclude that the answer was to turn all slaves into slaveowners.

Who would they own?

Society did not move on by admitting slaves to the ranks of the owners, but by abolish the distinction altogether. The obstacle to progress was in fact the existence of a special privilege. Is it not possible that the privileges of the North today constitute exactly the same kind of barrier to human progress? Is the issue therefore to raise the South to the status of the North – the paradigm of ‘development’ – or to remove those institutional mechanisms which maintain the privileges of the North?

I pose this as a dilemma precisely because the solution is not obvious, and I would not like to leave you feeling that I believe it is. There are many very powerful economic arguments that the world as a whole advances more when some people are richer than others – it is the incentive, or it is the benefits of enterprise or it is the reward simply to those who try harder – that they should receive benefits which others do not receive.

However this is an empirical, not just a moral question. Has privilege made the world a better place? I want to put before you some very simple figures, which arose from a study you can find in my book.

The ratio between the income per capita of those four fifths of the world’s people who live in the so called non-advanced countries and the same for people who live in the advanced countries, so the ratio of per capita income for the advanced and the non-advanced countries at the start of the process of globalization in 1980 was 10.7; by 2000, this ratio was 22.6. The effect of globalization was to multiply by somewhere between two and three times the ratio of the incomes of the rich countries to the incomes of the poor taken on average.

Is this privilege sustainable? My argument is a straight forward one – no, it is not. This degree of inequality cannot bring world civilisation into being for the most basic reason, which is that economically it does not work. The rate of growth, the GDP of four fifths of the world, which was 35% during 1970 to 1980, fell to minus 20% during 1980 to 1990 and minus 14.5% in 1990 to 2000, during which time the GDP growth rate of the euro area fell from 12.2% to minus 8.4%, that of South-East Asia fell from 12.9% to 1.9%, but even that of North America, fell from 24% to 20%. The difference being, of course, in 1970, America’s growth rate was the smallest at 25%, it is now the largest at 21%. It has come out on top, but what is the price of victory?

This suggests that the cause of poverty, in short, may not be the inadequacies of the poor but the privileges of the rich. The problem lies, it suggests, not with the ‘have-nots’ but the ‘have-lots’, whose narrow has have blinded them to the true possible riches of a world without privilege. This is an old message and a simple one, but this does not make it a false one.

Of course, it could be that despite all that, there is no other solution. This world with its warts may be the best, at least economically, that we can hope for. Is this in fact the case? For me this is synonymous with the following question: do we have a choice? My answer is yes: there is no such thing as economic necessity. There is always a choice. The problem is

only that sometimes, the choice to institute justice is a difficult one, because it involves an assault on privilege.

If what we have seen for the last twenty years is in fact economic necessity, we are no more in control of our destiny than the ancient peoples of the world who viewed lightning, thunders and armies and earthquakes as the work of the Gods, as the work of a Nature that they could not possibly hope to confront or overcome. We are now so much more able to confront what Nature does that there is nowhere that humans do not go – some times at a greater risk than others, but to such an extent that we are actually destroying that Nature, instead of it destroying us. If, therefore, we can not control what is happening as a result, it must tell us that it is not because we can not control Nature, but because we can not control ourselves. So, to say that there is an economic necessity and there is no social alternative is in fact to say that we as humans are incapable of changing our own destiny. This would be a sad conclusion.

It contains, I think, an error. In my view, we have to begin to educate people not to accept that there is only one economic answer: to inquire after the economic alternatives, into the consequences of applying the prescriptions which are alleged to come from purely technical experts, but which, when we unpick them, turn out to be the views of politicians, or political interests. Of course, the politicians might be right. But I will finish on one quotation from Kurt Tochholsky: *“Lass dir von keinem fachman imponieren, Der dir erzählt. ‘Lieber Freund, das mach ich schon zeit zwanzig jahren so.’ Mann kann eine Sache auch zwanzig Jahre lang falsch machen. “* In English: “Don’t let any expert tell you: ‘My dear friend, I’ve done it like this for 20 years.’ You can also do something wrong for 20 years”

Alan Freeman is co-editor, with Boris Kagarlitsky, of *The Politics of Empire: the crisis of Globalisation* (Pluto Press, 2004)