

RETHINKING INCLUSION THROUGH UTOPIA:
CRITIQUE AND PROJECT
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This article examines inclusion as a test case for utopian intentionality, understood as a specific mode of engaging critically and constructively with the present (Ricœur, Mannheim). Grounding inclusion in the ontological relationality and constitutive vulnerability of human beings (Honneth, Maillard, Pelluchon), the article argues that inclusion qualifies as a utopian device only under two conditions: it must not be instrumentalised for ends extrinsic to itself, such as mere social cohesion or systemic stability; and it must not, in turn, instrumentalise the subjects it addresses, who are to be recognised as ends in themselves. Drawing on Iris Marion Young's typology of oppression, Ruth Levitas's critique of the discourses of inclusion, and Miranda Fricker's account of epistemic injustice, the article shows how inclusive practices can betray their own normative promise while retaining its rhetoric. It further argues that genuine inclusion does not suppress conflict but enables it, distinguishing conflict from violence. Inclusion thus emerges not as a state to be achieved or a regulative idea, but as an unending, self-revising practice of justice oriented toward a good place that does not yet exist.

Keywords: inclusion, utopia, justice, vulnerability, relationality.

1. What does a utopian way of thinking mean?

The history of literature and the social sciences offers many very different utopian tales.

The range of meanings of the word "utopia" - which arises from its complex etymology *ou/eu-topos* - initially pertains to a place that does not yet exist: perhaps a possible place. Furthermore, utopia concerns the not-yet of some being-good, understood not merely as absent but as lacking¹.

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¹ See Virgilio Melchiorre, *La coscienza utopica*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 1976; see Francesco Totaro, *Assoluto e relativo. L'essere e il suo accadere per noi*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 2014.

Moreover, when comparing utopia with ideology (Karl Mannheim, as well as Paul Ricœur), a third relevant element emerges: utopia not only describes a potential good place but also strives to achieve it.

Therefore, what distinguishes certain narratives as “utopias” is not their specific content – given that it can vary significantly and may even be historically contradictory – but rather their specific intentionality, meaning how the content is interpreted and presented. This approach is characterized by three key factors: it is performative; the place/time it refers to is considered a good one; and it is distant in time/place.

Paul Ricœur points out:

If we consider utopias according to their contents, we even find opposing utopias. [...] So we cannot define utopias commonly by their concepts. In the absence of utopia’s thematic unity, we must seek unity in its function”². In this regard, he highlights its starting point from the idea of “no place”, which is implicit in the term itself: “what must be emphasized is the benefit of this special extraterritoriality. From this ‘no place’ an exterior glance is cast on our reality, which suddenly looks strange, nothing more being taken for granted. [...]; it is a field, therefore, for alternative ways of living”³.

Karl Mannheim had already stated that utopia tends “to shatter, either partially or wholly, the order of things prevailing at the time”⁴. This characteristic makes utopia the opposite of ideology. The utopian approach is neither a mere prediction nor a claim to absolute knowledge. Rather, it constitutes a particular modality of engaging with reality, representing a specific manner in which it is considered: I refer to this as “utopian intentionality”⁵.

The utopian intentionality chooses the way of a true realism, because considering the existing world in terms of its possibilities – the possible being-good that is not-yet – utopia reveals more about the world than any so-called realistic considerations that are limited to what is immediately apparent. Utopian thinking assesses both the value and the deficiencies of the present condition and urges a move toward a better one by overcoming the

² P. Ricœur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, Columbia University Press, New York 1986, p.16.

³ *Ibidem*.

⁴ K. Mannheim, *Ideologie und Utopie*, Cohen, Bonn 1929, engl. transl. *Ideology and Utopia*, Routledge & Kegan Paul 1938, p. 173.

⁵ C. Danani, *Utopia: critica e progetto*, in *Iride*, 3, 2023, pp. 513-527.

world's current defects. Utopia is more realistic than realism: it functions as an "ontological disclosure"⁶.

This does not imply disregarding human historicity: any thinking – even utopian thinking – should be aware of being rooted in a form of belonging, without which it would be impossible to develop any critique. Human thinking develops in the tension between belonging and distance. Ricœur says:

If finitude is primordially 'point of view', the acts and operations by which we become aware of point of view as point of view will reveal the most elementary connection between an experience of finitude and a movement transgressing this finitude. [...] All perception is perspectival. But how could I recognize a perspective, in the very act of perceiving, if in some way I did not escape from my perspective?⁷

Utopian thinking is not deemed utopian because it is free from historicity, but rather due to its ability to critically consider it, to highlight the negative aspects that afflict it, and to advance towards overcoming them.

From the perspective of utopian intentionality, certain pathologies can be identified: these may manifest as forms of escapism or impatience. The former involves indulging in visions of a better world without taking any steps to change reality; the latter, impatience, is the insistence on forcing reality – even by violent means – to conform to the ideal. These issues arise from an inability to manage the tension between 'now' and 'not yet': inherently, the virtue of utopian thinking lies in understanding and generatively living this tension.

2. *Facing (in)justice*

Utopian thinking not only interprets the world but also aspires to be transformative in the construction of "a good place". However, it should not claim to possess absolute knowledge or to define once and for all the characteristics of the good place: it should recognize itself as a form of historical thinking. Utopia should be capable of revising itself from time to time in response to the contradictions and wounds of the world it critiques. Content undergoes changes but, from a formal perspective, always with the

⁶ See P. Ricœur, *La métaphore vive*, Seuil, Paris 1975, transl. eng. *The Rule of Metaphor. The creation of meaning in language*, University of Toronto Press 1977, pp. 204-254.

⁷ Id., *L'Homme faillible*, Aubier-Éditions Montaigne, Paris 1960, engl. transl. *Fallible Man*, Fordham University Press, New York 1986, pp. 25-26.

objective of liberating humanity from conditions that undermine dignity and hinder human flourishing. Utopia confronts existing injustices to advance justice. Consequently, its content pertains to practices and institutions, cultural paradigms, and processes of distribution and recognition, as well as the division of labor and the ways in which human beings relate to other living entities. Even if one cannot entirely adhere to John Rawls's contractualist paradigm of justice - due to its inability to account for human vulnerability, for instance - it remains valuable his distinction in *A Theory of Justice* between the concept and conceptions of justice.

He writes:

Thus it seems natural to think of the concept of justice as distinct from the various conceptions of justice and as being specified by the role which these different sets of principles, these different conceptions, have in common. Those who hold different conceptions of justice can, then, still agree that institutions are just when no arbitrary distinctions are made between persons in the assigning of basic rights and duties and when the rules determine a proper balance between competing claims to the advantages of social life. Men can agree to this description of just institutions since the notions of an arbitrary distinction and of a proper balance, which are included in the concept of justice, are left open for each to interpret according to the principles of justice that he accepted. Injustice, in turn, has many faces"⁸.

Following this distinction, it is beneficial to consider Iris Marion Young's reflection on injustice. She argues that oppression and domination are the two primary social conditions that define injustice, and she identifies five faces of oppression. However, she contends that groups and their members can experience oppression in numerous ways and aspects, which can only be fully comprehended – and countered – through a confrontation with historical reality. In fact, “each criterion can be operationalized; each can be applied through the assessment of observable behavior, status relationships, distributions, texts and other cultural artifacts”⁹. Oppression “consists in systematic institutional processes which prevent some people from learning and using satisfying and expansive skills in socially recognised settings, or institutionalized social processes which inhibit people's ability to play and communicate with others or to express their feelings and perspective

⁸ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA) 1971, p. 5.

⁹ Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1990, p.64.

on social life in contexts where others can listen”¹⁰. Oppression pertains to institutional obstacles that impede personal development, encompassing material deprivation or unequal distribution, along with other associated issues. Domination is the institutional constraint on self-determination. It “consists in institutional conditions which inhibit or prevent people from participating in determining their actions or the conditions of their actions”¹¹. Young affirms that oppression and domination overlap; however, there are nonetheless reasons to distinguish them. Oppression generally encompasses or involves domination, which refers to restrictions imposed on oppressed individuals to adhere to rules established by others. However, it also includes inhibitions that are not directly a consequence of relations of domination. Moreover, not everyone subject to domination is also oppressed. In any case, Young concurs with Foucault, who proposed to look beyond the concept of mere conscious and intentional injustice. The exercise of power frequently results from liberal practices in education, bureaucratic administration, the production and distribution of consumer goods, medicine, and related fields.

Oppression appropriately categorizes a set of concepts and conditions, grouped into five classifications: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence. There are class, gender, and racially specific forms of exploitation. Marginalization refers to people the system of labor cannot or will not consider. Furthermore, “the powerless have little or no work autonomy, exercise little creativity or judgment in their work, have no technical expertise or authority, express themselves awkwardly, especially in public or bureaucratic settings, and do not command respect”¹², they “lack the authority, status, and sense of self that professionals tend to have”¹³. Exploitation, marginalization, and powerlessness all pertain to dynamics of power and oppression that arise from the social division of labor, as stated by Young. Moreover, “to experience cultural imperialism means to experience how the dominant meanings of a society render the particular perspective of one’s own group invisible at the same time as they stereotype one’s group and mark it out as the Other”¹⁴. Violence, the final category of oppression to which Young refers, causes that “members of some

¹⁰ Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, Oxford University Press, New York 2000, p. 156.

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

¹² Ead., *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1990, pp. 56-57.

¹³ *Ivi*, p.57.

¹⁴ *Ivi*, pp. 58-59.

groups live with the knowledge that they must fear random, unprovoked attacks on their persons or property, which have no motive but to damage, humiliate, or destroy the person”¹⁵.

3. *Inclusion: a utopian topic?*

Since the Lisbon Summit in 2000, the promotion of social inclusion and social cohesion has remained a central strategic objective of the European Union. Member states are now mandated to develop biennial National Plans for Social Inclusion (NAPs). These plans must address four key objectives delineated at the Nice Summit in December 2000:

1. to facilitate participation in employment and access to resources, rights, goods, and services for all;
2. to prevent the risks of exclusion;
3. to help the most vulnerable;
4. to mobilise all relevant bodies.

While there is considerable scope for interpretation through the ‘open method of coordination’, member states retain discretion in implementing these objectives¹⁶. In any case, inclusion has increasingly become a pivotal concept. It may serve as an effective means to operationalize Young’s concept of oppression, and consequently, the notion of injustice. The processes of inclusion are shaped by intersecting and overlapping structures of gender, sexuality, and race with those of class, culture, and postcolonial imperialism, considered in a transnational frame¹⁷. However, it is a problematic concept that requires critical oversight. Indeed, due to the lack of initial conceptual clarity, the terminology of social inclusion and exclusion has been employed to justify a variety of conflicting ideological positions¹⁸.

The prominent Ruth Levitas’ book on the subject advocates for maintaining a critical perspective on it.

Levitas states:

¹⁵ Ivi, p.61.

¹⁶ R. Levitas, *The Inclusive Society? Social Exclusion and New Labour*, 2^a ed., Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2005, p. 191.

¹⁷ N. Fraser, *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the "Postsocialist" Condition*, Routledge, New York 1997, pp. 225 – 235.

¹⁸ H. Collins, *Discrimination, Equality & Social Inclusion*, in *Modern Law Review*, 66, 1, 2003, pp. 15-43, p. 21.

I am deeply skeptical of the effects of discourses of exclusion and integration, which so easily obscure rather than illuminate patterns of inequality, and which do not question the nature of the society in which people are to be included. [...] I am still searching for a route to a just and sustainable future¹⁹.

Moreover, the question is not simply whether there is more or less social exclusion, but what kind of inclusion has been delivered for whom, and on what terms²⁰. Should inclusion be delivered without equality?²¹ Addressing social exclusion without making a significant effort to reduce inequality is like struggling with our hands metaphorically restrained, undermining the effectiveness of any efforts²². Furthermore, Judith Butler²³ cautions that individuals are so profoundly dependent on the recognition of others for their survival as social beings that they would prefer to adhere to painful and subordinate forms of identity rather than remain unrecognized.

Inclusion models can result in new forms of oppression and domination, thereby leading to injustice. Similar to the narrative of capitalism, they can lead to new forms of oppression and can also colonize the imagination of the very subjects to whom their promises are made. It may result in homologation or mere integration.

Nonetheless, can it be considered a concept of value? In truth, inclusion is a compelling notion, chiefly due to its flexibility and sensitivity. At an individual level, it elicits personal fears of exclusion or marginalization. At the political level, it holds broad appeal, both to individuals who prioritize increased participation and those who advocate for enhanced social control. The issue of inclusion is fundamentally rooted in human beings' ontological relationality²⁴; however, it can be regarded as a utopian device – where 'utopian' refers to a transformative movement aimed at achieving a better state that has not yet been realised – under at least two conditions: it must be based on some inherent attribute of human beings rather than on external claims; it should operate with human beings as ends. Only under these

¹⁹ Ruth Levitas, *The Inclusive Society? Social Exclusion and New Labour*, 2^a ed., Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2005, p. 6.

²⁰ Ruth Levitas, *The Inclusive Society? Social Exclusion and New Labour*, p. 192.

²¹ *Ivi*, p. 193.

²² *Ivi*, p. 234.

²³ See J. Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 1997.

²⁴ See C. Danani, "Living on the World": Rethinking Justice by Reconsidering Vulnerability and Autonomy, in *Medicina e Morale*, 2, 2020, pp. 193-211.

specific conditions can it function as a utopian device in conjunction with the categories delineated by Young.

4. *Grounding inclusion on human ontological relationality*

The human being is inherently relational; no individual flourishes in isolation. An individual develops themselves and contributes to society through the relationships they establish²⁵. Consequently, the development of a just society must prevent processes of exclusion. Because of the ontological relevance relations (with oneself, others, and their environment) have, human beings are inherently vulnerable and interdependent entities²⁶. Vulnerability is an ontological feature of humans, but it is experienced differently in various existential conditions²⁷. The term, in general, should be devoid of its customary negative connotations, as it pertains to the constitutive relational porosity of human beings. This notion underpins the capacity for individual flourishing through generative relations or, conversely, can result in deprivation owing to destructive relations.

Since ontological vulnerability reveals both the possibility of being wounded and of being supported to flourish, this opens a multifaceted space of responsibility and underscores the urgency of practices – including political ones – that not only rely on formal principles and aim to contain and address the potential for harm but also enable the embodied subject, who always coexists with others within specific milieus, to flourish and attain their own – relational – autonomy. To foster justice, mere protection and defense are insufficient; human beings require care. It concerns not only the equitable distribution of goods but also demands for recognition²⁸. Furthermore, it pertains to a certain degree of stability, as what is significant for individuals is not solely the level of functioning attainable at a given moment but also the expectation of maintaining that level²⁹. Exposing individuals to significant

²⁵ See A. Honneth, *Leiden an Unbestimmtheit. Eine Reaktualisierung der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie*, Reclam, Stuttgart 2001.

²⁶ See N. Maillard, *La vulnérabilité. Une nouvelle catégorie morale?*, Labor et Fides, Genève 2011.

²⁷ See C. Pelluchon, *Du principe d'autonomie à une éthique de la vulnérabilité*, in *Grandeurs et leurres de l'autonomie. Pour une prise en compte de la vulnérabilité en médecine*, Médiasèvres, 156, maggio 2010, pp. 83-102; see C. Mackenzie, W. Rogers, S. Dodds (a cura di), *Vulnerability. New Essays in Ethics and Feminist Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, New York 2014.

²⁸ See N. Fraser, A. Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange*, Verso, London 2003.

²⁹ See J. Wolff, Avner de-Shalit, *Disadvantage*, Oxford University Press, New York 2007.

risks and conditions of considerable precariousness inherently disadvantages them compared to those not subjected to such circumstances; this constitutes a state of disadvantage irrespective of the occurrence of adverse events. Furthermore, there are also “cross-categorical” risks – where more than one function is affected – and “inversely cross-categorical” risks, which occur when the attempt to enhance one function inadvertently jeopardizes another. If an individual, due to their circumstances, is compelled to undertake undesirable risks that others are not required to assume in order to maintain their dignity, this constitutes a situation of injustice. Moreover, disadvantages tend to accumulate, and some are particularly detrimental, as they have the potential to lead to additional disadvantages.

Given that vulnerability is an inherent aspect of human ontology rooted in human ontological permeability, inclusion is a positive practice relevant to all human beings. It is not limited to specific categories of people but pertains to the human condition as a whole, taking into account contingent specific vulnerabilities that give rise to “special needs.” Consequently, justice requires that inclusion first guarantees equitable access and stability across various functions, ensuring that individuals are not excluded from beneficial interventions that facilitate such achievements. Furthermore, it necessitates those interventions avoid stigmatization of any individual. Language should also be inclusive, aiming to prevent causing harm, disrespect, or marginalization, as referenced in the *Manifesto della comunicazione non ostile*³⁰. Moreover, the environment in which individuals exercise their agency must be inclusive, recognizing that place matters (pertaining to “spatial justice,” as discussed by H. Lefebvre in 1968³¹). Places should not be viewed merely as physical settings but as integral components of existence, constituting a socio-spatial-symbolic complex with semantic and performative importance.

The concept of inclusion is more effectively conveyed through verbal expression rather than solely through substantive terminology. It signifies a dynamic process rather than a static condition. Additionally, it pertains not only to individuals but primarily to the relationships among people, it is a contextual and evolving idea. Inclusion represents an ongoing responsibility – an incessant effort that must be continually pursued. It is both a critical and constructive notion, acknowledging that practices previously considered inclusive may, over time, transform into exclusionary or even pathological

³⁰ <https://paroleostili.it/scarica-il-manifesto/> .

³¹ See H. Lefebvre, *Le Droit à la ville*, Anthropos, Paris 1968 1968, trad. it. di C. Bairati, Marsilio, Padova 1970.

and oppressive behaviors, rather than remaining open and liberating. Only when inclusion is regarded as a persistent commitment can it avoid ultimately becoming exclusionary.

5. *Shaping Inclusion by Justice*

If the theme of inclusion finds its foundation in the ontological condition of human relationality, thereby qualifying itself for admission into a utopian horizon, it must consequently establish itself within the framework of justice, as previously noted. Inclusion is not entirely self-justifying, as evidenced by the numerous questions that, if left unanswered, may lead to contrary outcomes.

This qualification unfolds into two distinct yet interconnected conditions. The first one rejects external instrumentality: inclusion must not be understood as a means to achieve objectives external to it. To be included must be regarded as a means to achieve inclusion. An outcome frequently associated with inclusive practices is social cohesion, understood as the stability of the social bond. But if this outcome is assumed as the criterion that justifies inclusion – such that inclusion becomes its means – rather than as its possible effect, inclusion ceases to be measured by justice and is instead measured by its own systemic functionality. This is the difference between an inclusion that produces cohesion because it is just, and an inclusion pursued because it produces cohesion, which may or may not be just. The second concern pertains to inclusion as a process: it must not, in turn, instrumentalise the individual to whom it is addressed. Inclusion indeed involves human beings as its own end. It constitutes the relational process through which humans can realize their potential, given that they are fundamentally relational, porous, and open.

Therefore, inclusion occupies a position within the utopian horizon not as an ultimate end, but rather as a “qualified way” – an institutional and practical mediation through which the intrinsic relationality of humans is recognised and realised with justice. It is precisely because it is not an end in itself that inclusion is susceptible to failure, betrayal, or degeneration into its own simulacrum, and the two conditions outlined herein serve as a form of critical oversight.

Axel Honneth, by considering freedom, offers a conceptual tool to clarify this interpretation of inclusion. In *Das Recht der Freiheit* he argues that freedom is not exhausted in its negative or reflexive form, but is fully realised only as social freedom, arguing that social freedom requires that “individual subjects can perform the reflexive acts required for self-

determination only if they interact socially with others who do the same”³². Social freedom is a freedom that obtains within institutions to the extent that these allow for the reciprocal recognition of subjects as ends, and not merely to the extent that they secure the functional integration of the system. Honneth speaks, in this regard, of a possible betrayal of institutions with respect to their own constitutive normative promise: an institution can continue to function, indeed function better, precisely while betraying the normative principle that justified its existence in the first place. The same can happen to inclusion.

This possibility of betrayal is not merely a theoretical hypothesis. Ruth Levitas has offered a precise empirical and conceptual diagnosis of it in her study of British social inclusion policy. Levitas distinguishes three competing discourses that have historically contested the meaning of social “inclusion” and “exclusion”: a redistributive discourse (RED), centred on poverty as a lack of resources and rights; a social integration discourse (SID), which reduces inclusion to participation in paid employment; and a moral underclass discourse (MUD), which attributes exclusion to behavioural and cultural deficits on the part of excluded subjects, rather than to structures of inequality³³. Her analysis of New Labour policy shows how the language of inclusion, social cohesion and “community” can slide from the first discourse – anchored in a logic of distributive justice – towards the second and third, in which inclusion is reduced to functional integration into the labour market or to the moral regulation of excluded subjects. Levitas observes, critically, that this slide often occurs without being declared: the inclusive lexicon – community, partnership, cohesion – can continue to be deployed precisely while its redistributive substance and its dimension of structural critique are progressively hollowed out, leaving underlying inequalities substantially intact. This is a precise illustration, at the level of concrete policy, of what the Honnethian perspective allows us to formulate at the theoretical level: an institution (here, social inclusion policy) can retain its name and its rhetoric while in fact betraying the normative promise of justice that name is supposed to guarantee. Inclusion, by itself, does not exclude oppression.

Inclusion is deemed to possess a utopian quality only when it maintains its basis in the fundamental normative commitment to reciprocal recognition as an end in itself. It should not serve as a means to establish order, nor be used as a rhetorical cover for discourse that implicitly perpetuates oppression.

³² A. Honneth, *Das Recht der Freiheit. Grundriß einer demokratischen Sittlichkeit*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Berlin 2011, p. 42.

³³ See R. Levitas, *The Inclusive Society? Social Exclusion and New Labour*, p. 6.

Only then can inclusion be considered capable, in a utopian sense, of critically surpassing the existing order rather than merely reproducing it in a harmonized form. When exercising inclusion as the opening of a space for reciprocal recognition as an end, the included subject is never reduced to a mere instrument for another purpose – not even for inclusion itself – but is regarded as an end in their own right.

As Paul Ricœur articulates, such a subject is regarded as capable of speech, action, promise, and narration of self, and is not merely a recipient of actions and practices. Therefore, the process through which the subject participates via inclusion should be oriented towards constructing the very agenda of that process itself. Otherwise, to be included would merely signify serving as a means to stability objectives established by others.

This also raises questions about epistemic injustice³⁴. Fricker defines epistemic injustice as “a wrong done to someone specifically in their capacity as a knower”³⁵: someone is not believed and is underestimated in the importance of what they say. The result is that someone has no power over their own milieu. Fricker identifies two forms of epistemic injustice, which she calls testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice.

She clarifies:

Testimonial injustice occurs when prejudice causes a hearer to give a deflated level of credibility to a speaker’s word; hermeneutical injustice occurs at a prior stage, when a gap in collective interpretive resources puts someone at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of their social experiences. An example of the first might be that the police do not believe you because you are black; an example of the second might be that you suffer sexual harassment in a culture that still lacks that critical concept. We might say that testimonial injustice is caused by prejudice in the economy of credibility; and that hermeneutical injustice is caused by structural prejudice in the economy of collective hermeneutical resources³⁶.

The question concerns not only judgments but also social imagination, a core element of utopia. Inclusion processes demand active imagination for social change. However, individuals regarded as irrelevant in their opinions

³⁴ See M. Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, Oxford University Press, New York 2007.

³⁵ *Ivi*, p. 1.

³⁶ *Ibidem*.

are excluded from shaping social imagination. Fricker emphasizes the importance of social imagination:

The social imagination is a mighty resource for social change, and this is significantly due to its capacity for informing thought directly, and thus independently of beliefs that may remain tainted with the prejudices of the day. But where it is the images themselves that are tainted by prejudice, the very same capacity to impinge on judgement directly and without the subject's awareness can render the social imagination an ethical and epistemic liability. The collective social imagination inevitably contains all manner of stereotypes, and that is the social atmosphere in which hearers must confront their interlocutors. No wonder the prejudicial elements in the social imagination can impinge on our credibility judgements without our say-so³⁷.

She clarifies:

prejudice will tend to go most unchecked when it operates by way of stereotypical images held in the collective social imagination, since images can operate beneath the radar of our ordinary doxastic self-scrutiny, sometimes even despite beliefs to the contrary³⁸.

The two conditions indicated for inclusion are not redundant, and it is worth making their relative mutual autonomy explicit. One can imagine an inclusion that is not instrumentalised in its end – that does not aim, for instance, at stability as its ultimate criterion – but that nonetheless instrumentalises those who take part in the process: for example, by activating participation without shared construction and without reciprocal recognition. Only when both conditions are jointly satisfied, articulating inclusion according to the regulative measure of justice, does it show itself to be a faithful, critical and constructive way towards the good place that no given order can exhaust. Inclusive practices demonstrate utopian intentionality not only when they are not aimed at legitimizing the status quo, but also when they function as agents of justice.

An additional and essential aspect must be regarded as intrinsic to inclusiveness, which should not be misconstrued as homologation or merely integration. Genuine inclusion processes allow – and do not hinder – the

³⁷ *Ivi*, pp. 38-39.

³⁸ *Ivi*, p. 40.

emergence of conflicts. Moreover, a broader scope of inclusion elevates the probability of divergence and conflict, as it averts fragmentation, fosters relationships, and does not necessitate fusion. Instead, it unleashes the potential inherent in each perspective. It is imperative to distinctly differentiate between conflict and violence in this context. The term ‘conflict’ derives from the Latin ‘cum-fligere,’ meaning to collide with someone; meanwhile, ‘violence’ pertains to the use of force intended to cause harm, and it entirely lacks a positive relational component. Daniele Novara (2011), in his work conducted by the staff of the “Centro Psico-Pedagogico per l’Educazione e la Gestione dei Conflitti,” as reported in the magazine *Conflitti*, summarizes that violence is inherently disruptive, whereas conflict constitutes a contrast that does not necessarily entail damage and pertains to potential relations, even if these are arduous and complex. The conflation of these two concepts, particularly the reduction of conflict to violence, is highly perilous; it incites fear and alertness, leading solely to defensive reactions that hinder the resolution of issues. Individuals capable of engaging in conflict are able to endure relational tension or disagreements without feeling threatened. Violence emerges when aggressive feelings, anxieties, and contrasts are repressed or denied, preventing their recognition, expression, and processing. Conversely, the capacity to manage conflict serves as the most effective antidote to violence.

6. *Conclusion*

This contribution has considered inclusion, a practice characterized by high levels of individual and social sensitivity, in order to concretize how utopian intentionality functions. Through the perspective of utopia, inclusion unveils its potentialities and risks. Consequently, utopia assumes more defined contours. The initial decision was not to limit the scope of the term to specific categories of subjects. While it may be important to consider individuals with special needs, rigid categorizations hinder a more profound examination. Consider, for instance, the well-established discourse on architectural barriers: beginning with the needs identified by particular situations of limited mobility, the objective is not to devise specific solutions - what might also result in stigmatization - but rather to conceive of spatial design that accommodates all individuals, in every context and at every stage of life. Such design should promote well-being, foster relationships among human beings and with the environment, encourage sharing, and enable individuals to act as protagonists of their own lives, contributing to the

development of the world they inhabit. Therefore, the fundamental question is subsequently reformulated.

This does not imply that efforts involving checklists, specifically derived from the most apparent instances of exclusion, lack value; however, they should be regarded as instruments that cultivate perceptiveness and encourage broader awareness. Take, for example, the work of Melinda Jones³⁹, who, among other aspects, addresses education and proposes a checklist as a practical guide, recognising that success in education is crucial to success in other areas of life. Failure to provide adequate and appropriate education to all children is tantamount to perpetual exclusion. Precisely because for an inclusive education it is not enough for children to be physically present – although this is a good start – children (she specifies “with disabilities”, but these lines of reasoning apply to everyone) must be meaningfully engaged in the full range of benefits available through education. She proposes a checklist, suggesting that “the relevant questions with respect to education are:

Is any child excluded from school (whether due to financial, physical or intellectual constraints)?

Is any child excluded from any aspect of school-life (including learning, assemblies, excursions, playtime, sport and extra-curricular activities)?

Is the teaching programme relevant to all learners?

Are the education system, the school and the teacher committed to inclusion?

Has teacher training taught flexibility to respond to diversity amongst the student body?

Are the teaching materials accessible to all?

Is the classroom designed with the needs of all learners in mind?

Are all children facilitated in such a way that the learning is meaningful?

If support is required for a student to be included, is this available? (Support may take the form of personal assistance, modification of materials or equipment.)

³⁹ M. Jones, *Inclusion, Social Inclusion and Participation*, in Marcia H. Rioux, Lee Ann Bassier, Melinda Jones (a cura di), *Critical Perspectives on Human Rights and Disability Law*, Brill | Nijhoff, Leiden 2010, pp. 57-82.

Is support or assistance designed to enhance the valued recognition of the child? ⁴⁰.

Jones specifies that the right to education has been said to consist of four elements: availability (to ensure no-one is excluded); accessibility (in terms of non-discrimination, physical accessibility and financial accessibility); acceptability (demonstrating a commitment to human rights); and adaptability (meeting the needs of all learners)⁴¹. She clarifies that “to be included in education, each of the three dimensions of inclusion must be present. There must be a commitment to equality and an inclusive attitude; there must be access, and there must be facilitation”⁴². She formulates these considerations with children with disabilities in mind – but does it not hold for everyone? Specific studies on the various forms of exclusion experienced by individuals with special needs should not overlook that ableism is a socio-cultural construct and that, without considering human ontological relationality, any solution risks transforming into new forms of exclusion.

Once implemented in a utopian sense, it becomes increasingly apparent that inclusion, as a transformative endeavor, does not represent a definitive state to be achieved, nor is it merely a regulating concept: its essence is continually shaped by the critical and constructive efforts it necessitates. In this regard, it constitutes an ongoing commitment, requiring perpetual re-engagement within evolving contexts, and must continually be deconstructed – to address its potential pathologies and redesigned – to build the good place that does not yet exist.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁴¹ See K. Tomasevski (*Human Rights Obligations in Education: The 4-A Scheme*, Wolf Legal Publishers, Nijmegen 2006) quoted in M. Jones, *Inclusion, Social Inclusion and Participation*.

⁴² *Ivi*, p. 77.