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Jan Amos Comenius and his 'Forging Place of Humanity'

Jan Hábl

I Modernity, Postmodernity and the Problem of Humanity

Humaneness is a precious commodity. It is more precious the more we are aware of its lack. Since the time of the Enlightenment people have believed that humaneness would follow the progress of knowledge, that the right *scientia* would secure the right *conscientia;* that is, the one who knows what is right will do what is right! Historical experience, however, has proven that human beings are more complicated than that.

There is no doubt that certain areas of human potential have made unprecedented progress. Technologies have provided extraordinary power and overabundance—especially to the western part of the world. On the other hand, our technocratic society faces gigantic ecological, economic, political, social, and other problems; millions of people are living in poverty on the edge of society, starving and lacking foundational care. 'The technocratic optimism of the 50s and 60s is being re-evaluated today', observes Jarmila Skalková, who continues:

> It appears that science and technology, as they have functioned in the resulting society, bring about a number of antihuman symptoms: objectification of human beings, one-sided development and neglect of spiritual needs. The key problematic motifs are the alienation of personality under the pressure of bureaucratic structures, and a mass consumerist culture.[1]

In the same way, Zdenek Helus comments on our era from the sociological point of view, observing that it is a 'period of great disruption' in which

1 J. Skalková, *Humanizace vzdělávání a výchovy jako soudobý pedagogický problem* [The Humanisation of Education as a Contemporary Pedagogical Problem] (Ústí nad Labem: UJEP, 1993), 46-47.

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we are disturbed by realities such as the conflict of civilizations, the potential for global self-destruction, uncontrolled demographic explosions, the decline of moral literacy, a dramatic decrease in social capital, political and religious extremism, and so on.[2] The moral aspect of the problem is underlined by statements such as the one by Gilles Lipovetsky: '[T]he 21st Century will either be ethical or it will not be at all.'[3] Similarly Jan Sokol speaks about human beings as an 'endangered species'.[4]

There are some who still believe that the current crisis of humanity is merely temporal and provisional.[5] It is expected to change soon as some new, technically better method is generated and implemented—whether political, economic, structural, educational or other. The optimistic spirit of modernity, however, is gradually yielding to postmodern scepticism. The new generation does not believe that any scientific, business, or economic, let alone political, solution exists that would ensure a better existence than what their parents experienced.

The progress of humanity has been, for the postmodern individual, utterly lost in romantic illusions. Truth is an empty concept that means whatever anyone wants it to mean. Objective knowledge is irrelevant. Law and justice have been left to the mercy of interpretation (according to observations by professionals dealing with clinical behaviour disorder issues). Schools have become tools of indoctrination, for their so called 'preparation for life' is—deconstructed with post-modern hermeneutics—nothing but a functional moulding of individuals to be able to accept and play well their socially determined role, according to the agenda of modernity. (In this work, space will not allow me to deal with the specifics of modern and post-modern philosophy and culture, and many others have studied it in greater detail).

Is there any alternative? A meaningful understanding of humanity? A meaningful way of educating a human being that would help the individual to become truly human? Schools are often expected to play a significant role in developing 'authentic humanity', but what does it mean to be human in the first place? To answer these questions, I want to turn to the work of Jan Amos Comenius. Why Comenius, a pre-modern thinker of the 17th century?

His anthropology as well as his pedagogy offer something modern philosophy has lost. In contrast to the typical modern self-imposed restriction on metaphysics, Comenius's philosophy of education assumes it. In fact, he believes that a proper education is the key means of restoring humanity. De-

2 Cf. Z. Helus, 'Culture of Education at the Beginning of the New Millenium, Current Educational Challenges' in S. Chocholová, M. Pánková, M. Steiner, eds., *Jan Amos Komenský. Odkaz kultuře vzdělávání* [Jan Amos Comenius: the Cultural Legacy of Education] (Praha: Academia, 2009).

3 G. Lipovetsky, *Soumrak povinnosti. Bezbolestná etika nových demokratických časů.* [Twilight of Obligation. A non-painful Ethics in New Democratic Times] (Praha: Prostor, 1999), 11.

4 J. Sokol, *Filosofická antropologie. Člověk jako osoba* [Philosophical Anthropology. Human being as Person] (Praha: Portál, 2002), 15.

5 Cf. A. Prázný, 'Komenský—myslitel krize' [Comenius—Crisis Thinker] in *Pedagogika* 3 (Praha: Univerzita Karlova v Praze, Pedagogická fakulta, 2008), 236-240.

spite the antiquated language and premodern philosophical apparatus, his work brings fresh insights to the contemporary de-humanising situation.

II Biographical Context of Comenius's Work

Comenius was born on March 28, 1592 in Moravia. His family belonged to the Unitas Fratrum (Unity of Brethren), which was a branch of the Czech (and Moravian) Reformation movement begun in 1457. Inspired by the ideas of Petr Chelčický (1380–1460) and Jan Hus (1369–1415) the Unity strove for radical piety and a return to a Christ-like simplicity of life. It was their radicalism and separatism that caused much persecution of the Brethren from the beginning of their existence.

Their characteristic non-compromising desire for spiritual purity also included, in their early periods, a rejection of magisterial power, oath-taking and war. They also avoided worldly education and vocations such as commerce, which they considered a hindrance to a consistent following of the Lord. Due to their interaction with the Reformation ideas of the time, the community gradually developed into a Protestant denomination, standing theologically between Lutheranism and Calvinism.

Comenius's life was marked by a series of particularly difficult afflictions, which significantly shaped both his theology and his pedagogy. At the age of twelve (in 1604), Comenius lost his parents and two sisters, probably from the plague, and had to live with one of his other sisters and her family. When only thirteen years old Comenius experienced first-hand the destructiveness of war. As a consequence of the religious conflict between the Hungarians (Calvinists) and the Habsburgs (Roman Catholics) he lost all his inherited possessions, as well as his guardian family.

His church community soon recognized his natural talent and sent him to Přerov Gymnasium—one of the best high schools in the country at the time. Later Comenius was sent to the reformed universities in Herborn and Heidelberg, where he encountered some of the most influential ideas of the time (Alstead's encyclopediasm, Piscator's irenism, Ratichius's educational reforms, etc.). Two years after returning from his studies he was ordained as a minister, and his first pastoral appointment was to the church at Fulnek in Northern Moravia. By this time the Brethren theologians had determined there was no biblical reason for their pastors not to marry, so Comenius's young wife Magdalene accompanied him.

The beginning of the Thirty-Years War, in 1618, brought about another series of life afflictions for Comenius. His homeland was devastated by various troops of the Habsburg (Roman Catholic) armies. Being a cleric of the Protestant church, Comenius was forced to leave both his family and his community, and hide in various locations in Northern Moravia. By 1623 he had lost virtually everything: his house was destroyed, his congregation dispersed, his library was burned by the Jesuits, and his young wife, having just delivered their second child, died of the plague along with the two babies.

For the next five years Comenius led an insecure life, until the final expulsion of all Protestants from the coun-

try. The Brethren found refuge for a short while in Leszno, Poland. Comenius remarried, but his second wife also died, leaving him with four children. His third wife outlived him. In Leszno he became a co-rector of the Brethren's school and later bishop (the last one) of the denomination. It was during this period that most of his educational works were written.

Comenius's fruitful, 28-year-long Leszno period (1628-1656), was interrupted by three sojourns in other countries—where he was invited to work on educational reforms as his reputation as an outstanding educator spread across Europe. The first invitation came from England (1641-1642), the second from Sweden (1642-1648), and the third from (today's) Hungary (1650-1654). Comenius even received an invitation to work as rector of the newly founded Harvard College in America.

The Northern Wars in 1655 between the Protestant Swedish King, Charles X Gustav and the Roman Catholic Polish King, John II Casimir, proved to be fatal for Comenius and his denomination. The Lezsno Brethren community naturally sided with Swedish party, which the Polish Catholic majority considered to be a betrayal of Poland. As soon as the city of Lezsno was no longer protected by the Swedish troops the Polish partisans invaded it and burned it.

Comenius and his family barely escaped with their lives, lost all their property, and were forced into exile once again. Particularly painful for Comenius was the loss of certain manuscripts on which he had worked for more than 40 years. From Leszno he took refuge in Amsterdam in the Netherlands, where he died in 1670.

III School as the Workshop/ Forge of Humanity

Comenius's contribution to education is enormous. He attempted to write about two hundred books related to education. To outline his philosophy of education I will focus on three main areas that represent the most significant contributions: 1) his revolutionary approach to language learning and teaching; 2) his emphasis on wholeness and universality in education, and 3) the concept of following nature in education.

1. Language teaching/learning

Comenius himself was surprised by the international fame which was brought about by the publication of his Latin textbook *Janua linguarum reserata* (*The Gate of Tongues Unlocked*) in 1633. He quickly accompanied it with two additional language textbooks: *Vestibulum*—for the elementary level, and *Atrium*—for the advanced.

The fame of these textbooks was so great that it soon reached the royal courts; Douphin the Great, son of Ludwig XIV, and Kristina Augusta, the Swedish Queen, for instance, learned Latin from them. Amazingly, even Jesuits, whose pedagogical approaches were so antagonistic to Comenius's pedagogical universalism, could not deny the effectiveness of his method and used his *Janua* in their schools.

To understand its success, it is necessary to know that the language teaching methodology of Comenius's time relied mainly on rote memorization and repetition. Boys were forced to recite long pieces of classical antique writings, for example, without any understanding of the sounds they were

uttering; the meaning was 'locked' to them. The process was long, painful and often completely unsuccessful, the learners simply never grasped the foreign language. Comenius's lament in the *Great Didactics* shows the point: 'it is men we are preparing, not parrots.'[6]

In contrast to that spiritless recitation, Comenius's method was based on the *pansophic* idea of an encyclopaedic organization of material and the interconnection of real things, sense experience, and words. The key principles can be summarized in several maxims:

- foreign languages ought to be learnt through the mother tongue;
- the ideas ought to be obtained through objects rather than words;
- proceed from the familiar to the unfamiliar;
- phasing and progression of teaching must be appropriate to the learner's development;
- the learner ought to be equipped with a universal compendium of knowledge, that is knowledge of all important aspects of his world (physical, social, religious, moral, etc.);
- make the learning process a pleasure by the proper choice of learning matter, and also by the proper (nonviolent) methodological treatment of the matter.

The *Janua* was followed by a series of other textbooks which made language learning even more user-friendly. Perhaps the most famous is *Orbis Sensualium Pictus* (The Visible World in Pictures), the first illustrated language textbook.

M. W. Keating (translator of *The Great Didactics*) comments on Comenius's language-learning revolution by saying that he 'rescued the boys of his generation from the sterile study of words and introduced them to the world of mechanics, politics, and morality'. Similarly, Daniel Murphy praises his approach: 'Seldom in the history of language teaching has it been so closely related to the personal and social environment of the learner as it was in these new texts, which probably explains their survival more than three centuries after their creation…'[7]

Interestingly, Comenius gradually became frustrated by the side effects of the fame. He kept receiving invitations from various countries asking him to help with didactic reforms, but he saw his calling elsewhere. He sought after greater goals: not merely the reformation of schools and learning methods, but the restoration of all human affairs.

2. Holistic approach to education

The notion of 'wholeness' or 'universality' is an integral part of Comenius's pansophic approach to education. He often expressed it in the motto, '*omnes, omnia, omneno*', which means that all people ought to learn, in all possible

6 J. A. Comenius, *Didaktika magna* (Great Didactics), M. W. Keating, Trans, (https://archive.org/details/cu31924031053709/, 1967) chap. XXII, par. 3. Original work published 1657. The majority of the remainder of citations from the *Great Didactics* come from chapters XXIII and XXIV, and will not be further referenced.

7 D. Murphy, *Comenius: A Critical Reassessment of his Life and Work* (Portland, OR: Irish Academy Press, 1995), 195.

ways, all things.

Let us consider *omnia* first. When saying 'all things' Comenius recognizes that 'a perfect knowledge of all sciences and arts … is neither useful nor possible for any human being'. Wholeness in this context means the learning of 'the foundations, reasons, and goals of all the important things', which enables human beings to 'fulfill the essence' that is given them by God.[8]

In the *Czech Didactics*, Comenius elaborates on this theme, and relates the content of education to the previously set goals:

- the goal of rationality refers to the knowledge of created beings (that which is);
- the goal of virtuousness refers to the knowledge of morality (that which ought to be);
- the goal of godliness refers to the knowledge of God's grace (that which is to be enjoyed).

These three areas of knowledge then constitute the content of education, which enables humans to understand why they were brought to life: to serve God, other creatures, and themselves.[9]

When saying *omneno*, that is teaching/learning by 'all possible ways,' Comenius refers to the noetic as well as methodological aspect of education. He often expresses it in the triad *theoria/praxis/chrésis* (wise use), pointing to the fact that knowledge without virtue and piety is never complete, for knowledge—as well as anything else—might be both used and abused. A person who is well *informed*, but not morally *formed* is merely a 'useless encumbrance on the earth', according to Comenius, even a 'misery' — to oneself as well as to others. For the greater the knowledge, the worse it is when it's used for evil.

Therefore Comenius contended that an educated but immoral humanity goes backwards rather than forwards, degenerating. On the other hand, his 'forging-place of humanity' deliberately aims for regeneration, that is, for the restoration of every dimension of humanity — reason, character, and spirit.

The idea that morality as well as piety is both teachable and learnable might be surprising to a contemporary educator (and not only to Christian educators). After all, is not authentic piety (together with morality) a direct result of God's saving grace? What was implicit in the early *Didactics* is made explicit in the later *Pampaedia*.

Here Comenius presents his argument for the necessity of leading students towards morality and courtesy, and the following paragraph—dealing with 'instilling piety'—begins with the words: 'For it is evident … that also piety is teachable…' He further recognizes that regeneration is the necessary starting point given by the grace of God. But grace does not 'abolish' nature; on the contrary, grace 'restores' and 'perfects' it, argues Comenius.

Therefore, it is legitimate to use natural instruments when leading towards morality and piety. And to Comenius it is evident that nature teaches that morality and piety will be best instilled by:

- Providing a good and living ex-

8 Cf. J. A. Comenius, 'Pampaedia' in *Obecná porada o nápravě věcí lidských* [General Consultation Concerning the Improvement of Human Affairs] III (Praha: Svoboda, 1992), 1-12.

9 J. A. Comenius, *Didaktika česká* [Czech Didactic], 4th ed. (Praha: Národní knihtiskárna I. L. Kober), 1926, chap. X.

ample to children, for imitation is one of the key elements of human learning.
- Providing an adequate explanation of every rule or principle that is to be obeyed, for it is good for human action to know and understand why we do what we do.
- Providing an opportunity for everyday practice, because morality and piety are not only a matter of knowing, but also of doing.

Notice that in both paragraphs (on morality and on piety), Comenius follows the same threefold structure of instruction: example, understanding, practice. The whole process must never be 'violent' or 'coarse'; on the contrary, it must be 'gentle', 'free' and 'smooth'. For that is the way God himself relates to people; he brings no one to himself violently, against his or her will.[10]

In Comenius's conceptualization, *omnes* refers to all people indeed. Education for everyone was a revolutionary idea in his time, and Comenius, being aware of it, anticipated his opponents' objections:

> Someone might say: For what [purpose] should workmen, peasants, porters, or even women be educated? My answer is: If this general education is properly instituted, everyone will have enough appropriate material for thinking, desiring, exertion, and acting. Secondly, everyone will know how to conduct all the behaviours and longings of life without crossing the enclosures one has to pass through. Moreover, even in the midst of labour, all people will be lifted through meditation on the words and deeds of God. … In brief, they will learn to see God everywhere, to praise him for everything, to embrace him always, and thus live better in this life of sorrows.

Elsewhere Comenius adds to his theological argument other material, which seems to be based simply on the educator's experience: 'if a human being is to become a human being, he or she needs to be educated toward humanity'. Without proper education, he or she becomes 'the most wild of all creatures'. Therefore, it is necessary to educate all people, whether smart or dull, rich or poor, boys or girls, rulers or serfs.

The need for the inclusion of all people into the 'project' of the restoration of human affairs, Comenius sees reflected also in the mutual interdependence of each individual unit of humankind—whether a person, a city or a nation. 'We are all together on one big theatre stage of the world, and everything that happens here touches us all', states Comenius figuratively in one of his late writings.[11]

The value of this idea cannot be overestimated, for the recognition of the fact that the harmony of the individual cannot be attained without the harmony of the whole has enormous

10 This thought comes from J. A. Comenius, 'Mundus spiritualis', in *Obecná porada o nápravě věcí lidských* [General Consultation concerning the Improvement of Human Affairs] vol III (Praha: Svoboda, 1992), chap. VII, par. 2.

11 *Unnum neccesarium*. Taken from A. Molnár and N. Rejchrtová, *J. A. Komenský o sobě* [J. A. Comenius About Himself] (Praha: Odeon, 1987), 294.

implications for every aspect of human life.

To accomplish his holistic goals Comenius designed a complex system of schools based on both horizontal unity in respect to curricula at a given educational level, and vertical unity in the hierarchy of the stages of education. In the *Great Didactic* he distinguishes four major developmental stages of youth and proposes four types of schools: the nursery school—up to the age of six; the 'comprehensive' or basic school—from age six to twelve; the grammar or secondary (Latin) school—to end at age eighteen; Academia from eighteen to twenty four. In *Pampaedia* he later adds four more stages with the explanation that the whole of life provides opportunities for conscious learning: the school of youth; the school of maturity; the school of old age; the school of dying.

However obscure the 'school of dying' may sound, Comenius explains that it is the greatest sign of wisdom to 'prepare for meeting with the Creator'. Any time before the old age one 'could' die, but when reaching the old age one knows he or she 'must' die. This fact provides a good educational opportunity to 'turn away from the ephemeral and adhere to the eternal'.[12] In a time when education had neither stable institutions nor general programs of study, such a systematic and complex proposal was quite unique.

3. Educating according to nature

Comenius was the first person to formulate the idea of 'education according to nature'. However, his education was very different from the popular approaches of later thinkers such as Rousseau, because his understanding of nature (both that of the world and of the human being) was different. Comenius presents the foundations of his anthropology and cosmology in his early *Didactics*. Here he explains that:

Human beings are 'the greatest, strangest, and most glorious of all creation'.

Human beings are the *greatest*, because only humans possess all the attributes of being: life, senses, and reason. For example, a stone has being but does not possess life; plants and trees are given life, and even the ability to multiply, but do not sense things; all the animals, beasts, birds, fish, reptiles, etc. possess life and the senses but not reason.

Human beings are the *strangest* of all creatures, for only in them 'is the heavenly merged with the earthly; the visible with the invisible, the mortal with the immortal. To embed a rational, immortal, and eternal soul into a piece of clay and make it to be one personality, that is a mighty act of God's wisdom and artistry.' It was only the human being to whom God related personally (*nexus hypostaticus*) and thus united his nature with human nature.

The greatest *glory* of human beings lies in the fact that God himself in Jesus Christ became a human being in order to 'recreate what has been corrupted'. No other creature in the whole universe has been so gloriously honoured by the Creator.

The ultimate goal of human life is not in this life. This is made known to people in the Scriptures, but it is also observable in human nature and life.

The composition of our nature

12 *General Consultation*, 135.

shows that what we have in our lives is never sufficient. For human beings have a threefold life in themselves: vegetative, in common with plants; animal, in common with beasts; and spiritual or intellectual, which is specific for people. From the fact that we tend to grow and develop toward perfection on all these levels, though we reach perfection on none of these levels, Comenius concludes that 'there must be something greater cherished for us'.

> All our actions and our affections in this life show that we do not attain our ultimate end here.
>
> Everything that happens with us in this life happens on levels, onto which we ascend higher and on which we always see yet higher levels… . Similarly, our efforts are first smallish, thin, and feeble, but gradually they grow greater and reach further. But as long as we are alive … we always have something to do, something to desire, and something to strive for. Nevertheless, we can never fully satisfy or fulfil our efforts in this life.

Earthly life is but a preparation for eternal life. Comenius sees the evidence of this in three things:

Human beings. 'If we examine ourselves, we see that our faculties grow in such a manner that what goes before paves the way for what comes after. For example, our first life is in our mother's womb. But for the sake of what does it exist? Of the life itself? Not at all. … In the same way, this life on earth is nothing but a preparation for eternity.'

The world. 'When we observe the world from any point of view, we can see it has been created for the purpose of the multiplication, edification, and education of humankind… . This world is but a seedbed, nourishment, and school, from which we are to proceed to the eternal academy.'

The Scripture. 'Although reason shows it, the Holy Scripture affirms most powerfully that God, having created the world and everything in it, made man and woman a steward of it and commanded him and her to multiply and to replenish the earth and subdue it. Hence the world is here for man and woman. God speaks about this clearly in Hosea, that the heavens are for the earth, the earth then for corn, wine, oil, etc., and those things are for people (Hos 2:21,22). All things, therefore, are for humans, even time itself… . After all, the Scripture speaks about this world almost always as preparation and training, a way, a journey, a gate, an expectation; and we are called pilgrims, visitors, arrivers, and expectant ones.'

The ultimate goal of every human being is 'eternal happiness with God'. To reach this, a human being needs to fulfil his or her human vocation, which Comenius derives from the Scriptures, specifically from the account of the creation of human beings (Gen 1:26). There are, according to Comenius, three main tasks given to people as a life assignment:

To be a rational being, which means 'to be an observer of all things, the one who names all things, and the one who learns all things. In other words, humans are to know, to call, and to understand all the known things of the world.'

To be a master of all creation. This consists in 'subjecting everything to his own use by contriving that its legit-

imate end be suitably fulfilled; in conducting himself royally, that is, gravely and righteously…' In other words, to govern the creation requires first of all to govern virtuously one's own 'movements and actions, external and internal...'.

To be the image of God. That is, 'to constantly turn one's heart, desires, and efforts toward God, both externally and internally… and thus reflect the perfection which lies in human origin'.

In the following chapter, Comenius further explicates the three tasks in order to show they are rooted in human nature. Human nature has a 'natural' tendency toward *learning, virtue*, and *piety*. In the explanation, Comenius makes clear that by nature he understands 'not the corruption which has laid hold of all men since the Fall …, but our first and original condition, to which, as to a starting-point, we must be recalled'.

To support his view, he quotes Ludwig Vives, a recognized authority of the time, along with Seneca. Vives says: 'What else is a Christian, but a man restored to his own nature?' This is remarkably similar to Seneca: 'That is wisdom, to return to nature and to the position from which universal error has driven us'. To strengthen his argument, Comenius relates naturalness with the doctrine of common grace (*universalis providentia Dei*). The sign of God's wisdom, which secures the continual functioning of everything, is that:

> he does not do anything in vain, that is, without a specific goal, nor without the specific means needed for achieving the goal. Whatever is, is for some purpose, and in order to reach the goal, it is furnished with the necessary instruments, even with some kind of impetus, that make things flow to their goals not against their nature, but rather spontaneously and gently.

It is similar with the human being, according to Comenius, who 'is naturally fitted for the understanding of facts, for existence in harmony with the moral law, and above all things for the love of God'. Comenius acknowledges several paragraphs later that the 'natural desire for God, as the highest good, has been corrupted by the Fall and has gone astray, so that no man, of his strength alone, could return to the right way', but God has his instruments of 'Word and Spirit' by which he 'illumines' his own.

Therefore, 'while we are seeking for the remedies of corruption, let none cast corruption in our teeth', states Comenius anticipating an objection, and continues:

> Did not God, soon after the Fall, and after the exile … sow in our hearts the seeds of fresh grace by the promise of his blessed offspring?

4. The implications demonstrated

The implications of Comenius' philosophy (anthropology) for education might be well observed in his specific (didactic) instructions for moral education and so called 'instilling piety'. Morality as such is dealt with in his *Mundus moralis* – 6th grade of Pansofia, and partial notes can be found in many of his works (*School of infancy*, *Via lucis, etc.*), but the educational aspects of morality are most thoroughly treated in his *Didactics* (both *Great* and *Czech*, briefly also in *Analytical didactics*).

In addition to little notes spread throughout the *Didactics*, Comenius devoted an entire chapter (XXIII in both books) to the question and named it '*Methodus morum in specie*', which M. W. Keating translates into English as 'The method of morals'. The next chapter (XXIV) is called *Methodus pietatis* ('The method of instilling piety'); the fact that it follows the moral instruction chapter is no coincidence, as we shall see.

Comenius begins the preface to these two chapters by explaining that everything he had written to that point was only the 'preparation' or 'beginning' and not the main work. It is necessary to emphasize here that in the previous twenty two chapters he dealt with nothing less than the entire system of pedagogical goals, principles and methodology for the teaching of 'science, art and language'. But the main work, according to Comenius, is the 'study of wisdom, which elevates us and makes us steadfast and noble-minded – the study to which we have given the name of morality and of piety, and by means by which we are exalted above all creatures, and draw nigh to God himself'.

These three purposes of the study of wisdom correspond to the triad of fundamental pedagogical goals mentioned above. Let me briefly remind the reader: at the very beginning of *Didactic* Comenius states that the teleological demand for knowledge, morals and godliness arises from an *a priori* anthropological nature, which means that to humankind it has been given to be knowledgeable of things, to have power over things and himself, and to turn to God, the source of everything.

All three areas belong inseparably together and would be 'unhallowed' if they were separated. 'For what is literary skill without virtue?' Comenius floats this rhetorical question and immediately answers it with a reference to the old proverb:

> He who makes progress in knowledge but not in morality ... retreats rather than advances. And thus what Solomon said about the beautiful but foolish woman holds good for the learned man who possesses no virtue: *As a jewel of gold in a swine's snout, so is a fair woman who is without discretion.*[13]

Hence an education that was not held together with morality and the 'firm bond' of piety, would be a 'miserable' education. A good education would instead develop humanity in all three of the above-mentioned dimensions. For 'the whole excellence (*essence,* in the *Czech Didactics*) of man', Comenius explains in chapter IV, is situated in these three things,

> for they alone are the foundation of the present and of the future life. All other things (health, strength, beauty, riches, honour, friendship, good-fortune, long life) are as nothing, if God grant them to any, but extrinsic ornaments of life, and if a man greedily gape after them, engross himself in their pursuit, occupy and overwhelm himself with them to the neglect of those more important matters, then they become 'superfluous vanities and harmful obstructions'.

The proper aims of moral education in Comenius's *Didactics* are the

13 Comenius, *Didaktika česká*, chap. X, 17.

so-called 'key' or cardinal virtues of 'wisdom, moderation, courage and justice' (*prudentia*, *temperantia, fortitudo*, *iustitia*), without which the structure of pedagogy would be 'unfounded'. Comenius first briefly clarifies the individual virtue, and subsequently posits the method of its acquisition; together, these then form the crux of his methodology of character formation. He identifies six principles in the *Czech Didactics*, and later in the *Great Didactics* supplements and expands them to ten. For the sake of clarity I will only briefly summarize them here:

- Virtue is cultivated by actions, not by talk. For man is given life 'to spend it in communication with people and in action'. Without virtuous actions man isn't anything more than a meaningless burden on the earth.
- Virtue is in part gained by interactions with virtuous people. An example is the education Alexander received from Aristotle.
- Virtuous conduct is cultivated by active perseverance. A properly gentle and constant occupation of the spirit and body turns into diligence, so that idleness becomes unbearable for such a man.
- At the heart of every virtue is service to others. Inherent in fallen human nature is enormous self-love, which has the effect that 'everyone wants most of the attention'. Thus it is necessary to carefully instil the understanding that 'we are not born only for ourselves, but for God and our neighbour'.
- Cultivation of the virtues must begin at the earliest age, before 'ill manners and vice begin to nest'.
- Honour is learned by virtuous action. As he learns to 'walk by walking, to speak by speaking, to read by reading' etc., so a man learns 'to obey by obedience, forbearance by delays, veracity by speaking truth' and so on.
- Virtue is learned by example. 'For children are like monkeys: everything they see, whether good or bad, they immediately want to imitate, even when they're told not to, and thus they learn to imitate before they learn how to learn.' Therefore they need 'living examples' as instructors.
- Virtue is also learned by instruction, which has to accompany example. Instructing means clarifying the meaning of the given rule of moral behaviour, so as to understand why they should do it, what they should do, and why they should do it that way.
- It is necessary to protect children from bad people and influences. Inasmuch as a child's mind is easily infected, it is necessary on the one hand to retreat from 'evil society' and on the other hand to avoid lazy people.
- Virtue requires discipline. Inasmuch as fallen human nature reveals itself to be constantly 'here and there', it is necessary to systematically discipline it.

It is worth mentioning that Comenius is aware of the principle that a young age is well fitting for any kind of education or formation. In chapter VII, paragraph 4, he speaks almost like a developmental psychologist:

'It is the nature of everything that

comes into being, that while tender, it is easily *bent* and *formed* (emphasis mine). … It is evident that the same holds good with man himself', continues Comenius in the following paragraph, and infers: 'If piety is to take root in any man's heart, it must be engrafted while he is still young; if we wish anyone to be virtuous, we must train (chisel, *otesat* in the *Czech Didactics)* him in early youth; if we wish him to make great progress in wisdom, we must direct his faculties towards it in infancy…'

The inter-relationship of morality and piety can hardly be overlooked. It is evident throughout the book, but in chapter XXIII and XXIV Comenius makes it explicit. To stress his point, he accompanies the chapter on moral education with a brief chapter dealing with 'instilling piety'. Here he acknowledges that piety is a special 'gift of God', but adds that God uses also the 'natural agencies' of his grace and he therefore wants parents, teachers and ministers to be his 'assistants', which reveals something about his understanding of the doctrine of *common grace*. This, then, leads to the conclusion that piety ought to be an integral part of family education as well as school education.

Comenius repeats that by piety is meant the ability to 'seek God everywhere, ... to follow him everywhere ... and to enjoy him always' and explains that the first happens through reason, the second through will, and the third through the joy of knowing him. There are three sources of piety given to people: God's word, the world, and human beings (*Scriptura, natura, providentia particularis*); we are to read, observe and meditate carefully in order to draw from them.

The growth in piety takes place through *contemplation*, *prayer* and *trials*, which make a believer to be a 'true Christian'. But piety must not be merely 'a matter of words', explains Comenius, but must be based on a 'living faith' which is authenticated by adequate deeds. Similarly, in *Mundus moralis* Comenius says that one of the key aspects of proper moral wisdom (*prudentia*) is pursuance, for 'to know what ought to be done is not as difficult as doing it'.[14]

Since one of the key sources of piety is the Scripture, Comenius presents a strong case for its role in education (in chapter XXV). Rather than using pagan books (antique classics) in schools, he encourages using the Scriptures and argues for its superiority. That does not mean he would reject the classics as such, but he is concerned about the primary influence to which a youth is to be exposed.

There is much wisdom in the pagan literature consistent with the Scriptures, which might be collected and used, which Comenius frequently does in all his writings. But at the same time there is much 'immorality,' 'godlessness' and 'blindness', which only a trained spirit can distinguish, and which is therefore not suitable for a youth.

Some of Comenius's statements concerning the classics such as Ovid, Lucianus, Diogenes and Aristotle led some interpreters to the conclusion that he was an 'enemy of the antique' as such. That however is a very artificial reading of Comenius, for through-

14 Comenius, *Mundus moralis*, chap. II, 5.

out all his work there are virtually hundreds of quotations from the classics used as validations of his arguments.

The same attitude can be observed also in Comenius's late *Věječka moudrosti* (Fan of Wisdom), where in paragraph 38 he shows in contemporary examples how pagan literature turned a number of people, including the Swedish queen Christina, away from the truth.

The inter-relation of pedagogy, anthropology, theology and cosmology in Comenius's thinking shows that he pursued high philosophical goals. It was a conscious and serious endeavour which in his later works he called *pansophy*, a special notion of universal wisdom. Assuming the universe is a harmonic unity created by one Creator, Comenius saw a fundamental parallelism between the cosmos (nature), the microcosmos (human nature), and revelation (Scripture). Bringing human nature into harmony with nature and Scripture is the real essence of education. It is the 'art' (*ars*) of 'forging' such humanity in which the '*nexus hypostaticus*' (the personal relationship) to God is restored.

IV A Model for Today

It is evident that Comenius's anthropology, as well as his overall philosophy of education, is thoroughly grounded—both metaphysically and theologically. Comenius takes for granted that a human being was not made 'only for himself, but for God and his fellow man'. Likewise, human nature is not defined (even by an excellent observer) empirically, but theologically: man is the most perfect and excellent of all creation because he was made in the image of God, but he is also a sinner because he has denied that image.

Out of this arises the need for education—human nature is broken and cannot by its own efforts become good; on the contrary, it has a tendency 'to become obstructed by empty, fruitless and vile things'. Comenius's education is thus *educatio* in the original sense of the word: *e-ducare*, a leading out of, or away from, the hindrances of one's sinful self.[15] Without any exaggeration, for Comenius education plays a soteriological role: it is a God-given means for the salvation of mankind.

Such assumptions and goals are understandably foreign to the point of view of secular modernity. Therefore most of the modern (especially Czech) Comeniological research has been affected by the secular tenets of modernity, and has had a tendency to ignore those assumptions and goals as merely a 'residual of his time' or as a theoretical 'wasteland' without much sense.[16]

There were of course notable exceptions like Jan Patočka, Jan B. Čapek, Dagmar Čapková and Radim Palouš, who opposed the Marxist ideology and strove to understand Comenius in his thought integrity, but the mainstream of Communist Comeniology did its best to 'save' Comenius from the metaphysical and medieval 'slush' (*bahno*).[17]

15 Cf. R. Paluoš's notion of *educatio* in *Čas výchovy* [Time of Education], (Praha: SPN, 1991), 63ff, and A. Wright, *Religion, Education and Post-modernity* (Routledge Flamer, 2004), 130-131.

16 Cf. J. Popelová, *Komenského cesta k všenápravě* [Comenius's Way to Universal Reform], (Praha: SPN, 1958), 143.

17 Cf. F. R. Tichý, 'S J. A. Komenským do budování socialistické školy' [Building the

Comenius has been linked for example with social reformers and revolutionaries such as John Lilburne the Leveller, John Bellers the Quaker, and Robert Owen the Socialist.

Thus the Communist prism prevented the interpreters from appreciating Comenius's work in its fullness. Jan Patočka, for example, bravely stated (in 1957! that is, during one of the most difficult periods under the totalitarian regime) that the Communist interpreters, such as Otakar Chlup, Robert Alt and Archbishop Alexejovič Krasnovskij, 'emphasize Comenius's relationship to Bacon's inductive realism and assume that this relationship affects his education. However, they usually do not provide sufficient warrant for their theses, but simply affirm that Comenius belongs to the materialistic and sensualistic traditions.'[18]

Similarly, as early as 1966 John Sadler identified the reductionist problems of the Communist interpretation: '[Comenius's] educational methodology is seen as an expression of his educational philosophy and as something which could be detached without great loss from its religious framework.'[19] What is interesting (and somewhat frustrating) is the fact that this interpretation still prevails in Czech schools today, as I have witnessed in my own experience as a university professor of education.

However, I believe that the crisis of the modern paradigm (especially its secular version) that we have witnessed for some time opens up new interpretational horizons in relation to pre-modern intellectual concepts. Not everything that is old is necessarily obsolete. Comenius's concept of education is indisputably old and non-modern, but in the context of the current state of 'modern' humanity the question must be raised as to whether this isn't its greatest strength.

Socialist School with J. A. Comenius] in *Jan Amos Komenský, Didaktické spisy* (Praha: SPN, 1951), 9.

18 J. Patočka, 'Cusanus a Komenský,' [Cusanus and Comenius] in *Komeniologické studie* I. (Praha: Oikoymenh, 1997) 168, and J. Patočka, 'Komenského duchovní biografie' [Comenius's Spiritual Biography], in *Komeniologické studie* III (Praha: Oikoymenh, 2003), 18.

19 J. E. Sadler, *J.A. Comenius and the Concept of Universal Education* (London, 1966), 35.