

# “HUMANITATIS OFFICINAE”?<sup>1</sup>

## RETHINKING KOMENSKÝ'S NOTION OF EDUCATIONAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Jan Hábl

### Abstract

This paper introduces the contours of Jan Amos Komenský's anthropology in context of his education. Komenský is internationally known as Comenius. He was a Czech 17th century Brethren bishop, philosopher and educator who is celebrated especially for his timeless didactic principles, which earned him the epithet “the teacher of nations”. The goal of this paper is to present and analyse the anthropological assumptions of his educational project, which is to be *humanitatis officinae*, that is, a “forging-place of humanity”. In the context of dehumanising tendencies of the present society, pedagogical *humanisation* seems to be an urgent issue in contemporary education. This paper attempts to contribute to the discussion concerning the pedagogical *humanisation*.

### Key words

Education, pedagogy, humanity, school, philosophy, anthropology, didactic, theology, Comenius.

### 1 The problem of dehumanising humanisation

Humanity suffers a constant tendency to “became inhumane”, observes Komenský<sup>2</sup> again and again in his works. If human being is to become truly humane, he or she needs to be led towards humanity, to be humanised. Hence the well known and often quoted Komenský's phrase “school as workshop

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<sup>1</sup> This term comes from the Komenský's Latin *Didactica magna* (*Great Didactic*), in the Czech Didactic he uses “dílna lidskosti”, which some English writing Czech comeniologists translate as “workshop of humanity”. M. W. Keating (1896) translates it as “forging-place of humanity”. Since Keating is a native English speaker, I will use his translation.

<sup>2</sup> Komenský is internationally known as Comenius. I will in this article use the Czech version, however, for I believe it will be closer to the assumed community of readers.

of humanity". But what it means to be human? What is human being? What he or she ought to be? Salt ought to be salty. River ought to be clear. Knife ought to be sharp. But what about human being? Who he or she ought to be? And how he or she ought to become what he or she ought to be?

This paper attempts to answer some of these questions and thus contribute to the contemporary discussion concerning pedagogical *humanisation*,<sup>3</sup> which is considered to be one of the key principles of transformation in the contemporary (not only) Czech educational system. The need for "humanisation" arises from the specific situation in which Czech pedagogy, and the school system in general, finds itself today. On one hand, the totalitarian heritage, which still exercises its influence, needs to be dealt with and overcome. The dehumanising tenets of communist totalitarianism have left deep traces upon Czech pedagogy. On the other hand, new social and cultural challenges, having dehumanising and depersonalising potentials, have emerged with the fall of totalitarianism. They are related to a specific ambivalent dichotomy within our contemporary western society. On one hand, we are witnesses to unprecedented advances in science and technology which have provided extraordinary possibilities and potentials for the progress of civilisation – even allowing overabundance. On the other hand, the newly-developed society faces gigantic ecological, economical, political, social and other problems; millions of people are living in poverty on the edge of society, starving and dying without any medical care. Relying on foreign sources as well as on her own observation Jarmila Skalková states: "The technocratic optimism of the 50s and 60s is being re-evaluated today. It appears that science and technology, as they have functioned in the resulting society, bring about a number of antihuman symptoms: objectification (*zvěcnění*) 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, a mass consumerist culture, and technocratic progress." (1993, p. 46–47) In

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<sup>3</sup> See for example: Skalková, J. *Humanizace vzdělávání a výchovy jako soudobý pedagogický problém* (The Humanisation of Education as a Contemporary Pedagogical Problem), UJEP 1993; Walterová E. *Humanizace vzdělávání jako prostředek kultivace člověka* (Humanisation of Education as a Means of Cultivation of the Human Being). *Pedagogická revue*, 43, 1991, V, pp. 327–333; Harbo T. *Humanizace vzdělání a současné teorie kurikula* (Humanisation of Education and Contemporary Curricular Theories). *Pedagogika*, 41, 1991, III, pp. 247–255.

the same way, Zdenek Helus recalls socio-critical analysts who speak about our era as a “period of great disruption” in which we are disturbed by realities such as the conflict of civilisations, potentials for global self-destruction, uncontrolled demographic explosions, the decline of moral literacy, a dramatic decrease in social capital, political and religious extremism, etc. (comp. Helus 2009). Along the same lines, Jan Sokol speaks about human beings as an “endangered species”, whose personality is endangered by the “uniformity of mass consumerism” which institutionalises and bureaucratises itself and thus “replaces personal relations with impersonal ones” (2002, p. 15–16).

As a response to this condition, there has emerged the so called “new humanism” in pedagogical circles, states J. Skalková, and continues, “the issue of humanism reappeared with new intensity in the last decade of the twentieth century” (1993, p. 41). Not surprisingly, Komenský’s old motto describing school as the “*humanitatis officinae*”, (forging-place of humanity) has been resurrected and frequently quoted. Post-totalitarian Czech pedagogical literature abounds with various innovative plans and proposals, in which “the crystallising axis of transformation is the idea of humanisation” (Švec, 1994, p. 24). Along the same lines, Vladimíra Spilková makes a clear overall statement: “The idea of humanisation is one of the leading principles for the transformation of the contemporary Czech school system...” (2004, p. 25)

What is meant by humanisation? The actual wording may differ, but the common principle is “the significant strengthening of an anthropological orientation, increased attention to the child, to his or her needs, interests and potentials of development”, in V. Spilková’s words (2005, p. 33).<sup>4</sup> Likewise L. Holkovič defines the core of humanisation as an “adequate adjustment of the whole system of education and its particular parts to the demands of students”. (2004, p. 311) K. Rýdl expresses it similarly when identifying humanisation as an “approximation to the needs and expectations of the individual, so that he or she participates in shaping the form of educational processes” (2004, p. 351).

However, it has been more than two decades since the fall of the totalitarian regime, but the desired “humanisation” has not arrived yet. It is true that the contemporary school succeeds relatively well in equipping learners with the various pieces of pragmatic information, skills and competencies

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<sup>4</sup> For more details on the question of humanisation see also Vališová, A. (Ed.) *Historie a perspektivy didaktického myšlení*. Praha: Karolinum, 2004.

necessary for their efficient self-assertion in life and more currently in the marketplace, but it fails to form an authentic humanity on either a personal or an inter-personal level, observes Pavel Floss, and continues, “such schools are reduced merely to the *functional* aspect of education, producing efficient employees or experts, but failing to cultivate the whole humanity of an individual”. (2005, p. 26)

The failure of schools to achieve the humanising goals is commonly viewed as critical.<sup>5</sup> It is said that the problem is that school “has failed to fulfil its role in preparing human beings for living in our contemporary dynamically changing society, [changing] particularly its goals and values”, asserts J. Skalková (1993, p. 52). The psycho-didactic principles of the past; such as, one-sided intellectualism, verbalism, formalism, encyclopedism, learners’ passivity, manipulation, authoritativeness, etc. still dominate in the Czech school system. It also appears “that both the process of education and school management fail to provide adequate room for the cultivation of human potentials and talents, for development of moral, aesthetic and emotional aspects of character, for the development of inter-personal relations and for self-realisation of the individual”, contends Skalková (1993, p. 52). Moreover, the problem is that humanisation is becoming a mere slogan, “in which might be covered almost anything”, observes K. Rýdl, and continues, “providing convincing arguments are supplied, which is not at all a problem in the contemporary state of affairs concerning the quantum of knowledge and information” (2004, p. 351).

The critical question is why? Why is humanisation not arriving? Is it a lack of appropriate pedagogical methodology? Is it a lack of financial resources? Or is it a lack of human resources, i.e., teachers’ motivation, skills or abilities? Briefly, are the problems structural, pedagogical, economic, political or other?

Without downplaying the importance of these aspects for effective education, my argument is that the main reason for the failure of the contemporary Czech educational system to achieve the desired “humanisation” is primarily philosophical. Specifically, the problem of modern understanding

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<sup>5</sup> However, it should be mentioned that the failure is still interpreted as temporary and provisional. Its achievement is expected as soon as some new technically better method is generated and implemented – whether political, economic, structural, curricular or other. Cf. Prázný, A. Komenský – myslitel krize. *Pedagogika* 3/2008, Univerzita Karlova v Praze – Pedagogická fakulta, pp. 236–240.

of humanity determining the definition of the humanisation. Ever since the Enlightenment, the modern anthropological paradigm has been determined by a self-imposed restriction on metaphysics, which deprived the humanity of the transcendent dimension. The emphasis on human autonomy, intrinsic goodness, rationality, epistemological objectivity, moral subjectivity and overall progress have constituted the key doctrines of the modern meta-narrative. Its fundamental crisis, which we experience today, calls for a new definition of humanity.

Hence arises the relevance of Komenský and his educational anthropology which I want to sketch in this paper. Despite an antiquated language and pre-modern philosophical apparatus, his notion of the human being, taking into account the transcendent dimension of humanity, brings very fresh insights to the contemporary de-humanising situation. In fact, since it is modernity which is in crisis today, Komenský's ideas are most insightful to us by the very fact they are non-modern. Or as Jan Patočka prophetically put it, perceiving the problems of modernity as early as 1941: "Komenský can render us service by those things which are foreign to us. For they disclose the limits of our spiritual universe." (1997, p. 21) My intention is to recover Komenský's "foreign things" and show their relevance to our postmodern situation.<sup>6</sup>

By revisiting Komenský, I do not suggest replacing modern education with that of Komenský, but rather complementing it. Instead of ignoring

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<sup>6</sup> In this work I will not deal with the specifics of modern and post-modern philosophy and culture, but rather rely on authors who studied this area in greater detail, such as: Eagleton, T. *The Illusions of Postmodernism*, Blackwell Publishers 1996; Erickson, M. J. *Truth or Consequences: The Promise and Perils of Postmodernism*, IVP, 2001; Geer, R. C. *Mapping Postmodernism*, IVP 2003; Grenz, S. J. *A Primer on Postmodernism*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1996; Greer, T.H.; Lewis, G. *A Brief History of the Western World*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed., Harcourt Brace & Comp., Florida 1997 (1<sup>st</sup> ed.1968); Harvey, D. *The Condition of Postmodernity*, Blackwell Publishers 1990; Lyotard, J. F. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984; Murphy, N. *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda*, Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1996; Murphy, N.; McClendon, J. W. Jr. "Distinguishing modern and postmodern theologies", in *Modern Theology* Vol. 5 No. 3, April 1989, 191-214; Murphy, N. *Anglo-American Postmodernity: Philosophical Perspectives on Science, Religion, and Ethics*, Westview Press 1997; Wright, *Religion, Education and Post-modernity*, RoutledgeFlamer, 2004.

the transcendent dimension of humanity, my proposal intends to develop a constructive approach to educational philosophy which both draws on the experience of modern pedagogical science; and, at the same time, takes into account the natural transcendence of humanity which is, I believe, highly relevant to the contemporary discussion concerning pedagogical humanisation.

## 2 School as *humanitatis officinae*

Komenský kept repeating the idea of school as a “forging-place of humanity” in almost all of his writings dealing with education.<sup>7</sup> However, the concept was quite complete already in the thirties of the seventeenth century, when he begun to write his didactic works. I will therefore limit my study mainly on his *Didactics* (*Czech, Great and Analytical*).<sup>8</sup>

When opening Komenský's *Great Didactic*, one might be tempted to skip the Prologue as a ‘mere’ prologue, but it is important not to do so. In the title page of his *Great Didactic*, Komenský hints that the first part of the book is going to deal with the “foundations”, as he puts it. A careful reading shows, indeed, that the Prologue deals very extensively with the foundational anthropological starting points of all his education. The opening words already reveal how broad and thorough Komenský's intentions are: “In the beginning God created human beings out of dust and placed him and her into paradise, the Garden of Eden, which he planted in the east for the purpose that man and woman would not just look after it, but also that it should be a paradise and pleasure to their God. Certainly as the Garden of Eden was the most

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<sup>7</sup> See for example his introduction to *Schola pansophica* (*Pansophic School, Škola vše-vědná*), par. 3. In other works Komenský uses different terms, which, however, overlap in their content with the term “forging-place of humanity”. In *Pampaedia* (I,1), for example, he says that the goal of the pan-educational project is “*cultura universalis*”, that is, *culturing* or *cultivating* of the whole humankind. In the *Informatorium školy mateřské* (*School of infancy*) Komenský speaks of “*štípení, zavlažování, podpirání*” (fostering, watering, shoring) of little trees or plants, which is a process that might be compared to the care of child's young soul. See *Informatorium*, chap. III.

<sup>8</sup> Most quotations will come from these three sources, therefore I will not burden the reader with extensive footnote references, but rather I will use the following system of abbreviations (if possible): e.g.: Czech Didactic, chapter I, paragraph 2 (CD, I., 2); Great Didactic, chapter III, paragraph 4 (GD, III, 4); Analytical didactic, chapter V, paragraph 6 (AD, V, 6). As for the quotations, I will use mainly my own translation of the original text.

delightful part of the world, so the human being was the most delightful creature... created in the image of the one who arises from eternity.”<sup>9</sup>

After an exposition of the Creator’s wisdom and outlining the beauties of the original state of creation, Komenský continues: “But alas! We have lost the paradise of the physical pleasures which we inhabited, and likewise we have lost the paradise of the spiritual pleasures. To the wasteland of the earth we have been driven, and in our hearts we have become wastelands. We did not appreciate the paradisaal arrangements, we coveted something more both for our bodies and for our minds, and thus we lack both, both our bodies and minds are burdened by the burden of wickedness...”<sup>10</sup>

This description is the traditional Brethren doctrine of the fall of human beings. With biblical texts, Komenský then continues to depict the far-reaching consequences of the fall. This depiction is particularly important, because it indicates how Komenský saw the human condition. He saw it as a condition which needed to be addressed. An extensive quotation is in order:

For what is in relation to people as it ought to be? What stands in its proper place? Nothing. Everything is upside down, everything has gone wrong, for all the order, all the government, all the noble features are scattered. Instead of the wisdom by which we were to resemble angels, there is foolishness and dullness ... resembling dumb beasts. Instead of prudence, which leads one to prepare for eternity, for which we have been created, there is a forgetfulness of both the eternal nature and the mortality of man. ... Instead of mutual candidness and truthfulness, there is slyness, deceit, and falsity everywhere. Instead of grace, there is envy, instead of confidence, there is deception. ... Instead of unity, there are discords, quarrels, and rages, secret malice as well as open hostility, fights and wars. Instead of righteousness, there are injustice, robberies, thefts; everyone greedily amasses only for himself or herself. Instead of purity, there is lechery, both internal and external; there is adultery, infidelity, misconduct, and lewdness, both in the mind and in speech. Instead of truthfulness, there are lies and gossip everywhere. Instead of humbleness, there is arrogance and

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<sup>9</sup> Komenský, J. A. *Didaktika česká (Czech Didactic)*. Národní knihtiskárna I. L. Kober v Praze, 4. ed., 1926, p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> Komenský, *Didaktika česká*, p. 2.

pride, preening and boasting; one rising against the other. Woe to you, miserable generation, how deeply you have sunk into wretchedness!<sup>11</sup>

Such a woeful condition of human affairs does not, however, lead Komenský to a renunciation of the world or his generation. He saw a way out — or rather a way toward — the world, toward a remedial engagement with the sick world. The solution was related to his eschatological hopes, which once again provided motivational power. Komenský knew two “joys” in the midst of all the above described miseries: 1. “That God prepares the paradise of eternity, where there will be everlasting perfection...” 2. “God has restored his paradise and his church in certain times and turned a wasteland into a delightful garden.”<sup>12</sup> According to Komenský’s reading of Scripture and history, God did such things a number of times in the past: after the flood, when bringing his people out of Egypt, and later out of Babylon; in King David’s time; and, of course, when sending his Son, the Saviour.<sup>13</sup> And Komenský adds a conclusion which seems to be one of the key moments in his ‘didactic turn’: “It is highly important that we would understand well the foundation of God’s glorious and joyful restoration and thus know how to contribute to the merciful work of God.”<sup>14</sup> Notice Komenský was no longer determined to merely put up with the miseries of the world as he had been in his ‘resignation’ period, but he was ready to participate in the restoration of the world, which was indeed a significant shift in his thinking.

The idea of *didactic*, which plays the essential role in the process of restoration, needs to be explained to the readers, for the concept was new, especially for Czech readers.<sup>15</sup> Komenský presents didactic as an “art of arts”; that is, the “artful teaching” of youth (and people in general) in the arts. Komenský further explains that all the confusions and labyrinths of contemporary schools show the urgent need of such an art. He recognized and listed the didactic reformers who inspired him and in whose footsteps he wanted to follow, but he humbly suggested there was a need for far greater and more

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<sup>11</sup> Komenský, *Didaktika česká*, pp. 4–5.

<sup>12</sup> Komenský, *Didaktika česká*, p. 5.

<sup>13</sup> In the *Czech Didactic*, he also mentions Jan Hus and Martin Luther as the servants of restoration, for these figures were clearly familiar to the Czech readers.

<sup>14</sup> Komenský, *Didaktika česká*, p. 6.

<sup>15</sup> That is why the introduction is longer and more detailed in the *Czech Didactic*.



substantial reform. According to his judgment, his predecessors formulated their didactic handbooks “on the basis of an easy practice, a posterior”,<sup>16</sup> and thus their advice covered merely external and partial aspects of education. But he dares: “to promise a great didactic, that is, a universal art of teaching all things to all people. And it shall proceed in a *reliable* way, so that the results cannot be avoided. Furthermore, *gently*, without problems and sorrows to either the teacher or the pupils, rather to the pleasure of both parts. And *thoroughly*, not superficially and for the sake of appearance, but by bringing [the pupils] toward true knowledge, pure morals, and honest godliness.”<sup>17</sup>

In contrast to his precursors, this grand project is to be educed “a priori, that is, from the unchanging essence of the things themselves, as if we brought together brooks from a living spring”. In the very next paragraph, Komenský recognizes the greatness of the things promised and invites all the readers to evaluate his project very carefully and encourages them to contribute to it. In the following paragraphs of the Prologue, Komenský further explains the importance of education in general, in particular, the education of youth, and then elaborates on the general benefits of a better educated society.

The Prologue is followed by several chapters dealing with general pedagogy. Here Komenský lays the teleological foundations of all pedagogy. The ultimate goal of all education is to bring human beings to the fulfilment of their purpose as given in the Scripture, which is, in Komenský’s words, “to enjoy with God the most perfect glory and blessing by being united to him, who is the height of all perfection, glory, and delight”. (GD, II, 1) To realize this goal, humans need to know themselves (CD, I, 1), that is, they need to know that:

1. They are “the greatest, strangest, and most glorious of all creation”. (CD, I, 2–4)
  - 1.1. Human beings are the greatest, because only humans possess all the attributes of being: life, senses, and reason. E.g., 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. (CD, I, 2)

<sup>16</sup> Komenský, *Didaktika velká*, p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> Komenský, *Didaktika velká*, pp. 3–4.

- 1.2. Human beings are the strangest of all creatures, for only in them “the heavenly with the earthly is merged; 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.” (CD, I, 3) It was only the human being to whom God related personally (*nexus hypostaticus*) and thus united his nature with human nature. (GD, I, 3)
- 1.3. The greatest glory of human beings lies in the fact 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 honored by the Creator. (CD, I, 4)
2. The ultimate goal of human life is not in this life (CD, II). This is made known to people in the Scriptures, but also it is observable in human nature and life:
  - 2.1. The composition of our nature 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, Komenský concludes that “there must be something greater cherished for us”. (CD, II, 2)
  - 2.2. “Everything we do or suffer here shows that we do not reach the ultimate (*poslední*) goal here but that everything, as well as we ourselves, heads elsewhere.” (GD, II, 5) “Everything that happens with us in this life happens on levels, on 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.” (CD, II, 3)
3. Earthly life is but a preparation for eternal life. Komenský sees the evidence of this in three things:
  - 3.1. Human beings. “If we observe *ourselves* [emphasis his], we can see that all our being progresses on levels, so that every preceding level prepares the way for the following one. For instance, our first life is

in our mother's life. But what for? Is it for its own sake? No. There it is to be formed well as a dwelling of the soul, in order to live a good life under the sun. When that is finished we come to the light... So it is with earthly life." (GD, III, 2)

- 3.2. 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 seed-bed, nourishment, and school, from which we are to proceed to the eternal academy." (GD, III, 3)
- 3.3. 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 about preparation and training, a way, a journey, a gate, an expectation; and we are called pilgrims, visitors, arrivers, and expectants." (CD, III, 7)<sup>18</sup>
4. The ultimate goal of every human being is "eternal bliss with God". (GD, IV, 1) To reach this, a human being needs to fulfil his or her human vocation, which Komenský derives from the Scriptures, specifically from the account of the creation of human beings (Gen. 1:26). There are, according to Komenský, three main tasks given to people as a life assignment:
  - 4.1. 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". (GD, IV, 3)
  - 4.2. To be a master of all creation, which means "to treat all the creation with a lordly attitude, that is, soberly and virtuously ... and without allowing any creature, including one's own body, to enslave oneself". In other words, "to govern the creation means first of all to govern

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<sup>18</sup> To back his argument, Komenský gives the following biblical references: Gen. 47:9; Ps. 39:13; Job 7:1-2; Luke 12:34.

virtuously one's own acts and deeds, both externally and internally". (GD, IV, 4)

- 4.3. 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". (CD, IV, 9)

In the following chapter, Komenský further explicates the three tasks in order to show they are rooted in human nature. Human nature has a "natural" tendency toward *learning* (4.1), *virtue* (4.2), and *piety* (4.3). In the explanation, Komenský makes clear that by nature he understands "not the corruption which resides in all people ever since the fall..., but the original and foundational state of ours, toward which we all need to be brought back". (GD, V, 1) 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 or woman brought back to his or her own nature." This is remarkably similar to Seneca: "That is wisdom, to return to our nature from which we were driven away by general fault." (GD, V, 1) To strengthen his argument, Komenský relates naturalness with the doctrine of common grace (*universalis providentia Dei*, GD, V, 2).<sup>19</sup> 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. (GD, V, 2)

It is similar with human beings, according to Komenský, who "are born with the ability to know things, with the tendency toward harmony, and with the purpose to love God above all". (GD, V, 2) Komenský acknowledges several paragraphs later that the "natural desire for God has been damaged due to the fall into sin in a such a way that it cannot be restored by its own power", but God has his instruments of "word and spirit" by which he "en-

<sup>19</sup> For the latest Latin edition, see also *Didactica magna* (Great Didactic). In DJAK, vol. XV, Praha: Academia, 1986, p. 60.

lightens his own". And, therefore, "let no one argue against us on the basis of human depravity when we begin to consult the means of restoration from this depravity, for God has already ordained his own means of restoration... Did not God sow soon after the fall the seeds of grace (by promise of the blessed seed) into our hearts? Did he not send his Son, so that the fallen could be raised up again?" (GD, V, 21–22) This 'raising up' or restoration of the original state of human beings given by the Creator then constitutes the overall goal of all Komenský's didactic.<sup>20</sup>

After defining the general goal(s) of education, Komenský turns to the actual subject of education. From all that has been said, it follows that education is (and is to be) general, or universal; that is, it concerns all people. Komenský first affirms that every human being is not only an educable being but also one in need of education, for "if a human being is to become a human being, he or she needs to be educated toward humanity",<sup>21</sup> for if he or she lacks proper education, he or she becomes "the most wild of all creatures" (GD, VI, 7). Therefore, it is necessary to educate all people, whether smart or dull, rich or poor, boys or girls, rulers or serfs (GD, VI, 7–9). This was a truly revolutionary proposal, and Komenský, 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 behavior and longings of life without crossing the enclosures one has to pass through. Moreover, even in the midst of labor, 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,

<sup>20</sup> The paragraph explaining what is meant by *human nature* was added only in *Great Didactic*. Perhaps some of his colleagues or critics pointed out to Komenský that the concept of "natural tendency" needs such clarification. It seems that part of Komenský's argument attempts to respond to some implications of the Calvinist doctrine of *total depravity*, which is the first component of the TULIP (T stands for *total depravity*; U stands for *unconditional election*; L stands for *limited atonement*; I stands for *irresistible grace*; P stands for *perseverance of saints*).

<sup>21</sup> In the Latin version Komenský uses the term: *formatio hominis* (GD, VI, 1).

and thus live better in this life of sorrows. ... Could not this state of the church be paradise, the one possible under the sun? (GD, IX, 8).

Education should begin as soon as possible in early childhood, according to Komenský, for the young age is most suitable for learning (GD, VII). Educating children is the solemn task of all parents, but Komenský realistically recognizes that parents often do not know how to do that or do not have time for it, and therefore, it is helpful to have schools where children might be educated together. Besides these practical reasons, Komenský sees another advantage of school education, which could be classified as socio-psychological in today's terminology:

It is better to educate the youth in greater numbers, for the result is greater, too; and also the work is more pleasant when they may take an example and impetus from each other. For to do what we see others doing, to go where they go, to follow those who are ahead, and to lead those who are behind – that is most natural. ... The children's age especially allows for leading through examples rather than rules. Commands meet with little response, but if we show that others are doing it, children will imitate it even without a command. (GD, VIII, 7).

In the subsequent chapter, Komenský further develops the generality of education from the content point of view. General education not only concerns all people but also refers to all things. Komenský puts it briefly and plainly: "All people ought to be taught all things." (GD, X, 1) By that he does not mean "a perfect knowledge of all sciences and arts, for such a thing is neither useful nor possible for any human being". (GD, X, 1) What Komenský has in mind is such an education as would "teach the foundations, reasons, and goals of all the important things, so that everyone would become not merely an observer of things, but also an actor... who knows how to use and enjoy all things for a good purpose". (GD, X, 1) In the *Czech Didactic*, Komenský elaborates this theme in greater detail and relates the content of education to the previously set goals: a) the goal of rationality refers to the knowledge of the created being (that which is); b) the goal of virtuousness refers to the knowledge of morality (that which ought to be); c) 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. (CD, X)

Such schools, then, would be “a true forging place of humanity”. This famous phrase has become a motto in modern Czech schools, but it should be stressed that behind the phrase lies: a) a theological definition of humanity which shapes the general goals of education: a being having a personal relationship with God, a rational being, a self-controlled master of creation, and a being reflecting the glory of God; b) specific reasons for the universality of education: all have fallen into sin and, therefore, all are in need of restoration through education; c) the specific content of education: foundational knowledge of all things necessary for properly serving God, others, and oneself.

Though there already exist a number of schools and academic institutions, such proper schools as proposed above have not yet been founded, Komenský laments in the next chapter. He anticipates this claim might upset many of his colleagues-educationalists again and therefore provides a comprehensive warrant for his claim: a) there is a very limited number of schools; b) the existing schools are neither intended nor designed for everyone but only for a few; c) the way of teaching resembles “torture”, and children turn away from learning; d) the important things are not taught, as evidenced by the loose morals of the pupils, which exist in spite of harsh discipline; e) a verbal approach leading toward “parrot-like verbosity” predominates everywhere: pupils are given merely external shells, without an understanding of the core of things, and are forced to mindless repetition; f) this problem is best seen in the way Latin is taught. (GD, XI)

However, the effort of the schools is not completely lost, Komenský continues in the following chapter. The schools could be reformed, which is both necessary and possible. Komenský is convinced the reform will succeed if based on the *natural order of things*. He writes: “It is quite clear that that order which is the dominating principle in the art of teaching all things to all men and women can and should be borrowed from no other source than the operations of nature.” (GD, XIV, 7) Therefore, if we observe nature carefully from the educational point of view, it tells us all the orders we need to know for proper teaching: a) the order of arrangement of the educational material; b) the order of speed and timing; c) the order of method (GD, XII, XIII, XIV). These orders or principles derived from nature constitute the core of

the actual didactic, which Komenský elaborates in the second part of the book. He arranges the principles into three sets of 29 didactic fundamentals, as he calls them (chapters XVI, XVII, XVIII). The first set is entitled: How to make education certain. The second: How to make education easy. And third: How to make education thorough.<sup>22</sup> Each fundamental is outlined according to the same pattern:

1. Komenský first sets out the principle of nature, that is, “Nature does not push anything out before it matures inside and wants to sprout on its own.” (set III, fund. 7)
2. Then he demonstrates the principle by several examples from nature: “Nature does not push the baby bird out of its egg before the limbs are properly developed and strong, neither forces a nestling to fly before it has feathers, nor drives it out of the nest before it can fly. Similarly, a tree does not push the buds until the sap ascending from the roots feeds them.”
3. Then Komenský exposes how the rule has been broken or neglected in the traditional schools: “In the same way, therefore, violence is done to the spirit of the young if they are forced to learn things i) which are ahead of their maturation and understanding; or ii) without sufficient preceding exposition, explanation, and guidance.”
4. And finally, Komenský proposes an alternative derived from the first principle: “Therefore: a) let there be no work of the young but what the age and abilities not only allow but also desire; b) let there be no memorization of things which they have not understood properly; c) let there be no forced performance without proper demonstration and instruction of imitation.” (GD, XVII, 38)

The three sets are further supplemented by eight principles of conciseness and rapidity in teaching, which are structured somewhat differently.<sup>23</sup> It

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<sup>22</sup> Instead of “thorough” Komenský uses, in the *Czech Didactic*, “powerful” (*mocné*) and “bringing abundant benefit” (*hojný prospěch neslo*).

<sup>23</sup> Komenský does not offer here fundamentals, but raises eight problems put into questions, to which responses are provided. The problems are, e.g., How can a single teacher teach a number of boys, no matter how great, at one time? How is it possible for all the scholars to be taught from the same book? How can many things be explained in a few words?



is both unnecessary and impossible to describe all the fundamentals in detail, for they constitute about one-third of the book. All the fundamentals are based on the same principle of natural analogy and embody three common characteristics: a) Consistency of correlation of things and their names – senses (as many as possible) must be involved in the process of learning; things themselves must be learned together with their names. b) Appropriateness of phasing and progression of teaching, which is determined by the individual aspects of a child's development. c) Suitability and pleasantness of the teaching method, which is determined not only by the proper choice of the learning matter, but also by the proper (nonviolent) methodological treatment of the matter. In Chapters XX, XXI, and XXII, Komenský then applies these general didactic principles to the specific methodology of teaching of sciences, arts, and languages.

### 3 Conclusion

In the conclusion of this paper, I want to highlight concept of “*nesamosvojnost*”, which is – to my judgement – essential for understanding Komenský's philosophy of education. Let me remind the concept: All the beings of this world, including human beings, are “*nesamosvojný*”, that is, they are not self-existing and self-sustaining, they do not belong to themselves and do not have their ultimate goal within themselves, but are related to God the Creator. In this very nature of the world lies, according to Komenský, its educative character. In the methodological part of his *Didactic* Komenský explains: “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...” (GD, 5, 2). In other words, “the world is not an accidental occurrence of something that follows an anonymous mechanism, emerging from dark meaninglessness and similarly heading towards empty indifference; on the contrary, the world is an intentional abidance of all beings, called to be ‘well’, beings called not merely ‘to be’, but ‘to be in order to’”, interprets Radim Palouš (1992, p. 18).

Every being in its true form has got the self-transcending designation. And its transcendence is educative. Patočka comments Cusanus' influence on Komenský: “From the world itself we are to learn transcendence, we are to learn that the goal of each thing lies beyond itself; thus the goal of things is

in human beings, and the goal of a human being is that which is beyond him/her.” (1997, p. 182) Men and women enter the school of the world through birth and are immediately exposed to its education. The world narrates a narrative of its own transcendence and thus calls people to the same task, to fulfil their role in the drama, for after all, they are part of the same story. The failure to follow this calling (education) is the essence of human fallenness as expressed in the biblical narrative, and has caused all the human problems, miseries and wretchedness experienced in the world.

In other words, Komenský views human beings as complex beings of a *noble* and *fallen* nature. Human beings are very noble, because they were created to be the image of God. On the other hand, Komenský recognised the fallen side of human nature, which causes humans to miss the noble “telos” of their lives, and thus brings about all the darkness and evils observable within the human world. Jan Patočka interprets this disposition of human nature as the “twofold potential of humanity”. That is, a human being is substantially an open being endowed with two potentials: he or she might be moved towards true humanity, which is characterised by love, openness and the commitment of one’s self to the whole, to its unity, harmony and meaning. But a human being might also give way to the “*samosvojný*” tendency of human nature, that is, the tendency to a self-focused entangling into one’s self which is indifferent to others; even hostile to everything that disturbs this self-concentrated closeness (cf. Patočka, 2003, pp. 485–489).

From this arises the relationship between Komenský’s philosophical assumptions and his educational philosophy: the goal, content and method of his educational project arise from and respond to this specific condition of human affairs. Komenský’s educational project is *educatio* in the authentic meaning of the word, that is, e-ducation, a *leading-out*; it is to lead humans out of everything counter-human (sins, darkness, delusions, violence, etc.) towards true humanity, that is, to light, truth, unity and harmony, dwelling ultimately in God (cf. Palouš, 1991, p. 63). However corrupted human nature is, the potential of true humanity is still there, and the restoration of humanity is both desirable and possible due to the redemptive act of Jesus Christ. This restoration of the so called “*nexus hypostaticus*”, the vertical and personal relationship to God, includes also the restoration of the horizontal relationship to other people (GD, I, 3). Such transformation of the human being into the image of God, is what constitutes, according to Komenský, the

ultimate humanity. School which transforms human beings in such a way is, according to Komenský, the proper “forging-place of humanity”.

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**Contact**

PhDr. Jan Hábl, Ph.D.  
Univerzita Hradec Králové  
Pedagogická fakulta  
Katedra pedagogiky a psychologie  
jan.habl@uhk.cz