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Development of anthropological accents in Comenius' early work and its implications for his philosophy of education

Rozwój akcentów antropologicznych we wczesnych dziełach Komeńskiego i ich konsekwencje dla jego filozofii edukacyjnej

Abstract

This brief paper investigates the anthropological aspects in Jan Amos Comenius's early works. The goal is to show the dynamics of the development in his notion of humanity. One of the sub-goals is to show that Comenius's specific notion of *resignation*, which is characteristic for his post-White-mountain work, has got a particularly positive meaning, and as such lays meaningful foundation for his educational and emendation plans and efforts of the later periods. Comenius attempted to write about two hundred books on various educational, philosophical and theological subjects. Not surprisingly, his thought throughout his life showed signs of a certain dynamic. The intention of this paper is to show the development of his anthropology in the early periods of his life and work. I believe an understanding of the formative sources and incentives, which shaped his notion of humanity in his early life illuminates the overall educational and emendation work of the "teacher of nations", as Comenius is sometimes called. The paper explains how the external factors in Comenius' life shaped the shifts in his understanding of human being, and its implications for the subsequent pedagogical and emendation projects, which proved to be so brilliant and important for the European cultural heritage.

Keywords: anthropology, humanity, observation, critique, resignation, education, emendation, faith, hope

Streszczenie

Hasło to analizuje aspekty antropologiczne we wczesnych dziełach Jan Amosa Komeńskiego. Ma na celu ukazanie dynamiki rozwoju w jego pojęciu człowieczeństwa. Ponadto udowadnia, iż specyficzne pojęcie rezygnacji Komeńskiego, typowe dla jego dzieł po epoce Białej Góry, ma wyjątkowo pozytywne znaczenie, i jako takie stanowi ważny fundament dla jego edukacyjnych i korekcyjnych planów i dążeń późniejszych etapów. Komeński próbował napisać około dwustu książek z dziedziny edukacyjnej, filozoficznej i teologicznej. Nie dziwi fakt, iż jego idee na przestrzeni całego życia charakteryzowała pewna dynamika. Celem niniejszego tekstu jest ukazanie rozwoju jego antropologii we wczesnych etapach życia i pracy. Wierzę, iż zrozumienie formatywnych źródeł i bodźców, które ukształtowały jego pojęcie człowieczeństwa we wczesnym etapie życia, rzuca światło na całość edukacyjnych i korekcyjnych dzieł „nauczyciela narodów”, jak czasami nazywa się Komeńskiego. Niniejszy tekst wyjaśnia, w jaki sposób czynniki zewnętrzne w życiu Komeńskiego miały wpływ na wahania w jego rozumieniu człowieka,

oraz konsekwencje tego rozumienia dla przyszłych projektów pedagogicznych i korekcyjnych, które okazały się tak doskonale i ważne dla europejskiego dziedzictwa kulturalnego.

Słowa kluczowe: antropologia, człowieczeństwo, obserwacje, krytyka, rezygnacja, edukacja, korekta, wiara, nadzieja

Introduction: Comenius' Dynamic Anthropology

Comenius attempted to write about two hundred books on various educational, philosophical and theological subjects. Not surprisingly, his thought throughout his life showed signs of a certain dynamic. The intention of this paper is to study the development of his anthropology in the early periods of his life and work, because I believe an understanding of the formative sources and incentives, which shaped his notion of humanity in his early life illuminates the overall educational and emendation work of the “teacher of nations”, as Comenius is sometimes called. My goal is to show how the external factors in Comenius' life shaped the shifts in his understanding of human being, and its implications for the subsequent pedagogical and emendation projects, which proved to be so brilliant and important for the European cultural heritage.

Up to the great discoveries of Comenius' manuscripts in the 1930s, the periodization of the development of Comenius' thought and work had usually been guided by external and accidental factors such as place of living, historical events, etc. The three big finds are the following: 1) S. Souček's so called 'Leningrad finds', which he found in 1931 (and published the results) in the Saltyk-Ščedrina Public Library. The discovery was an outcome of Souček's long-term explorational endeavour. The six very important manuscripts included, among others, Comenius' *Prima Philosophia, Geometrie or Cosmographiae compendium*. 2) In 1933 G. H. Turnbull found in Hartlib's written inheritance quite a large number of manuscripts. Some of them were originals of works already known, but there were also a number of works, documents and letters completely new to us. 3) The third find is considered to be the most significant one. After a long period of focused research in the area of Slavic studies, D. Číževský found, in the archives of the Francke Orphanage in Halle in 1934 (on Christmas Eve), a great manuscript of two thousand pages. It was four (out of seven) parts of Comenius' magnum opus: *De rerum humanarum emendatione consultatio catholica* (A General Consultation on the Reform of Human Affairs). Besides these main discoveries there were also other smaller ones in the area of correspondence, sermons etc. The significance of these finds cannot be over-emphasised by Patočka when he shows how greatly they contributed to our understanding of the historical, political, philosophical and literary background of Comenius' work. He summarizes the importance of the finds saying that: “It is true that certain philosophical ideas on which Comenius founded his pedagogical work were known to us for a long time. But what was not known is that the Czech thinker reached such a degree of originality which is, despite some similarities with his contemporaries, indisputable” (Patočka. 1997: 7-63).

From the time of the great finds of the philosophical manuscripts, Comeniologists tend to divide the work into periods according to the intrinsic factors of Comenius' work, that is, factors that Comenius himself considered as important and that decisively shifted his thinking. There are traditionally distinguished three or four main phases: 1) Encyclopaedic or preparatory; 2) Consolation or pre-pansophic; 3) Educational-pansophic; 4) General restoration, which somewhat overlaps with the preceding phase. Each phase is characterised by a specific understanding of human beings. Before we plunge into the study, it should be noted that the phases are merely relatively delimited; some of the transitions between the phases were quite sudden, but others gradual and slow (cf. Floss, 1970; Patočka, 1997). Since this study focuses on understanding of the sources of Comenius' anthropology (in relation to pedagogy) I will limit the scope of my analysis merely to the early period of his thought development.

Theatrum: Anthropology of Observation

When Comenius returned home from his studies in 1614, he enthusiastically began to implement the plans he had conceived during his university years. He wanted to raise the general level of Czech literacy and culture, because, at the time, it lagged behind the rest of Europe. In addition to other works (e.g. *Grammaticae facillioris praecepta*, *De antiquitatibus Moraviae*, *De origine et gestis familiae Zierotin*, and others), he embarked on two major projects: an encyclopaedic Latin-Czech glossary called *Thesaurus linguae Bohemicae*, a phraseological, grammatical, and stylistic dictionary. He worked on this project for over forty years until 1656 when it was lost in the fire at Leszno. Unfortunately, the second project, *Theatrum universitatis rerum*, suffered the same fate, only short fragments were preserved. It was planned to be a gigantic encyclopaedia of 28 volumes. *Theatrum univesitatis rerum* was to be accompanied later with *Amphitheatrum universitatis rerum*. Comenius began the work earlier in Herborn under the influence of J.H. Alsted. For the preserved fragments see *Dílo Jana Amose Komenského* (Works of J. A. Comenius), vol. I, (1969).

The goal of the *Theatrum* was to teach (Czech) people about the greatness of the Creator's work and beauty of God's providence. Created reality is a spectacle, testimony and proclamation of God's wisdom, righteousness and power, the God who in his sovereignty governs all things. Humans are to enter the scene (*theatrum*) with reverent awe, behold their subtleness and play their role well. Let the author speak:

It is not without a reason, that the world is called KOSMOS in Greek language, that is beautiful; and mundus in Latin language, that is pure. For everything in the world is beautiful, pure, delightful and graceful, and thus visibly portrays the invisible beauty of God. A sight that does not see the beauty is a deficient sight. [...] Oh, what a marvellous and awesome beauty there must be in our God, from whom the multifarious beauty aroused and continues to arise! For we reckon that whatever nobility there is in the created things, its source is to be found in the uncreated fount on the high. (1969: 146)

Jan Patočka, referring to Stanislav Souček (1924: 271), calls Comenius' view of human beings an "extensive (*obširná*) anthropology", explaining that human wisdom, according to Comenius at this stage, was in "surrender to God's will, that is, a complete dependence of human beings in his [sic] cosmic position and creative, moral and historical conduct" (1997: 178). It must be observed that in this period Comenius had already recognised the negative aspects of human activity in the world drama: God's original perfect creation was disrupted by human sinfulness. In the second volume of his *Theatrum* Comenius dealt with: "the corruption, diversion and confusion of man and all his things in his body and soul..." (1969: 119). That in itself was not a new insight, but in Comenius' development, it was an important recognition, for in the next stage he was to find a way to change this passive perception into an active emendation of that which was damaged by human sin (cf. Palouš, 1992: 9).

Labyrinth: Anthropology of Critique

The transition from an instructional viewing of the world in *Theatrum* to a satirical-critical approach to the world in *Labyrinth* was induced most likely by both internal and external factors. Patočka is certainly right when seeing the transition as "internally logical", for without "*Theatrum* there would be no *Labyrinth*" (1997: 178), that is, without a careful observation of the world (in both its virtue and vice), there would be no critique of the world (and later striving for emendation of the world). But it is also true that the actual external circumstances of Comenius' life played an essential role here. The beginning of the Thirty-Years War in 1618, and the consequent evils of persecution, killing, epidemics, plundering, loss of Comenius' dear ones, etc. undoubtedly shifted his mind from the harmony of the world to the misery of the world. Jaroslav Pánek comments on this saying, "The period of the few years around the Battle of White Mountain (1620) were sufficient to transform the maturing personality of J. A. Comenius from an admirer of the most diverse attractions of the universe into a biting critic of the contemporary world and its community" (1989: 15). Similarly saw the situation Antonín Kostlán: "The period of great personal and national catastrophes at the beginning of the 1620s is usually, and justly, considered to be an important periodisation milestone in the life of Johannes Amos Comenius" (1989: 25). The world appeared to Comenius as a labyrinth: it was not a safe place, the truth had been lost, people viewed it awry. To him the world was seen through glasses of delusion, and there was nothing in this world that would open the way out of it. There was no activity or occupation which could fulfil the human need for peace.

Thus, in spite of the fact that the plot of *Labyrinth* had an encyclopaedic character, for the pilgrim was taken around the world to observe all the various human occupations and activities (which were to instruct the reader). The point of the "labyrinth tour" was not mere observation, but critical observation (cf. Čapek, 2004: 71-89). The reader (the pilgrim in the *Labyrinth*) was confronted with a contrast of two anthropological models: on the one hand there was a hu-

man being who took the things of this world as the rule for his or her life. On the other hand, there was a human being who turned away from the things of this world, for he or she had a correct view and understanding of them. They could not satisfy the substantial human desire for peace. It is important to note that the solution of the pilgrim's problem is given from without, or rather from above: the pilgrim is given good, non-delusive glasses, "glasses of truth", which enable him to see through the essence of things and find the way out. The influence of both Cusanus' 'beryll' and Andreae's 'glasses for viewing things through different colours' is evident here. However, Patočka notes that Comenius develops his own symbolism of dual glasses that is glasses of delusion and glasses of truth (1997: 73). So it is clear that at this stage Comenius does not see much that could be done with and for the labyrinth of the world, except for a critical contemplation and exposition of its problems, which is made possible by God's sheer act of grace.

This characteristic critical approach to the world might be also seen with great intensity in Comenius' *Renuntiatio mundi* (Renunciation of the World) from 1633, in which he lists thirty seven "weaknesses" of this world, which could be paralleled with the "dead ends" of the labyrinth of the world. Here Comenius gives way to his sorrows over the pains of the world, and renounces publicly all relations to the evils of this world, and thanks God for taking him away from it. The strong language Comenius uses in this work is understandable, given the exceptionally difficult circumstances of his life at that period.

Centrum Securitatis: Anthropology of Resignation

Comenius displayed similar views of the human situation in *Centrum Securitatis* (inspired by N. Cusanus' *De ludo globi*). The world, which is likened to a big wheel, has somehow slipped out of its axis or centre, and consequently, is not functioning properly. It is disordered, bewildered and insecure. It is full of human confusions; the original unity and harmony is lost. The only secure and firm place is in the immovable centre of all reality, which is in God. Patočka infers that such a negative view of the world and of human and social reality prevented Comenius "from seeing the possibility of man to fulfil his vocation by positive activity in work," and in fact, the spirit of "resignation" was the prevailing influence on Comenius' work at this stage (1997: 179, 262).

Patočka is undoubtedly right to use the word *resignation* for his description of Comenius' thinking in this period, for Comenius himself used it in *Centrum Securitatis*. However, the term *resignation* requires a certain qualification – a careful reading of *Centrum Securitatis* shows that Comenius gives the word a specific meaning here. The Latin word *resignare*, which Comenius uses, is contrasted to the term *samosvojnost*, which is a not easily translatable archaism meaning *having an ultimate goal and end in oneself*. "Samosvojny" describes one who relies solely on himself or herself, who lives only for himself or herself, or as Comenius puts it, one who "founds his fortune on the mere insecure world" (1927: 76) and elsewhere who "wants to belong to himself, be his own counsellor, his own guide, his

own guardian, his own lord, his own little god." In this Comenius saw "the root of all evil" (ibid.: 34).

The term *resignation*, then, expresses the exact opposite to *samosvojnost*, and its character is expounded in chapters IX, X, and XI of the book. Comenius does not give a brief or simple definition, but rather extensively explains and illustrates his point by synonyms, parallels and examples. So the term *resignatio* is often used interchangeably with words such as *entrust oneself, give oneself, rely on* or *dive into the depth of God's mercy*. Such a desirable attitude is warranted for several reasons: 1) the limited nature of human knowledge, 2) the human tendency to carelessness, 3) the human inability to have control over either oneself or circumstances, 4) human unsteadiness and uncertainty, which are all things whose opposites might be found in God (1927: 72-78). Comenius further provides a number of biblical references with explanations and his own illustrations to make clear the meaning of proper *resignation*. For example (I am using here the 1611 English Authorized Version; Comenius would of course use the Czech Bible Kralická from 1613): John 5:30 "...I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me."; Luk. 22:42 "...not my will, but thine, be done."; Ps. 37:4 "Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart."; Iz. 30:15 "For thus saith the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel; In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength."; Phil. 1:20 "According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death." In chapter ten Comenius lists both present and future "joyously consoling benefits" resulting from such *resignation*. These are: 1) peace with God; 2) spiritual security in spite of physical dangers; 3) perpetual good-heartedness (*dobromyslnost*); 4) safe distance from worldly confusions (*motaniny*); 5) the 'resigned' do not fear any harm; 6) the 'resigned' bear suffering with praise of God; 7) the 'resigned' are amazed by God's benevolence; 8) the 'resigned' know their falls are for their good; 9) the 'resigned' die joyfully (*radostně*) (Ibid. 82-90).

Although the expression *hopeful resignation* may sound as a contradiction to a modern reader, it clearly expresses Comenius' understanding of it. We know Comenius was full of hope and expectation, because he understood the present evils as the eschatological signs of the early coming of Christ, which is the ultimate victory of good and righteousness. By this we may understand the hopefulness of his resignation lies in committing to God's will. Comenius' eschatology is implicitly present in most of his writings. In his first volume of *Truchlivý* (The Mournful), a book from this period (from 1623), he expresses the idea that the present afflictions are both signs of an early coming of Christ and God's necessary means of separating the wheat from the chaff. In other words, he was able to view the hardships positively (see 1910: 96-179). Further, we must observe that his notion of resignation was far from being absolute or total. It was not resignation from everything, but rather "resignation from worldliness" as Radim Palouš puts it very well, and continues, "which expresses itself in cleaving to God and accepting all

the difficult things as his will, [...] it is not hopeless despondency, there is a way out. Comenius is determined not to remain in falsehood; he wants to disclose it as a falsehood and delusion to himself and to others" (1992: 10). Providing we understand the amount of pain and disappointment Comenius went through in this period, we may understand his negative approach to the world. The world in its sin is lost, it is the "devil's pub", and as such is to be renounced and left behind, but as for men and women, there is a consolation, there is salvation in Jesus Christ.

J.B. Čapek observes that due to the subjective expressions of pain and sorrows Comenius has been often incorrectly identified as a baroque writer, but a careful reader, continues Čapek, notices that Comenius' subjectivism is far from "the typical baroque desolation (*rozervanost*), aimlessness and despair", but rather it expresses "a collective pain or life trials caused by the external events of persecution and personal loss." Čapek further states that "in Comenius we can neither find any traces of baroque sensuality or desire of sensual depiction of the transcendent, as was common in, e.g., Theresa of Avila or in Rubens." (2004: 18)

Conclusion: From *resignare* to *emendare*

Comprehension of these inner impulses is essential for understanding of Comenius' later thought development. When he moved from the consolation stage toward the emendation stage, it was not a movement away from his full reliance on God, but rather an extension or deepening of it. Comenius never abandoned the attitude of complete reliance on and submission to God until the end of his life, for he was firmly convinced of God's goodness and wisdom, as is evident from his late writings. In his late *Unum Necessarium* (The One Thing Necessary) from 1669, he says for example: "[Christ] commanded us not to worry too much about the earthly things, but to rely on God's fatherly care", and elsewhere Comenius quotes the apostle Paul to make his point: "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content" (chap. IV), and elsewhere he adds: "...to be born again, be changed into a new creature in the likeness to God [...] is possible only through the complete and meekest committing of oneself (*nejpokornějším odevzdáním se*) to the will of God." (chap. VI). See also his other late writings such as *Clamores Eliae* (The Exhortations of Elijah), 1st ed., 1992; *Angelus pacis* (The Angel of Peace), 1st ed., 1667. Such an attitude of commitment and hopeful expectations was not in contradiction with the later discovered emendation potentials; on the contrary, Comenius' 'resignation' to God functioned as its foundation. It should be recognised, however, that it was a foundation without actual realisation. Teleological hope prepared the ground for Comenius' educative and emendative action, but a further impulse was necessary to bring it to fruition. In other words, the *anthropology of resignation* (hope) was not overthrown or substituted by the later *anthropology of education and emendation* (action), but rather complemented by it. This is internally consistent: in contrast to hopelessness which leads nowhere, hope may lead to action. (Cf. Neval, 2006)

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