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# A way to remedy all human things is indeed the idea of these things<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

In this text, I would like to show some motifs of Comenius's *Didactica Magna* which could be inspiring for today's didactics and pedagogy. I start from a general comparison of Comenius's and Modern thinking, and in the light of this comparison I try to demonstrate some of his didactic principles. Indeed, confronting Comenius with Modern thinking might seem like an anachronism. Trying to compare the issues stemming from a different context and having nothing in common, no *tertium comparationis*, a common ground, seems odd. Such an objection that this confronting is inappropriate makes sense. But what stands behind my effort and hopefully legitimizes it, is the fact that Comenius, as a contemporary of Bacon and Descartes, is a thinker who responds in an original way to questions and issues in which and from which our modern world is born, but he tries to go in a different direction than the philosophers just mentioned.

I am following the idea of Jan Patočka, who in his *Comeniological Studies* showed Comenius as a thinker who stood at the intersection of the ages, as a thinker who sought a different path from the one followed by our modern world – that is, the path of controlling nature by the objectivistic methods conceived by science.<sup>2</sup> I interpret Comenius as a theologian and philosopher who allows us to distance ourselves from our own self-understanding and ways of seeing, thus allowing us to think of the possibility to free ourselves from the freedom of objectifying, which modern man identifies with freedom as such and with which the totality of our modern world and life has its

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<sup>1</sup> Citation from Comenius's *Consultatio* (see: J.A. Komenský, *Vybrané spisy Jana Amose Komenského. Svazek IV. Výbor Obecné porady o nápravě věcí lidských a z věcného pansofického slovníku*, Státní pedagogické nakladatelství, Praha 1966, p. 393).

<sup>2</sup> J. Patočka, *Sebrané spisy 11. Komeniologické studie II*, Oikúmené, Praha 1998, p. 336ff.

beginning and end. My intention is neither to dabble with the craft of didactics and pedagogy, nor to meddle with historians of philosophy and comeniologists. In fact, we want to ask about *the essential necessity* at work which makes possible something we call “school”. The point is to use the difference between Comenius and modern thinking to see the ground not visible from either of the standpoints, only by their mutual confrontation.

So the key for our interpretation of Comenius will be none of the academic specializations mentioned above. In this respect, we are in favour of admitted non-expertness. The interpretative key will be the idea<sup>3</sup> of education itself, in the sense that determines it as a way of making a human being human: what forms the humanity of a human being? For the purpose of this text – and we believe also in accordance with Comenius – we would like to assume that it is the ability to meet on the merits, to be able to gain the insight into the essential necessity or, to put it with Comenius: *consultation*.

Indeed, we can argue that from some ideal point of view it is easy to speak, but within a lived situation of the “blackboard jungle” something completely different is practised. But this would be a complete misunderstanding. We do not have an ambition to lecture about the methods of how to teach. Our aim is different: to examine the idea of education, from which any “how to” can arise. Ideas are patient in the sense that no reality can deny them. Or to put it in another way: *if something is education*, it must be adequate to its own idea; otherwise it is not education at all.

## The base of Comenius’s *Didactica Magna* compared to the theoretical base of modern pedagogy

In his old age Comenius looks back on the idea of his *Didactica Magna* and reconsiders its meaning. He shows that its starting point without which any didactic effort would be incomplete: “Let the *Didactica Magna* begin from the highest aim of man, and when it awakens the desire for his highest perfection, let it make him able to use his desire by every aid available.”<sup>4</sup>

The greatness of Comenius Didactics as the art of teaching everyone, everything and using every means (*omnes, omnia, omnino*) lies in that he does not start from the art itself, but from the *a priori* ground of the idea of the humanity of man. For him, education is not merely an objective process, whose patterns and causal relationships must be revealed and then regulated like any other natural process. This conception of nature as a sum of natural processes, totally indisputable to all modern scientific

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<sup>3</sup> I am using here the word “idea” as signifying what is constitutive for the respective thing, not in the sense of “representation” as it is conceived in Cartesian metaphysics of consciousness.

<sup>4</sup> J.A. Komenský, *Vybrané spisy Jana Amose Komenského. Svazek II*, Státní pedagogické nakladatelství, Praha 1960, p. 386.

approach, is not that obvious to Comenius. He does not separate the question “how to teach” from the question of what learning is and who is the one that learns. In this sense, he is interested in the idea of education, from which the possibility of any “how to teach” could arise.

In his thinking, Comenius is not situated on the level of process-controlling and regulating. He does not solve the problems at stake from the level of technological or organizational issues, but from the general point of view, respectively with regard to the whole. This whole, i.e. the humanity of man, cannot be conceived as a mere object approachable by means of analytical methods. In a word, you cannot put humanity under the microscope. Humanity is a question to which the answer is “education”. By this I absolutely do not want to put modern science in question. My point is, that in the field of education, the regulating and controlling of processes is not enough, because human beings cannot be reduced to a mere process. This reduction as a way to make nature our own is what has made our modern world with all its achievements. It seems that this modern project could continue only in the way that it turns itself against human beings as such. I believe this is the situation we live in. Even more important seems to be the search for other options and possibilities. But these possibilities cannot be found within the horizon of the factual world, but only through understanding the conditions of this modern world, in order to make visible what is hidden when we take these conditions for granted. That is, to repeat, why Comenius seems to be important in our “here and now”.

We can grasp the importance of this initial starting point when we realize a completely different way of solving problems in our present. Education is located as a subsystem within a system of planned processes, so that all issues are interpreted as a question of organizing this system. Does there not seem to be a significant difference between thinking of the sense of *education* and thinking of the *organization* of education? All the issues of education are thus transformed to the issues of organization and in this transformation their meaning is changed. Let me emphasize: I do not want to say that organization is not important and essential. I only want to draw attention to the fundamental difference between these two ideas. And the reason is simple: without seeing the idea of education, we may have a great educational system but no education at all. And insofar as humanity is not something arising from organization but from education, we also would have no humanity. In my understanding, this also seems to be Comenius’s idea.

As examples, let me point to authority and discipline. Comenius shows how a harmonious order, without which nothing could fully function, has to be also applied at school if education is to lead to humane living in the world: “School without discipline is like a mill without water.” In regard to Comenius’s idea of order, in order to give a meaningful (i.e., with regard to the idea of education) account of authority and discipline, we cannot do without ideas of order and of education. Statistical data, negotiation techniques are undoubtedly useful, but they alone cannot work unless

they are themselves subject to an order determined by the idea of education itself. Discipline has not the sense of process-regulation, but of focusing the pupil on merit, attracting the pupil to know things themselves, instead of mere beliefs and prejudices.

We have said that Comenius does not study the processes of education but starts from the idea of education itself. His *Didactica Magna* is not a technology of these processes, of their correct setting. Schools are, for Comenius, workshops of humanity. From the technological point of view it is not possible to produce the sense of education itself (and the sense of humanity of man), since this sense is neither a process, nor an effect, on the contrary, the idea of education illuminates any educational process and makes it meaningful.

The starting point for didactic research is, for Comenius, situated on an a priori level of nature (*natura*). *Natura* for him is not a construct, the result of methodical abstraction as in Cartesianism. This methodical abstraction consists in the analysis, in the decomposition of the examined whole into the simplest parts, which are given distinctiveness, and in the reconstruction or resolution by a controlled procedure. Locke's psychology of sensations and the construction of higher psychic formations is an example of this method. Man is the examined object as a result of this methodical construction. Even Rousseau's *Émile's* nature is acquired through this methodical abstraction, namely by means of the abstraction of all cultural, educational and historical levels. Thus, *Émile's* "freedom" is in fact only a great delusion of laboratory objectivity, wherein the child is objectified as a cluster of natural processes regulated and controlled by the educator.

In contrast to these methodical constructions of human nature, Comenius has a completely different idea of nature: "The nature of things is the law of their origin and end, activity and interruption, that God, the creator of everything, has given to every being as being."<sup>5</sup> In contrast to the modern method, nature for him is unity, the order of things, and this order is contained in these things themselves, is not merely a natural law outside of these things but is what creates their living unity and what inscribes them into the living world: "Exploring nature means observing how and by what each thing in nature enters into being."<sup>6</sup>

Sure, we can reject the metaphysical assumptions of Neoplatonic and Christian metaphysics, which provide the theoretical basis in Comenius' *Didactica Magna*. The idea of order, which is revealed in the structural analogy of similarities, traces or keys among the layers of being seems too much for our way of thinking, trained to find representation of the causal order and to mastering it. But the Neoplatonic scheme of emanations can also provide us the opportunity to ask about the hidden assumptions that mostly do not become visible, yet work in our own thinking and in our relation to the world and to ourselves in the world.

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<sup>5</sup> J.A. Komenský, *Vybrané spisy Jana Amose Komenského. Svazek V. Výbor ze spisů o filosofii a přírodě*, Státní pedagogické nakladatelství, Praha 1968, p. 94.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

Just as in the Neoplatonic scheme everything is connected by the unity of emanation, also in our thinking the assumption of stages or levels is at work: from the physical – chemical – biological – psychical – social layer. What makes the unity of these layers? It seems to be precisely what we call “process”. But what do we mean by this word? What is process? By this word, everything in the vast majority of scientific literature across all disciplines seems to be explained, but the meaning of the word alone is rarely subject to exploration.

In this paper, we cannot deal with the full metaphysical significance of this issue. It is sufficient to say “process” is an idealized substraction which is retrospectively related to our, to use the term from Edmund Husserl, natural, “living world”. In this substraction our world is conceived as a space-time nature consisting of measurable bodies connected in a causal nexus. Considering this Husserl’s motif of the living world, the reintegration of man and his living world into idealized constructions, his subordination to planned systems according to the standards of organization and efficiency, is achieved.

It is a well-known fact that Comenius himself transformed the Neoplatonic scheme into a nexus of many worlds that in a circular form come out from the creator-God and then come back again to Him. And education in the sense of the full development of all the components of human nature as human is precisely what participates in this return. Here we can see that didactics is, for Comenius, not a special field of expertise, but a universal field belonging to man as human and it also has an ontological importance.

## **The importance of distinguishing between man as a living being to which understanding the world and himself in the world belongs and as a subject of particular sciences**

So far, we do not want to say that methods of objectification are something that is to be rejected. We have said that our modern world is built on them. It suffices to look around and one can see that one’s surroundings are created by the application of these methods. What we want to show is the possibility and meaningfulness of thinking about science and knowing that it is appropriate to man without reducing his being to the mere interpretation of it in the sense of natural processes. Indeed, man is also a process within nature, but he cannot be reduced to a mere process. Only science which is able to make visible this “surplus” of humanity exceeding the process-like side of man could be able to thematize education in its idea and not only as a process. And unlike other disciplines, insofar as education cannot be separated from its meaning, this sought-for science is something without which education as education cannot be done. We definitely do not want to pretend that we have such a science. But maybe this provisional, always-to-be-sought-for character is something that belongs to this science of man as such.

Every science explores some part of being human and conceives him/her as an object within its methodical frame. In the same way that the human body is not just a compound of its organs, knowledge about man cannot be gained as a total sum by adding all these methodical frames. There is a difference between the body as the object of exploration and the living and lived body. Similarly, there is a difference between man as a subject of exploration and as living person. We will not gain knowledge about this living man by creating a system of knowledge composed of all special fields. These fields do not create such a system. And it is crucial to realize that the unifying idea in special sciences is not the idea of humanity alone, even less man as being within the whole world, living with all his action and passion, but the very fact that man is conceived *as an object* as such resulting from specific methods of objectification.

Considering this methodical frame of objectification and construction we can make another claim, namely that the person who conceives man as an object, is not himself/herself involved in this conceiving (insofar as he/she is not only an object, but also the subject). Because the meaning of objectification as a specific project responding to the question of what does it mean “to know” and “to be” cannot be given in any objectification. This project is a specific type of approach to entities, but what is encountered in this view cannot be identified with the thing itself. To put it another way around, it is tragic (in a sense it is a tragedy and success of our modern history) if this identification occurs, if the thing constructed by a scientific method is identified with the living thing itself. If this identification occurs, we talk, for example, about psychological, neurological, physiological, hormonal, etc., processes, and these layers are identified with a person himself/herself, or we even think that these processes are the truth about man. Similarly, we can hear about “human resources”, “assets”, their “flexibility” etc., without distinguishing between living people and their bodies that are embedded in the processes of production. Humans are subjected to planning and organizing processes, based on the cooperation of special sciences, thus reduced to a mere moment within these processes.

Let me emphasize again: it is not some cheap, moralizing critique, much less an interfering with the processional aspect of education, which I consider important in the scientific commitment to strict procedures of verification. By taking into account Comenius’s idea of humanity of man I am merely highlighting the need to complement what is visible within the constructive horizon of special sciences with a whole that is not visible within this horizon, and indicating that knowledge is possible, though not in the sense of constructive idealization.

Methodical procedures used by special sciences cannot be, or can only in a very limited scope be, used to comprehend man in his mental and spiritual motivations. Of course, these motivations can be captured objectively as processes, but it is only one aspect, one side, which does not fully recognize their living and lived meaning. And if it is possible to be able to cope with the process-horizon functioning in particular

disciplines, it is not possible and adequate within the field of education, in which process management cannot suffice for the situation of education aiming at the full spiritual being whose thinking and validity of this thinking cannot be understandable from space-time nature.

For, as I have been trying to emphasize in the introduction, freedom from the freedom of objectifying belongs to the humanity of man. And insofar as this freedom alone is not an object, it cannot be visible within this horizon of objectifying. And insofar as education deals with man not only as an object, it would be tragic to locate him in this horizon of construction.

At last, all the educational goals are focused on this living person. This living person, as living and projecting himself within the world, is not the subject of special sciences, although without their results education would be incomplete. It is a fateful distortion when knowledge imparted during lectures is limited only to those special sciences to which philosophy is added as a special discipline. Such a limiting leads not only to the emptying of the meaning of philosophy – the problem of the humanity of man – but also to the limiting and distorting of the student to be educated. If the objectifying procedures are absolutized and man as an object is identified with a living person as such, there is also a specific decision and response concerning the aim and meaning of education in action.

### **Comenius's development of *Didactica Magna* on the level of an a priori idea of nature and a commentary on certain didactic principles resulting from it**

Let us return to Comenius. In accordance with his conception of nature Comenius considers the task of education not as a regulation of processes, mental, social etc. He starts from the intentional relation of man and the world. He uses Aristotle's insight into the nature of man, namely, that for man the desire for knowledge is essential.<sup>7</sup> This desire for knowledge is not something that can be produced or construed somehow (as much as any of the goods which are good in themselves, such as health or justice), but rather is something basic. Education needs to begin with this insight in order to be brought into full bloom.

Here the key is Comenius' insight that the starting point must provide the very nature of man, what is truly human. The starting point cannot include the assumption that education is a matter of technology or art, in other words, that the educated can be produced as can a table or car: "at first, the teacher must awaken in the pupil desire for education; but who thinks about this? Almost everyone, as soon as he or she gets

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<sup>7</sup> J.A. Komenský, *Vybrané spisy Jana Amose Komenského. Svazek I*, Státní pedagogické nakladatelství, Praha 1958, p. 108.



his/her hands on a pupil, processes the pupil, turns him/her, forges him/her, stretches him/her as he or she wants, wanting immediate success and perfection.”<sup>8</sup>

To the point that education is not a matter of making, but following the nature of man, connecting the multiplicity of worlds into unity, into a harmonious whole, another important insight is added: “It is God who makes everything in everything, to man remains only one thing, that is to receive the seeds of teaching with his believing heart; they will grow up to maturity even without noticing. That is why the growers of youth have no other duty than to sow the seed into the soul and carefully water God’s trees; then prosperity and growth will come from above.”<sup>9</sup>

It is a fatal mistake to believe that education is primarily a technological issue, the issue of knowledge transfer, etc. Augustine, who is followed by Comenius on this point, shows in his *De Magistro* that it is not the teacher who really teaches. And, if we relive this insight, if a teacher thinks otherwise, it could have the unfortunate consequence of overwhelming the pupil with *information* and the *system* of knowledge as if it were the *knowing*. But then the nature of learning is misunderstood. From the *fact* that the teacher or any other authority tells me something, it does not follow that it is *true*. The teacher has only signs at his or her disposal, but in them no knowing is involved.<sup>10</sup> I myself must be able to see the necessity or, on the contrary, the falsity of some claim.<sup>11</sup>

“Nature conveys everything from beginnings that are small but powerful.”<sup>12</sup> We interpret this in relation to the idea of education: It is necessary to use my own insight to assess the validity of statements. This is something I have to do by myself – no one else can do this for me. Without this insight learning is not possible.

But that means that even teaching must be based on principles that are self-evident and the clarity of which illuminates the issue at hand. Only such teaching develops the ability to think. Put another way, teaching that merely reproduces knowledge or the system of knowledge leads to incompetence and to forgetting the necessity of insight.

Comenius considers even more damaging the replacement of such teaching by discussion. To quote him again: “He will never get to the truth, whoever begins to learn through discussion.”<sup>13</sup> Let us try to interpret: Such a discussion, which starts from mere opinions, instead of starting from clear insights, can only lead to the exchange and asserting of these opinions without a focus. If we are enclosed in our opinions, the thing itself – the thing of education – is lost.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 124–125.

<sup>10</sup> Augustine, *Against the Manicheans. The Teacher*, Hackett Publishing, Indianapolis/Cambridge 1995, p. 146.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p. 142.

<sup>12</sup> J.A. Komenský, *Vybrané spisy... Svazek I*, op.cit., p. 141.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 136.



Against this controversial debating Comenius puts the need for dialogue. He recommends textbooks in which knowledge would be given in the form of dialogue. For dialogue catches the pupil within the space of asking and thinking. But in contrast to debate, a dialogue requires that the student is able to listen to what someone is talking about, so that he or she is able to identify the idea, the “aboutness” itself. “The dialogue-form affirms the knowing.”<sup>14</sup> But this affirmation does not consist in a mere holding of data or information by memory. The purpose of affirmation is to hold the idea, or, like Comenius says: the purpose of dialogue is “to give pupils certain light, by which they will be able to understand everything even without a teacher.”<sup>15</sup> To retain what is not understood is as of little use as not to keep it. And analyzing particular mental or psychophysical components is indeed a legitimate method in natural and human sciences. But the mistake lies in the supposition that by re-composing the horizon of this analysis we gain the whole of living mental life. To put it simply, it rarely happens that for instance the mouse dissected within the experimental procedure could be alive again. Similarly, what Comenius calls “wisdom” is not a totality that can be composed from particular knowledge. Insight into the idea is the only way to gain unity of knowing. With regard to the motif of dialogue, the ability to endure a dialogical situation in the sense of common focusing on the idea is only possessed by the one who has learned to do it, who has learned to listen to what was said, that means who is not identifying his own subjective-relative aspect with the idea.

For those who did not learn this insight into the idea, entering into dialogue means only to debate in the above-mentioned sense of exchanging mere opinions, wherein all interest exhausts itself. With such a person it is discussion of the idea, insofar as he or she interchanges what was said for the person itself. Then his or her disagreement (or agreement) is focused not on the idea, but on the partner in the dialogue. It must be the idea that binds everyone (at least everyone who is rational). But for the one who does not know anything about this idea, the only possibility he or she is able to see is to enforce, to assert his or her opinions. Such mental blindness is called by Comenius “ignorance” (*ignorantia*).<sup>16</sup>

Considering what was said, it is better to understand a little than to have a database of information which does not affect my life, unless it helps me to succeed in the test and the consequences of it. In this way (quite anachronically) we interpret Comenius’s principle: “Nature does not overload itself, but is content with every small step.”<sup>17</sup> And the following principle: “Nature does not act prematurely, but it advances

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p. 171.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> J.A. Komenský, *Vybrané spisy Jana Amose Komenského. Svazek IV. Výbor Obecné porady o nápravě věcí lidských a z věcného pansofického slovníku*, Státní pedagogické nakladatelství, Praha 1966, p. 542.

<sup>17</sup> J.A. Komenský, *Vybrané spisy... Svazek I*, op.cit., p. 144.

slowly.”<sup>18</sup> Teaching must be guided by the task of developing the pupil’s living ability that he or she has at his/her disposal. Or, with regard to the idea of education, only a full understanding of the necessity of respective knowledge can transform me internally. Thus, Comenius says wisely about wisdom: “There is nothing more vain than knowing and learning a lot that is not to do any good; and the wise is not the one who knows many things, but the one who knows useful things.”<sup>19</sup> But here it is worth mentioning that “useful” for Comenius is not thought within the horizon of process efficiency, but within the horizon of human things. What are human things (*res humanae*), that is: what does the humanity of man consist of? According to Comenius it is politics, religion and education.<sup>20</sup>

The thesis that Comenius’s thinking about education is not situated within the field of natural processes and regulation proves itself by the fact that it would be anachronistic to think otherwise. But even Comenius’s “psychology” has nothing to do with psychology in our modern sense, with knowledge concerning mental-natural processes. His psychology is led by the idea of analogy functioning within the world. For instance, he distinguishes personal characteristics: bright / dull, obedient / disobedient, desiring to know / mechanical,<sup>21</sup> and he is guided by trinitological speculation about the trinity mind-will-memory, corresponding to the persons in the Holy Trinity. Of course, we could condemn such a “psychology” as obsolete. But this “psychology” allows Comenius to think about mental life outside the ontology of natural processes, thus taking into account the living intentional relationship of man and the world.

The relationship to truth is not understandable as a mental process as a result of methodical abstraction. Such an abstraction cuts off the living intentional “always already being in the world”. By scientific methods of analysis this living being is decomposed into anonymous processes. Let us be clear again: we do not mean this as a critique of natural science as in some new-age rhetoric, which we find hard to justify. We only want to uncover a little bit of the sense of the knowledge gained through the methodical abstraction as a base of modern science.

However subtle and sophisticated the analyzing of mental processes is, there is no way to gain a living intentional relationship to truth, to the world and to myself and others in the world by means of such analysis. Education cannot be established by the regulation of mental processes as processes. The living relation to truth is not a logical system of judging, but it is understandable only within the level of the living pulsation of meaning, within the intentional system of aims and interests of a living person.

The idea of education is to care for the ground on which the encountering with something including my Self occurs. This encountering of something is not a matter

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> J.A. Komenský, *Vybrané spisy... Svazek I*, op.cit., p. 177.

<sup>20</sup> J.A. Komenský, *Vybrané spisy... Svazek IV*, op.cit., p. 62.

<sup>21</sup> J.A. Komenský, *Vybrané spisy... Svazek I*, op.cit., p. 108.

of fact – in principle we can encounter the same thing again and again. So the validity of the thing encountered is not dependent on the factual-natural mental process. In Greek “*manthanein*” means “to learn”. The noun from this verb is *mathéma* – what could be learned. And what could be learned is an idea which we can encounter within dialogue. This is valid not only in one case and situation, but in principle always, everywhere and every time. For instance, knowing that 2 times 2 equals 5 is not a *mathéma* because it can never happen that we accept the necessity of this statement.

Let me go to another one of Comenius’s thoughts: “Nature respects the right time.”<sup>22</sup> This principle is not just about time management or about taking into account the developmental maturity of the pupil (although Comenius, in *Didactica Magna*, is one of the pioneers in both respects). What is the right time cannot be determined by some methodology, it is a matter of pedagogical tact or, in Aristotle’s terms, *fronesis*, that is: being able to recognize, in every living situation of teaching, what is “right”. And even though this ability cannot be reduced to some law-like regularity and generality, it is true that there is no possibility to identify the right time without having clarified the ideas of education and of man. In spite of the fact that there is always the same merit in education, there is also something singular in the meeting of the teacher and the pupils. The situation of this meeting occurs always within a changed living context, in which the education and school is situated within the world.

Within this situation the issue of the extent to which the teacher can educate arises, since the educational system is organized within the totality of processes. We must insist that it always the idea of education that must provide the lead in every educational situation. The importance of the philosophical claim to knowing is connected with the insight that we cannot solve the issues we have as humans once and for all, as is the case within the technological area. But these issues are affecting our humanity, insofar as in them the question of who we are as humans is at stake. We respond to them and solve them always anew, no matter whether we know about it or not. We cannot manage this sort of issue by managing technological systems (for instance, by setting up effective processes) – such an effort of technological solving of human life as human by transforming it into a technological and controllable system is nothing but an illusion, at least in human issues as human.

The idea of education must provide the measure for methods, procedures and solving issues, whether it concerns the issue of authority or organization. No matter how the teacher is subordinated to the organization of the educative process, the leading question must concern the idea of education, the humanity of man, insofar as this humanity cannot be without education and as man has to be human and not a beast, living within the labyrinth of processes and structures in the horizon taken from physics, whose purpose cannot be the education of man, but making a quantifiable and controllable entity, efficient within the system.

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<sup>22</sup> J.A. Komenský, *Vybrané spisy... Svazek I*, op.cit., p. 125.

This controllability is the purpose of the *organization* of education conceived as a system. Scales used to quantify education by feedback testing are not primarily controlling pupils, but above all teachers and with them the overall process. No one within this scaling is not interested in the living interest of the student, what is he/she interested in as a living person, led by a living tissue of interests. These living interests must provide the starting point, a ground for education and development. That is how we interpret Comenius's principle: "Nature begins every action from the inside."<sup>23</sup> Against this, by incorporating the pupil into the controllable processes of knowledge transfer and feedback testing (and one must admit: very efficiently), every living interest to know and understand something is also taken away. Institutional process control is completed not only by output, but also by input, through standardized admission exams. Equality is misinterpreted as uniformity regardless of the living field of interests of each pupil.

Education as a living situation was de-naturalized by incorporating the testing process. The system generates profits, the state has control over processes, and a living person who, according to the idea of education, is to be turned into a human is the last thing to be concerned about. For this living man as human being is not efficient, unless transformed into process.

The teacher has to understand how education fits not only into the system of testable information and skills, but primarily into the living context of a pupil's life in his/her innermost interests. Only in such a way is it possible to follow Comenius's intention of starting from the natural, living interest in knowing, to care for this interest and develop it. This is, I believe, what Comenius has in mind in principle. I would like to call this the principle of "erotization of knowing": "Nature arranges the fabric so that it desires form."<sup>24</sup>

But let us add immediately to avoid misunderstanding: this erotization is not to be confused with the mere technology of entertaining, interactivity etc. The point here is knowing, education. This is a true eros, as opposed to false desire not to be by myself, to be amused, which means diversion by my Self. This diversion of me from my Self is the reason why technological entertaining cannot awaken a true, inner interest stemming from the living interest and care for my Self and the whole world. But there is no education without this awakening.

These innermost interests cannot be of an instrumental or technological nature, but they must affect the most human core in us. They must aim for what is good not for something else but for itself. We could say beyond Comenius's thinking that, based on the experience we have from the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we can see that the humanity of man on the one hand cannot be subordinated to some higher good whether it is the nation, classless society or the market, on the other hand it cannot consist in the freedom of

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<sup>23</sup> J.A. Komenský, *Vybrané spisy... Svazek I*, op.cit., p. 131.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, p. 139.

subordinating everything to itself. In both of these possibilities humanity is always already misinterpreted as something once and for all answered, and the freedom to have freedom from his/her Self is lost. Knowing, unlike special-technological knowledge, must be at the same time self-knowing, concerned in the set of assumptions functioning in me, in my interpretation of the situations I am in and of my Self. And insofar as philosophy strives for this self-knowledge, education cannot be without philosophy and without a sincere questioning in this direction.

Both the teacher and the pupil are living within an historical context. They are neither mere theoretical concepts, nor results of scientific idealization and methodical construction, but living, striving and struggling persons with their own environment. Education cannot consist of a system of concepts and methods of their transmission. It deals with the constitution of man in his/her humanity, i.e. in his/her relationship to the world and to himself/herself in the world.

Insofar as I have insight into the idea of education, it cannot occur as a mere transfer of particular knowledge for the purpose of mastering feedback testing, but its purpose is illuminate what is essential and necessary. Only such knowledge is able to transform man according to the idea of education. Any knowledge that is to be transformed into insight must be understood as much as possible. Otherwise it is just garbage, useful for testing and quizzes. I can teach the same thing, and yet the educational content is always set in another living context, different living issues, that are relevant for my students. Taking into account the issues of students does not mean pandering, but it provides the starting point from which it is possible to meet and to show that knowledge is not something dead and abstract, but it fits into our everyday life, gives an orientation within the world and my Self. This is not a question of some dependency on what is fashionable – such a dependency indicates the inability in my freedom to strive for my own understanding. It is also important that the teacher himself/herself understands the meaning of his/her teaching and that his/her speech grows from his/her own nature. This cannot be imitated following some methodical procedure. In the living situation of dialogue, students will know that something is not right.

I would like to point to another issue I find important. It is a little-noticed, unsolved issue, at least two centuries old, namely, how to reach a balance between the demand for general education and the demand for the production of experts with technological skills. Or in other words, how to reconcile educational contents regarding the cultural and spiritual tradition with those educational contents that allow us to survive within the machines of all orders. I believe this issue constitutes one of the *aporias* in which we live. Whether we are aware of this *aporia* or not, we are responding to it by solving the issues we meet on a daily basis. This *aporia* is not something that could be visible or solvable within the technological frame, and yet it functions and creates the issues we meet in our schools. I believe that the technological frame and system approach, however important, is not the adequate one for these issues, or

at least must be completed by a philosophical approach that is able to take into account the humanity of man. As man I am not only an expert, but a living person who, however unlikely it seems in our schools, by nature desires knowledge.

## Conclusion

Let me conclude by interpreting Comenius's principle: "Let everything develop spontaneously and let violence be absent!"<sup>25</sup> Education needs to start from the natural-living relationship of man to his Self, *so that educational development will be also a manifestation of his Self*. The idea of education as developing the ability of insight is the light that has to govern everything. The meaning of Jan Patočka's statement: "The purpose of the teacher is to be overcome."<sup>26</sup> cannot be understood within the horizon of efficiency and technology. It does not mean that the pupil must be more efficient, but that the signs provided by the teacher are to be overcome by insight on the side of the pupil. Teaching becomes useless and internalized, i.e. becomes *self-learning*.

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<sup>25</sup> J.A. Komenský, *Vybrané spisy... Svazek II*, op.cit., p. 400.

<sup>26</sup> J. Patočka, *Sebrané spisy. Svazek 1. Péče o duši I. Stati z let 1929-1952. Nevydané texty z padesátých let. 1*, Oikúmené, Praha 1996, p. 411.

**A way to remedy all human things is indeed the idea of these things**

**Abstract:** This text deals with the issue of Comenius's idea of education. This idea is used for gaining the space "in-between", the difference to our own way of pedagogical thinking insofar as it starts from the modern sciences with its inherent metaphysics. Then we are trying to elucidate some of Comenius's essential principles that could inspire our schools and education. We are keen to argue that it must be the idea of education that rules, and not the organization or the process of education.

**Keywords:** Comenius, education, philosophy, metaphysics, consciousness

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