

## Harmonia, Scientia, Economia – Three Motifs in the Western Philosophy of Education

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### Abstract:

Education is a dynamic matter. Its movement is related to the movement of human thinking. As one thinks, one also acts, even educationally. In this paper we will understand didactics as a discipline that asks 'how' and the philosophy of education as a discipline that asks 'why'. The task of didactics and its related disciplines is to reflect the methodology of human formation. The philosophy of education forces pedagogy to think about why it does what it does. What is the goal? What is the point? We will focus on three historical ideological movements, respectively meta-narrative shifts that determined (and still determine) the form of contemporary philosophy of education. The purpose of this brief study is to outline the historical and philosophical contexts in order to understand our present pedagogical reality of the Western world. We will compare the ideological starting points of pre-modern, modern, and post-modern times and follow their educational implications. The goal of the paper is to argue for the holistic 'educatio' formulated by J. A. Comenius.

**Key words:** education, meta-narrative, philosophy of education

### Introduction: Questions 'why' in education

Education is like a living being. It changes over time, grows, moves, develops, and withers. As with all specifically human phenomena, its dynamics depend on the movement of human thought. One acts as he thinks even educationally. If we want to philosophise about upbringing, it means that we want love. We care about loving wisdom (philo-sophia). In our case, it is an educational wisdom – so it is not only about 'how' but also 'why'. In this paper, we will understand didactics as a discipline that asks 'how' and the philosophy of education as a discipline that asks 'why'. The task of didactics and its adjacent disciplines is to think about the methodology of human formation. The philosophy of education forces pedagogy to think about why it does what it does. What is the goal? What is the point? We will focus on three historical ideological movements, resp. meta-narrative shifts that have determined the form of contemporary philosophy of education. The purpose of this brief study is to outline the historical and philosophical context in order to understand our current educational situation. We will compare the ideological basis of the pre-modern, modern, and post-modern times and follow their educational implications. In other words, we will observe how individual meta-narratives have been reflected in specific educational philosophies. The aim of this paper is

to present a combination of anthropological-ontological and sociological arguments in favour of a holistic concept of 'educatio', as formulated by J. A. Comenius. Simplification cannot be avoided in such a small space, so we announce, in advance, the intention only to draw contours, not details.<sup>1</sup> Also, it should be pointed out at the outset that we will only deal with the context of the part of the world that we have become used to calling 'Western'.

## 1. Before Modern Times: *Harmonia* – Education as an Art

The sense of pre-arranged harmony between the character of nature and the nature of man (nature and temper) has accompanied mankind since time immemorial. Whether it is a document of ancient or older mythopoietic sources, we encounter again and again the idea that the mission of man is to strive for harmony with the universe – physical and metaphysical. Lack or violation of harmony is a universal human experience. People often act against their own nature and against the character of nature – they hurt themselves, they hurt others, they hurt nature. Different cultures have different aetiological explanations for this disharmonious state, but they agree that it is necessary to seek and strive for lost (paradise) harmony.<sup>2</sup> This effort is often called art in educational terminology. What was this art? The philosophical and educational system of Jan Amos Comenius will help us to explain this question. Comenius is one of the last great architects of educational harmonisation before the advent of the modern paradigm. His project of 'the reform of human affairs' is more than appropriate for the purpose of this brief study, because its metaphysical grounding perfectly demonstrates the contrast between the pre-modern and modern conception of the philosophy of education.<sup>3</sup>

An excellent example of how close Comenius was to the modern world is the result of his famous meeting with René Descartes, the father of the modern way of thinking. We know from Comenius' autobiographical notes that he met Descartes in 1642 on his way from England. Comenius was already an important figure in Europe at that time. His younger colleague was also known among scholars mainly for his revolutionary debates about the scientific method, which was once and for all to provide researchers with unwavering certainty of knowledge. When they said their farewells after a four-hour conversation, it was in a friendly spirit, but there was a fundamental disagreement between them. Their dispute symbolises and captures the essence of the difference between pre-modern and modern thinking. Comenius recalls Descartes' words: 'For me, only a part, for you, it is the whole.' In this way, Descartes allegedly concluded their epistemological debate about credible sources of knowledge.<sup>4</sup> Descartes' methodological doubt was unthinkable for Comenius. It distanced man from the world as an indivisible whole and reduced human knowledge to reason alone. Comenius polemicises against such reductionism. Man is given other sources of knowledge. Specifically, he names three 'books' in which one can read to learn *everything necessary for a good life*: the cosmos (world), the microcosm (man), and revelation (Scripture). Each book tells the same thing in its own way. They complement each other. Crucial here is the idea of holistic

1 For deeper studies in this area, I recommend, for example: Martin STROUHAL, *Teorie výchovy. K vybraným problémům a perspektivám jedné pedagogické disciplíny*, Praha: Grada, 2013; Jitka LORENZOVÁ, *Kontexty vzdělávání v postmoderní situaci*, Praha: Humanitas, 2016; Jan HÁBL, *Ultimate human goals in Comenius and modern Czech pedagogy*, Hradec Králové: Gaudeamus, 2011; Jan HÁBL, *On being human(e). Comenius Pedagogical Humanization as Anthropological Problem*, Eugene, Oregon (USA): Pickwick Publications (Wipf & Stock), 2017; Jiří POSPÍŠIL, *Filosofická východiska cílů výchovy a vzdělávání v období novověkého obratu*, Olomouc: Hanex, 2009.

2 Cf. Francis August SCHAEFFER, *How Should We Then Live? The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture*, London: Marshall Morgan & Scott, 1980.

3 Daniel MURPHY, *Comenius: A Critical Reassessment of His Life and Work*, Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1995.

4 Comenius recalls the interview with Descartes in his apologetic autobiography, which he wrote at the end of his life. For more details see Amadeo MOLNÁR and Noemi REJCHRTOVÁ, *J. A. Komenský o sobě*, Praha: Odeon, 1987, pp. 155–156.

harmony, which Comenius does not see as a random addition to the nature of being, but as a 'transcendental attribute without which no being can exist'.<sup>5</sup> Assuming that the whole universe is a harmonious unity based on uniform principles, then things that cannot be known directly (by reason or induction) can be derived from other sources. This is exactly what Comenius does both in his all-education (pampaedia) and in his omniscience (pansophia). He contextualises parallel resources, harmonises world(s). If he finds an educational or emendatory potential in one world (nature), he will get the most out of it for the human world using the way of analogy (*modo analogico*). For 'what is written in capital letters inside nature is written in lowercase inside humans' (Darling and Nordembo paraphrase Comenius in this way).<sup>6</sup>

How are these cosmological assumptions reflected in the concept of education? Even in the introductory part of the *Didaktika velká* (*Great Didactics*),<sup>7</sup> he states the fundamental thesis that 'every existence has its purpose'.<sup>8</sup> As a philosopher, Comenius views natural existence 'sub specie educationis'<sup>9</sup> to discover the educational potential in its nature. In other words, the natural world is not an accidental occurrence of things or a sequence of events that take place pointlessly and flow from nowhere. It is a purposeful stay of existences which are called to meaning. All existence is 'in order to', as R. Palouš explains.<sup>10</sup> Everything has its purpose. Every thing, every being is characterised by its teleological nature. It has a goal lying outside itself, it transcends itself, it exists, that is, it emerges from itself. That is how it was created and intended to be. In Comenius's terminology, nothing is 'self-sufficient', that is, nothing exists just for itself.<sup>11</sup> The educational talent of the natural world lies in this divine contribution. By birth, man enters the school of the world, which, by its very nature, educates man to understand the true essence of humanity. Nature itself provides didactic material; you just need to watch the natural world closely.

For example, in one of his chapters,<sup>12</sup> Comenius notes that nature 'does not make leaps, but steps forward gradually', as demonstrated by the growth of birds. When a bird is born, 'the old bird does not tell it to fly and look for grazing right away' says Comenius, and continues:

And when it gains feathers, its parents do not drive it out of the nest to fly, but trains it gradually. First, they teach it how to stretch its wings in the nest itself, then how to raise them and move them over the nest. Then they teach it in a place out of the nest, but still close to it. Then they teach it to fly from one branch to the other, then from tree to tree, and from one mountain to the other. And then it happens that they finally let it fly in the open wide air.

From this, Comenius deduces the following didactic laws:

5 Radim PALOUŠ, *Komenského Boží Svět*, Praha: Státní pedagogické nakladatelství, 1992, p. 24.

6 John DARLING and Sven Erik NORDEMBO, Progressivism, in: *The Blackwell Guide to Philosophy of Education*, Blackwell, 2003, p. 291.

7 It must be said that Comenius's use of the term 'didactics' is different from the present time usage. Comenius does not understand didactics as a methodological guide on how to teach specific subjects. His didactics is a philosophy of education in every sense of the word – it deals with the ontological and teleological determination of man and derives the principles of human education.

8 The whole text of the quote in question reads as follows: 'We also understand, by the word of nature, the general providence of God, or the stream of divine goodness, which does not stop doing everything in all; for and in each creature it does what it intended them to be. For the sign of divine wisdom was that it did nothing in vain, that is, without any goal, or without the means to achieve that goal. So, whatever is, is for something; and in order for it to arrive there, it is provided with certain necessary devices and aids, even with a kind of instinct, so that nothing is led to its goal against its will and with resistance, but rather lightly and pleasantly with the impulse of nature itself.' Jan Amos KOMENSKÝ, *Didaktika velká*, Praha, 1905, pp. 51–52.

9 Cf. Jan PATOČKA, *Komeniologické studie II*, Praha: OIKOYMENH, 1998, p. 133.

10 Cf. Radim PALOUŠ, *Čas výchovy*, Praha: Státní pedagogické nakladatelství, 1991.

11 Comenius often talks about self-loyalty. See, for example, *Centrum securitatis* (*Hlubina bezpečnosti*) or *Unum necessarium* (*Jedno potřebné*).

12 It is Chapter No. VII in *Didaktika velká*, from which I quote all the following passages. See KOMENSKÝ, *Didaktika velká*..., p. 155f.

1. Let the sum of all the teachings be divided precisely into classes, so that what is ahead will pave the way everywhere and ignite the torches for what is behind it.
2. Let time be divided precisely, so that each year, month, day, and hour has its own task.
3. Let this measure of time and work be kept exactly. So that nothing is left out, nothing overturned.

Similarly, Comenius deduces a number of other principles, while the common motif is always the harmonious synergy of the didactic method with the a priori nature of the natural world. Here, according to Comenius, lies the main vice of the schools of that time: they are not guided by the nature of the world and things themselves; instead they are an unnatural ‘torture of boys’.<sup>13</sup>

However, man urgently needs an education that harmonises his nature with the nature of the world. Of all creation, man is the only being who is able to make himself the ultimate goal of his existence, to become ‘homo mensura’ or ‘self-loyal’. This is, unlike in antiquity or modern times, not perceived as a positive trait, but as the core of human tragedy. Comenius sees the cause of all human ‘darkness’, ‘confusions’, and ‘choosing the wrong paths’ in it.<sup>14</sup> As a self-loyal man, one disrupts from the order of creation or the panharmony of the universe (as ‘late’ Comenius would say). Self-loyalty is unnatural, unoriginal, and improper for the whole of creation. Not only does it separate man from God, from whom all ‘breathing and life itself flow’, but it also separates people from people. ‘It causes man to set himself as a goal, i.e., to love oneself, to wish things for oneself, to care for oneself’.<sup>15</sup>

How does Comenius explain this specifically human tendency? It is in *Provolání*, that is, in the introduction to his *Velká Didaktika* (*Great Didactics*), that he explains, quite extensively, the state and causes of the human problem, to which he intends to respond with his didactics. It is based on the traditional biblical narration, where man is presented as ‘Imago Dei’, that is, as a being created for an essential relationship with God. Comenius states: ‘Behold, then, in oneself, man is truly nothing but harmony!’<sup>16</sup> However, as a result of the archetypal fall of humanity, caused by the human desire for godliness, man has lost the ‘nexus hypostaticus’, i.e., a deep personal relationship with his Creator. Having attempted to become equal to God, man has closed himself off or ‘closed in’ on himself. Thus, he alienates himself from his natural pre-ordained instance, which allows him to experience such an important transcendence. As a result of this distortion, man is unable to fulfil his essential human mission. But humanity is not lost forever, Comenius continues: ‘Therefore, it is like in case of a clock or a musical instrument created by the hands of an experienced artist, which are corrupted and out of tune. We do not immediately say that they are no longer useful [...]. It is the same with man. Even if one is corrupted by the sinful fall, it is given that he can be made harmonious again by God’s power with the usage of certain means’.<sup>17</sup> It is worth noting how realistically and comprehensively the dis-harmonic nature of humanity is captured here: Comenius knows that man is endowed with both positive and negative potential. The humanity of man is not right, but it is not quite lost either. Human essence is not predetermined, as, for example, in case of pumpkins or triangles. Pumpkins have their pumpkin nature, and triangles obtain their triangularity as a fact. A triangle can do nothing with its triangularness;

13 Jan A. KOMENSKÝ, *Didaktika velká*: X, 7.

14 A terminology that Comenius repeats in his works many times. For the earliest mentions, cf., for example, Jan Amos KOMENSKÝ, *Hlubina bezpečnosti*, Praha, 1927.

15 Cf. Zdeněk KOŽMÍN and Drahomíra KOŽMÍNOVÁ, *Zvětšeniny z Komenského*, Brno: Host, 2007.

16 Jan A. KOMENSKÝ, *Didaktika velká*: V, 17.

17 Ibid.



it cannot become more triangular, or, on the contrary, it cannot change into something different from a triangle. But man can. Man is capable of humanity and inhumanity. Every human potential, every knowledge or skill (even those acquired at school) can have both positive and negative updates. They can be used for good or bad. The greater the potential, the greater the danger, as ‘*corruptio optimi pessima*’.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, according to Comenius, there is a need for a ‘workshop of humanity’, a school or education of which the primary task will be to cultivate negative tendencies of human potential. In Comenius’s words, all education lies in overcoming the ‘self-loyal’ tendency, that is, in leading (e-ducatio) out of sinful self-centeredness or closedness. Comenius explains the meaning of his pedagogical project in his late general reformatory work, where he says that education is desirable ‘so that no man would fall into a nonhuman’.<sup>19</sup>

Education conceived in this way, by its very nature, implies the ascendancy of humanity. This is a very desirable movement, because it introduces man into the desired transcendent, that is, a self-transcendent process. In practice, this means that one learns to act, make decisions, and to be responsible not only with regard to oneself. He is led to a recognition which shows him that, in the order of being, he is subject to an instance that essentially transcends him. The basis of Comenius’s much prized universalism or wholism with very significant socio-ethical consequences can also be seen here.<sup>20</sup> Comenius does not intend to cultivate or correct humanity only in the individual sense, but in a comprehensive, global way as well. This is suggested by the prefix *pan*, which precedes every human endeavour in the peak stage of his work. A harmonious relation (reconciliation, *eiréné*) to the last instance implies harmonious relations to other people, and thus to the whole creation.<sup>21</sup> Comenius does not think about a partial being only. He includes the whole being. In his school, then, it is not just about the matter of humanising the individual, but about ‘the reform of human affairs’. Comenius knows that the well-being of the individual cannot be achieved without the well-being of the whole. His famous statement suggests that: ‘We all stand on one stage of the great world, and whatever happens here concerns everyone’.<sup>22</sup>

It is evident that Comenius’s educational system will in no way bear the adjective ‘scientific’. Although it was spoken of ‘sciences’ in Comenius’s times, Comenius himself calls his pedagogy using the traditional term *ars*, i.e., art. He does not mean that in the aesthetic sense. It is an art where the essence is expressed by Comenius’s famous motto on the front page of the file *Opera didactica omnia: Omnia sponte fluant, absit violentia rebus*.<sup>23</sup>

## 2. Modernity: *Scientia* – Education as a Science

To the modern ear, Comenius’s synthesis of cosmological premises, anthropological maxims, and didactic deductions sounds like pure alchemy. When the modern story was born, the enlightenment’s slogan was *sapere aude*, i.e., man, ‘trust your mind!’ It was a reaction to the medieval tradition of relying on external authorities – see Comenius’s Scripture, Creator, etc. The Enlightenment saw itself as the age of maturing of humanity, as a great historical moment in

18 ‘The worst is when the best goes wrong.’

19 Jan Amos KOMENSKÝ, *Obecná porada o nápravě věcí lidských*, Praha: Academia, 1992, p. 788.

20 Jan PATOČKA, *Komeniologické studie III*, Praha: OIKOYMENH, 2003, p. 190f.

21 Cf. David Ian SMITH, ‘It would be good to have a Paradise’ Comenius on learners past and present, in *Restoration of human affairs. Utopism or realism?*, ed. Jan HÁBL, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2021, p. 29f.

22 This is a paraphrase from the *Unum necessarium*: ‘We all sit in the great theatre of the world: whatever happens here affects everyone.’ Czech translation taken from Amadeo MOLNÁR, *J. A. Komenský ...*, p. 294. For more details on the issue of Comenius’s pedagogy, see Jan HÁBL, *Lekce z lidskosti v životě a díle J. A. Komenského*, Praha: Návrat, 2011.

23 ‘Let everything flow naturally and without violence.’ See also Jan A. KOMENSKÝ, *Didaktika analytická*, Praha, 1946, p. 42.

which humanity finally gathered the courage to free itself from the clutches of speculation and ignorance. The instrument of emancipation became the newly discovered human ratio. Using it, man hoped to ‘reveal, describe, and explain the entire natural order of things.’<sup>24</sup> At first, everything looked very promising. Equipped with Descartes’ and Bacon’s methodological guidelines, the first researchers reveal an immense number of new facts, phenomena, or laws concerning our natural world. Knowledge accumulates and expands exponentially: there is a need to classify, clarify, name, record, verify, interpret, define, etc. The first ‘logies’<sup>25</sup> or sciences in the modern sense of the word appear – zoology, geology, philology, ethnology, psychology, and the countless number of others. Each scientific discipline has its own terminology and internal structure, its own specific research subject and its own set of research tools (not just experiments). Whether natural sciences or humanities, they shared several basic features:

1. **Emphasis on objectivity** Due to the research guidelines of the first methodologists of science, such as R. Descartes or F. Bacon, the pursuit of objective knowledge became an imperative of science. Truthfulness must not be determined by authority, i.e., power, whether official, ecclesiastical, or by any other. Of course, the objective knowledge of reality requires distance from the observed object. If the researcher is to know how things really are, that is, *an sich* as Immanuel Kant said, subjective feelings, needs, or interests do not have and must not have any effect on the subject of research. In the early period of modernity, this noetic distance was perceived as unproblematic. The Cartesian-type researcher simply assumes that in his research he can ensure neutrality, that is, that neither himself (*res cognita*) nor any other factor will affect the observed fact (*res extensa*). The limits of this assumption were not recognised until the late stage of modernity.<sup>26</sup> For the sake of completeness, it should be mentioned that the modernists were aware of the problem of the unreliability which concerned sensory knowledge. R. Descartes spoke about this, but David Hume, a representative of the sceptical wing of empirical philosophy, pointed this out loudly. The logical positivists opposed Hume using the principle of verification. This concept requires the sensory experience test of every truth statement. This trend has taken over for some time in scientific circles. However, it has its research limits again, as it reduces all moral, aesthetic, or religious discourse to the level of emotional-subjective statements, which have no cognitive relationship to the real world. This is because it is not possible to verify, on the basis of the senses, whether a being is ‘good’, the sunset is ‘beautiful’, or the truth is ‘holy’. In addition, the principle of sensory verification suffers from auto-reference incoherence, because it cannot be verified in any sense.<sup>27</sup>
2. **Autonomy** As the etymology of the term *auto-nomos* (self-law) suggests, the modern thinker understands himself, respectively own reason, own observation, etc., as the instance that decides about the truth or falsity of any thesis or regularity. No priest, king, or feudal lord will decide about what is true and what is not. A scientist with the light of reason does not need these external authorities; he can figure it out on his own with the help of his scientific tools. The Enlightenment revolt against traditional authorities is understandable. The scholastic treasury of the wisdom of the Fathers was in many ways beautiful, philosophically deep and inspiring, but also full of errors, delusions, and dubious

24 Andrew WRIGHT, *Religion, Education and Postmodernity*, London: Routledge Falmer, 2004, p. 1.

25 The Greek term *logos* means word or also concept, meaning, understanding, knowledge.

26 Cf. Stanley James GRENZ, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996.

27 Cf. Stephen TOULMIN, *Cosmopolis, The Hidden Agenda of Modernity*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990.

speculations. The more dogmatically the scholastic guarded his sum of beloved, traditional, inherited from the Fathers, and time-tested doctrines, the sharper was the dispute with the scientist, who used empiricism and induction to discover a completely different world.<sup>28</sup> This is well illustrated by an episode from the 17th century, which is recalled by František Drtina in his *Úvod do filosofie (Introduction to Philosophy)*: a Jesuit provincial wanted to convince his priest of some of the facts of the universe, so he urged him to look through a telescope at the sunspots. The priest replies, 'Why is it, my son? I read Aristotle twice and found nothing like that. These spots do not exist, but are the fault of either your eyes or your glasses.'<sup>29</sup>

The emphasis on the autonomy of human reason can be observed in other areas of social life. In France, for example, the traditional calendar was abolished on 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1792, and 1793 was declared as year One. The seven-day week was extended to ten days. The reason is obvious. It was the external authorities that introduced the existing order of things and the perception of time. The year was traditionally calculated in accordance with the event that was considered the most significant from the historical point of view, that is, the birth of Jesus Christ, the saviour of mankind. The weekly arrangement was also based on the biblical statement 'Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest'. However, no authority will dictate to Enlightenment man what he should or should not observe. As an autonomous person, one can arrange one's life in one's own way.

3. **Optimism** Encouraged by success in the field of science, the modern thinker acquires the conviction of certainty of progress in the field of moral or human in general. Stanley Grenz put it well:

The modern scientist, for example, considers it axiomatic that the discovery of knowledge is always good. This assumption of the inherent goodness of knowledge renders the Enlightenment outlook optimistic. It leads to the belief that progress is inevitable, that science, coupled with the power of education, will eventually free us from our vulnerability to nature, as well as from all social bondage.<sup>30</sup>

In other words, one who knows 'correctly' will also act 'correctly'. The question itself about the connection between *scientia* and *conscientia* was not new, but the assumption that science and education would be an automatic humanising factor in the process of cultivating humanity did not receive its doctrinal form until the appearance of the modern story framework.<sup>31</sup> Modern man believed that human progress toward a better tomorrow is certain, and that it is only a matter of time before the unstoppable boom in knowledge will allow us to rule the natural world, even to 'command wind and rain', until we finally reach the coveted paradise on earth.

The optimistic spirit of the time is excellently expressed in the sublime appeals of the historian Jan Klecanda in his review compendium. It summarises all the events of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and these are the final words. Although it is primarily a tribute to the national awakeners, we cannot fail to hear the echo of the times:

28 Cf. Arthur VAN DOREN, *History of Knowledge*, New York: Random House Publishing Group, 1991.

29 František DRTINA, *Úvod do filosofie*, Sv. I., Praha, 1914, p. 558.

30 GRENZ, *A Primer on Postmodernism*..., p. 4.

31 Cf. Peter MENCK, The formation of conscience: a lost topic of Didaktik, in: *Curriculum studies*, vol. 33, III, 2001, pp. 261–275.

If we look at the state of our nation at the beginning of the nineteenth century, we see that we had to work hard in order to lay the foundations that other happier nations had already received. Without any support, often with obstacles, we had to pave the way for our Czech progress. Considering all of this, we know that what we are today, we have become through our own power, and not by the grace of more powerful entities, who would have held a favorable hand over us. On the contrary, many things were done despite their hostile efforts and adversity. And this effort, which we have gained by looking back into history, gives us unbreakable, self-confident forces for all future struggles. Happily turning away from the nineteenth century that has revived our nation, we are looking into the twentieth century with a clear vision. Perhaps new struggles, but certainly new work awaits us. We are not afraid of those struggles being aware of our power and of the fact that any nation which knows its rights and can fight, suffer, and make sacrifices for them, must finally win. We look forward to this work, knowing that our strengths, our abilities, and our love will secure our place among the nations. We are closing the book of the history of the nineteenth century and we greet the new century. In it, the good and glorious future of our nation is coming.<sup>32</sup>

Within the modern paradigm, the school had an irreplaceable role. It was a key means of sharing an optimistic-rationalist meta-story. All the didactic tools, knowledge, facts, skills, or values (which were available and were cultivated, developed, and passed on through school) had their significance in the process of implementing the modern agenda. And it must be added that school was very successful in that. Thanks to modern empirical sciences, it equipped itself with an arsenal that old educators such as W. Ratke, E. Bodin, Comenius, or J. F. Herbart had never dreamed of. The subject of pedagogy was clearly profiled, pedagogical research was branched out widely, a set of basic and auxiliary pedagogical disciplines was systematised, and last but not least (as a result of scientific research) the teaching methodology itself developed in an unprecedented way. The modern pedagogue thus has a very comprehensive repertoire of traditional and alternative strategies for the transfer of knowledge and competencies, while the ultimate goal of all pedagogical efforts is the 'preparation of individuals for life'. This means (when deconstructed by later post-modern hermeneutics) forming individuals in a way to make them able to accept and play their socially determined role within a modern scenario.<sup>33</sup> The fact that it was often a more or less latent indoctrination results from the very nature of the story. The fact remains, however, that the indoctrination was very functional. For centuries, it has effectively produced and consolidated an almost religious belief in progress.<sup>34</sup> Covered by such meta-narration, academia was one of the 'sacred' things, as it was a key place in which values serving social integration were formed and developed. The dignity of the teacher's robe then was in the legacy of historical continuity, because the modern school, regardless of how it contrasted with the pre-modern school, continued the tradition of the tenacious and prudent search, observance, and transmission of truths. These truths were assembled in their plurality into a large unity – as the very notion of *uni-versity* suggests.

### 3. Postmodernity: *Economia* – Pedagogy as a Market Tool

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the hopes of the modern world began to slowly disintegrate. It turns out that while knowledge brings unprecedented technical possibilities to humanity, it, by itself,

32 Jan KLECANDA, *Devatenácté století*, Praha: Josef Richard Vilímek, 1915, p. 888.

33 Cf. Stephen TOULMIN, *Cosmopolis, The Hidden Agenda of Modernity*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990.

34 Cf. Elmer John THIESSEN, *Teaching for Commitment, Liberal Education, Indoctrination and Christian Nurture*, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993; Jan HÁBL, *On being human(e). Comenius Pedagogical Humanization as Anthropological problem*, Eugene, Oregon (USA): Pickwick Publications (Wipf & Stock), 2017.



cannot ensure humanity and moral sophistication. As F. Bacon noticed, it is certainly true that knowledge itself is power.<sup>35</sup> It is also indisputable that one must be led to knowledge, that is, one must be educated. However, historical experience has revealed that knowledge and education can be used well, as well as badly. If we recall the monstrosities of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in which science took an active part, the automatic humanisation assumption of modern times will seem ridiculous and perhaps reprehensibly naive. Today's man, instead of gratefully putting himself in the care of scientists, tends to closely monitor their efforts with growing suspicion and apprehension. Who knows what their scientific and technical gain could be used for again.<sup>36</sup> In addition, the extraordinary development of technology and science, which provides Western societies with unprecedented power and prosperity, produces a number of problems that grow into global issues and cannot be coped with. The culture of abundance and prosperity contrasts sharply with the reality of the misery of millions of starving, destitute, illiterate, or marginalised individuals and entire nations, whom the 'civilized' world cannot help because it has enough problems with itself. To put it in a way of Fromm's thinking, our world is humanly 'malnourished', in spite of its scientific and technical supersaturation. Its advanced technocracy generates a number of anti-human manifestations such as the perpetuation of man, alienating individualisation, or the depersonalisation of interpersonal relationships. Instead of the coveted paradise on Earth, sociologists point out the reality of a dramatic decline in moral literacy, the decline of social capital (one does not believe the other), threats of global self-destruction, clashes of civilizations, various forms of extremism, etc. Man as a human person is even considered an 'endangered species'.<sup>37</sup>

Another problem of modern meta-narration, which contributed to its disintegration, was the tendency to totalise, that is, to make something an exclusive interpretation of reality and an instrument of power. This was well described by M. Foucault, who noted how modern scientific discourse is used as a means of pervasive domination and control.<sup>38</sup> The form of power totalitarianism may change, but the essence remains. Thus, under the auspices of great stories, more than one totalitarian crime was legitimised – whether it was the colonialist one in the West or the communist one in the East. A. Finkelkraut notes that from the point of view of Western civilization, it meant

to present current conditions as a model, special habits as universal ability, western values as absolute judging criteria, a European as the lord and owner of nature and the most interesting creature. [...] As Europe embodied progress vis-à-vis other human societies, colonization seemed both the fastest and the noblest way to put the latecomers on the path of civilization. Developed nations had a mission: to accelerate the path of non-Europeans towards education and prosperity. It was necessary, precisely for the good of primitive nations, to absorb their diversity – that is, their backwardness – into Western universality.<sup>39</sup>

The concrete consequences of the totalitarian discourse that dominated the Eastern bloc are familiar to all those who lived under the communist regime. It also had a great story about the class struggle, which should have – let us recall – eschatologically resulted in the promised paradise on Earth in the form of a classless society.

35 Bacon repeats the idea of *scientia potentia est* several times in his revolutionary reflections of the time, which also inspired Comenius in a specific way. Cf., for example, Francis BACON, *Nové organon*, Svoboda: Praha, 1974, p. 89, 186.

36 Zygmunt BAUMAN, *Individualizovaná společnost*, Praha: Mladá fronta, p. 159.

37 Jan SOKOL, *Filosofická antropologie. Člověk jako osoba*, Praha: Portál, 2002, pp. 15–16.

38 Michel FOUCAULT, *Dohlížet a trestat. Kniha o zrodu vězení*, Praha: Dauphin, 2000.

39 Alain FINKIELKRAUT, *Destrukce myšlení*, Atlantis: Brno, 1993, p. 42.

The disintegration of these meta-narrative patrons has caused all the simple landmarks and patterns that had made the modern world sound solid and life strategy choices easier to fade. The rising generation, fed with postmodern milk, no longer perceives reality as a coherent whole, in which one could find a meaningful system or logic, but rather as a scrum of random and changing events. Truth is an empty concept that anyone can handle in any way. Objective knowledge is irrelevant. Law and justice have been handed over to the demon of interpretation. And as for the prospects for the future, the postmodern generation does not believe that any scientific, economic, let alone political solution will ensure a better existence than the one which their parents had. The progress of humanity is a romantic illusion lost to postmodern man.<sup>40</sup> Especially in the Czech environment, where for decades great truths have been bent, strained, and twisted to the extreme and exalted ideas have been vulgarised by low interests, and where one great ideological story alternates with another without the promised paradise, our society has strengthened an almost conditioned reflex of a priori distrust. One would rather be disappointed in advance than to be disappointed again. What are the consequences of this thought change for school and pedagogy? With the end of trust in the meta-narrative instance, the school lost its most valuable assets. Figuratively speaking, it lost its soul. With the disappearance of the big story, it lost a guarantor who would legitimise its educational-formative role in society. The post-modern 'client' no longer expects great objective (world) opinions, definitive statements, or generally valid values from the school, let alone any educational 'influencing' in the name of universal truths. All he wants and needs is the pragmatic usability of school products. Do not educate. Mind your own business. Just give me the facts, skills, competencies, and I will treat them the way I want. I need to be competitive, to enter the job market.<sup>41</sup> Education has become a commodity. The last goal of education is economic.<sup>42</sup>

This is the demand of the neoliberal paradigm, which has very willingly seized the vacant space after the lost meta-narration, and which the school is forced to comply with. The school is thus reduced to a service or assistance position for any individual self-loyalty (in terms of Comenius), or self-assertion (in terms of contemporary society). In a postmodern climate, the school becomes a depository or – without pejorativity – a supermarket, where the consumer goes in order to choose eclectically from a wide range of more or less key products suitable for his immediate needs.<sup>43</sup>

Theorists and practitioners of education talk about 'frustration' and 'crisis'.<sup>44</sup> Although we would like to consider ourselves a 'knowledge society' or an 'educational society', in reality, education is declining.<sup>45</sup> It is a kind of appendix that must adapt to the dictates of the market, which is set according to the economic response to the need for innovation in the natural sciences and technological fields. The god of the market is 'profit', its priest is 'efficiency' and the tool is represented

40 Cf. Zygmunt BAUMAN, *Individualizovaná společnost*, Praha: Mladá fronta, 2004; Millard J. ERICKSON, *Truth or Consequences: the Promise and Perils of Postmodernism*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001.

41 In this context, the 'client' is primarily a university student, but he or she can be a primary school pupil as well (through his parents).

42 Radim PALOÚŠ, Doba postedukační, in: *Dary J. Peškové, Rozhovory, které pokračují*, ed. Zuzana SVOBODOVÁ and Irena VAŇKOVÁ, Praha: Eurolex Bohemia, 2007.

43 N. Postman was able to predict this phenomenon in a unique way in his sociological-analytical bestseller. Cf. Neil POSTMAN, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*, New York City: Penguin Books, 1986.

44 There is a considerable amount of literature dealing with the 'crisis' of Czech pedagogy. Cf., for example, Jiří HAŠKOVEC, Současná krize české pedagogiky, in: *Česká pedagogika: proměny a výzvy: Sborník k životnímu jubileu profesora Jiřího Kotáska*, ed. Eva WALTEROVÁ, Praha: UK – PedF, 2004; Vladimíra SPILKOVÁ, Pedagogika na Pedagogické fakultě UK – současný stav a perspektivy, in: *Česká pedagogika: Proměny a výzvy*, ed. Eliška WALTEROVÁ, Praha: Portál, 2004; Jarmila SKALKOVÁ, *Humanizace vzdělávání a výchovy jako soudobý pedagogický problém*, Ústí nad Labem: UJEP, 1993; Radim PALOÚŠ, *Heretická škola: o filosofii výchovy ve světověku a Patočkově pedagogice čili filipika proti upadlé škole*, Praha: OIKOYMENH, 2008.

45 Cf., for example, Výzvu všem „jejichž hlas je slyšet“. The content of the call including the names of signatories is freely accessible on the Internet, cf., for example, <http://ktv.mff.cuni.cz/IFORUM-4389.html>, cited 20<sup>th</sup> September 2018.

by the 'qualified specialist'. Educational products must therefore be marketable. Let educational institutions either adapt, become 'entrepreneurial', or let them disappear.<sup>46</sup> You cannot sell your philology, theology, philosophy, ethics, or Czech studies, so you are not useful. Have we been hit by some 'post-education' epidemic? R. Palouš philosophically asks about this.<sup>47</sup> Is the education sector 'at a crossroads'? Does it need to 'redefine its identity'? Z. Bauman makes us ask these questions.<sup>48</sup>

## Conclusion: Progress or Crisis?

The aim of this paper was to present material that is intended to help reflect on contemporary philosophising about education in historical-philosophical contexts. It is clear that the evaluation of education – as well as the evaluation of any other humanities phenomenon – is a matter of great controversy. Which educational philosophy is good and which is bad, or at least better or worse? It is the pre-modern, modern, or the contemporary one? It seems to depend on the interviewer's pre-initial insight and expectations. If we do not expect more than the equipment for competitiveness, then we could be quite satisfied with the current educational trend. The current educational mainstream provides such a service relatively well. It has the ability to produce individuals very well qualified for specific specialised industries. However, if we expect guidance to humanity, to virtue, to the cultivation of the spiritual components of the personality from the educational process, then we will be disappointed. Postmodernity knows no instance that would legitimise such goals. Everything that has happened in education over the last few centuries has made sense either within the frame of eternity or progress. If modernity ended the first, postmodernity said goodbye to the second. The premodern era honoured the gods, the modern one revered reason, and the postmodern one worships nothing.<sup>49</sup> Respectively, it honours the idol named Profit. Education that serves this 'god' becomes a commodity.<sup>50</sup> Some people perceive and welcome this as a kind of progress, others see it as a crisis.

I do not want to pretend academic neutrality, so, in the end, I will express my philosophical-educational preference. I am sure, though, that it is obvious to the attentive reader from the first lines. I advocate a philosophy of education that would develop Comenius's 'whole man'.<sup>51</sup> Let's call it a holistic, broad, general, or open conception of education. The reason for striving for such a concept is not to make sure that 'even the storekeeper can read Virgil in the original'. I present two fundamental arguments for a holistic concept: 1) Ontological-anthropological – it is based on how a human being is organised, 2) Sociological – it is based on the organisation of our society. Comenius will once again help us to interpret the first argument. His famous triad 'omnes, omnia, omnino' (all, everything, universally) uniquely captures the holistic approach to education; it answers three fundamental educational questions: who should be educated, what should be taught, and how to teach it? We should educate a) all people, b) in everything that is necessary for a good life, and c) using all appropriate means. We will explain it in this order: A) All people

46 Jitka LORENZOVÁ, *Kontexty vzdělávání v postmoderní situaci*, Praha: Humanitas, 2016.

47 Radim PALOÚŠ, Doba postedukační, in: *Dary J. Peškové, Rozhovory, které pokračují*, ed. Zuzana SVOBODOVÁ and Irena VAŇKOVÁ, Praha: Eurolex Bohemia, 2007.

48 Zygmunt BAUMAN, *Individuální společnost*, Praha: Mladá fronta, p. 147.

49 BAUMAN, *Individuální společnost...*, p. 157.

50 Cf. Václav BĚLOHRADSKÝ, Je vzdělání na cestě stát se zbožím?, 2003 (online), available at: <http://heol.loar.sweb.cz/Vzdelani.html>, cited 19<sup>th</sup> November 2012.

51 Comenius's holistic goals are often quoted by P. Floss, an outstanding philosopher and an expert on Comenius. Cf., for example, Pavel FLOSS, *Poselství J. A. Komenského současné Evropě*, Brno: Soliton, 2005, p. 26.

should be educated, because everyone has a vocation to develop the potential of his humanity, every person – poor, rich, noble, lowborn, male and female – is endowed with the potential to embody the highest conceivable good in the sense of *Imago Dei*. In addition, people are meant to live together ‘on one stage of the world’ and everything that happens here ‘concerns everyone’. Therefore, we must learn to take into account others and society as a unity. The well-being of an individual is not sustainable in the long run without the well-being of the whole. B) It is essential to educate one in everything which is necessary for a good life. This thesis is based on the anthropological assumption that a person should be knowledgeable, manage things, use things properly, i.e., in accordance with their nature. A good life is led by one who knows what is good, wants good, and does good ‘even when no one is watching’. If one uses current terminology, it is about the cultivation of the cognitive, voluntary-moral, and spiritual components of education. Regarding the issue of educational content, Comenius says that it is necessary to know ‘various fields’, that is, to have a broad overview. It is not just about knowing ‘a lot’. C) Appropriate means or methods are again based on Comenius’s ontological-anthropological assumptions – namely, that being has order and that this order is essentially harmonious. The skilful work of a teacher is introducing a person (child) into this order. Despite the fact that one suffers from a self-loyal tendency to ‘disturb the order of being’, that is, to be a mess, this process cannot and must not happen in a violent way. It is a specific and subtle skill or art of dealing with things (including man) in accordance with their natural character. One should not distort them, be violent to their essence, or use them badly (*abusus*).

The sociological argument also speaks in favour of a holistic, broad-based philosophy of education. As already mentioned – the logic of profit and marketability raises the demand for qualification, respectively the demand for specialists. However, the emphasis on narrow specialisation, which is focused on marketability, destabilises the whole of society, as qualifications make individuals ‘usable’ only in a very reduced range of human situations. Bělohradský’s expression taken from Konrad Liessmann<sup>52</sup>, the ‘fachidiot’ (skilled idiot), may be strong, but it captures the pitfalls of post-educational reduction well.<sup>53</sup> A qualification enables people to perform a narrowly specialised activity, but it does not provide a broader knowledge perspective, does not teach how to solve complex problems, does not teach how to think in context and independently, does not develop critical thinking, does not develop moral competencies and creativity, etc. In addition, the skills boom is leading to a spiralling process which differentiates society into specialised and independent sectors. Each of these areas is pursuing its own perspectives and interests, and it is resisting any political control, that is, constraints created in the interest of the whole. Belohradský asks: ‘In the end, will not the growing power to act effectively (but from the more and more narrow point of view) make our common world uninhabitable – biologically, psychologically, socially?’<sup>54</sup> In conditions of relative social stability, specialisation is undoubtedly effective and advantageous. On the other hand, in situations of instability, uncertainty, and variability, which are increasingly

52 Konrad LIESSMANN, *Teorie nevzdělanosti*, Praha: Academia, 2009.

53 Cf. ‘všem, jejichž hlas je slyšet’ (a challenge to all whose voices can be heard) from 2007. It states, among other things: ‘In many schools, we are witnessing a steady reduction in knowledge and skills requirements. The role of memory in education, the meaning of education for discipline and social behavior, the importance of personal effort and the importance of responsibility are often questioned in the media [...] Insufficient education and little general outlook leads to the degradation of the population to an unthinking crowd of consumers of all possible and impossible, creates a breeding ground for various fraudsters and extremists, is a source of ignorance and aggression towards people and nature.’ (© UNIVERZITA KARLOVA, MATEMATICKO-FYZIKÁLNÍ FAKULTA, KATEDRA DIDAKTIKY MATEMATIKY, Všem, jejichž hlas je slyšet, 2007 (online), available at: <http://kdm.karlin.mff.cuni.cz/akce2/vyzva/vsem.htm>, cited 19<sup>th</sup> September 2018).

54 Václav BĚLOHRADSKÝ, Je vzdělání na cestě stát se zbožím? (online), available at: <http://heol.loar.sweb.cz/Vzdelani.html>, cited 19<sup>th</sup> November 2018.



generated by global capitalism, it seems necessary to have an amount of 'general' rather than narrow knowledge, abilities, and skills, even if they appear to be redundant, useless and, above all, unsaleable for the market. I conclude my plead for an educational philosophy, which would have great attributes such as *open*, *general*, or *holistic*, with Bělohradský's words: 'Securing redundant capacity is costly. It is unused for a long time, so there is always a risk that it will be abolished under the pressure of market profit and loss accounting. However, such accounting rationalization destroys the abilities without which the late industrial society cannot survive.'<sup>55</sup>

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55 Ibid.