

(Im)Perfect Image of God's Perfection (Economic Fragments in the Work of J. A. Komenský)

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Economy is reasonableness when controlling other people united in a community ...its purpose is should be mutual assistance, peaceful and beneficial coexistence.

John Amos Comenius

Abstract

Comenius's reflections on economic issues are found primarily in his writings *Panorthosia*, *Letters to Heaven*, and *The Labyrinth of the World* and the *Paradise of the Heart*. They are imbued with an ethical approach in the relationship between the rich and the poor, an effort of mutual understanding and exemplary, zealous competition. Although Comenius admits social differences, the social structure is unchangeable, given by the Creation of the World, which is the work of God and therefore perfect. In Comenius's conception, it is the (im)perfect image of God's perfection.

Klíčová slova: Panorthosia, interpersonal solidarity, pseudotolerance, labyrinths of the world, bliss point, Arx Fortunae

Introduction

In our opinion, economics is a general science of human negotiations and is a part of the triad – to think, speak, and discuss. Therefore, it has its ethical dimension and shows what ethical rules compliance and violations brings. Comenius's conception of economics has this moral credit in the very basis of all human actions. His work draws attention to the fact that the reality of the man and the world is impossible without an ethical basis.

The picture of Czech society at the time of Comenius

Czech society of his time was an agrarian society with all the attributes of this state and all the signs of a new trend, ie. transition to capitalism. The essential

characteristic of the middle class (to which the Comenius family belonged) was a strong social mobility and a specific position in the bond of the pre-White-Mountain Czech state, which was, in terms of population (four million people), an economically significant power. Social differences between wealth and poverty eliminated, on one hand, but their feudal class features are deeply sealed and the real power is concentrated in the hands of about 12 “noble” family lineages, i.e. about 30 families. Political and economic reasons led the Habsburg dynasty, which in 1526 ascended the Czech throne in the person of Ferdinand I (1526–1564), to prefer the nobility. The rows of nobility were also extended by new rich burghers who made up about one-tenth of the urban population.

Recognition of the Unity of the Brethren and the Czech confession (confirmed verbally by Maximilian II. in 1575) contributed to the improvement of the climate of the whole of society, to its tolerant intellectual stretch, in addition to the ideas of the 16th century Reformation which brought to Bohemian-Moravian countries many followers of the Lutheran and Calvinist confession. The Unity of the Brethren was a minority church (at the Pre-White Mountain time it consisted of about 150 churches, bringing together about 3% of the population), but due to its social composition (it consisted mainly of members of middle class in addition to artisans and peasants) it was rather more bourgeois than rural. At a certain time, members of aristocratic families such as the Rosenbergs, Pernštejns, Slavatas, Žerotíns, Budovecs, Wallenstein and others belonged to it. In a sense, the culmination of this process was the year 1609, when Rudolf II. issued the Imperial Charter on Religious Freedom for the Czech estates. It was established against the will of the Catholic court nobility in need to gain a foothold against the rebellious nobility led by his brother Matthias.

In the context of European events, the socio-political conflicts, the origins of societal crisis, are manifested in the Czech lands from the beginning of the nineties of the 16th century. This leads to a splitting of the classes into two extreme wings: a Roman Catholic wing led by the Spanish Habsburgs and a Calvinist wing led by the United Kingdom of the Netherlands.

In his work *Letters to Heaven* Comenius returns to earthly pains and as an avid spokesman for “the oppressed poor” he turns fervently in his calls to heaven “for Christ to judge a dispute between the rich and the poor”. The poor and the rich sue each other before Christ. The poor complain to God on the prerogatives of the rich “Oh God Immortal! Look at what is happening, and either defend us or dismiss us if we are not your creation.” According to Comenius, this writing is the oldest print. It took its form from one of the three writings of Lucian of Samosata (2nd century), then popular among the humanists. He recalls the former fraternal equality under the rule Cronosolon. Knowledge of the words of Cronosolon was mediated to Comenius through the Latin translation by Erasmus. Complaints of both parties are dealt with in the Christian spirit of Christ’s promise: “Surely, I come quickly” and the author adds: “Come, Lord Jesus!”. The *Letters to Heaven* (1619) are a harbinger of future disasters.

Moral aspects of aspirations of Comenius have their roots in his theological philosophy and social political strategy. Therefore, let's return to the morally social problem of the time of Comenius, to a writing of a young pastor in Fulnek: Letters to Heaven, (J.A. Comenius, Letters to Heaven. Published 1619 in Olomouc and in 1902 by J. Kváčala in Liptovský Mikuláš). The poor and the rich sue each other before Christ. The main question is philosophically theological: How is it possible that God, who is gracious and righteous, tolerates oppression and injustice. Nevertheless, the actual work is not philosophical. The reason? The main causes of the differences between the world of wealth and poverty are not marked nor subjected to criticism. Philosophical inquiry is not just a mere religious meditation.

Comenius is an opponent of violence, disputes, hostility, anger and hatred. Claims and complaints end in compromise, with Christ's urgent appeal for tolerance, patience and mercy. Exhortation addressed to remedy the rich is rejected because the cause of poverty is lack of diligence and hard work of the poor. Moral appeal ends by stating what already is and by a call for peace. The light from the darkness ends with a light in the darkness. He later dedicated to this image a set of prophecies expressing mystical and millenarian mood of the contradictory 17th century.

The state of helplessness and resigning wisdom of the Stoics are used by Comenius to defend the current situation with "moralistic tract, or painful dialogue." The already cited author of an analysis of Comenius's philosophy, Jiřina Popelová, proves that "open apologetics defends a certain situation or a certain class position by extolling its virtues. Indirect apologetics does not obscure the contradictions and bad sides but decreases the blame for this situation by explaining it as a natural feature of human existence and all being" (Popelová 1986, p. 34 – 35).

Interpersonal solidarity

The comforting writings written by Comenius before his departure into exile, though they are filled with pessimism, have a moral importance that has bridged their painful tone, since they were not only to comfort their creator but also his companions. They were not a challenge to fight for but to endure the bitter destiny of history. Comenius was a messenger of the idea of human reconciliation and a persuasive advocate of the basic idea that we need to endure days of suffering to its peak. Only then a respite will come, returning to the realm of goodness and all passing this way of suffering will eventually be saved.

"Love of one's neighbour is an expression of human kindness in the unforgiving mazes of the world. Comenius's moral reflection has deep moral aspects and he puts in Christ's mouth not only messages but also a deep inner conviction and a requirement of the protection of the poor and a challenge to the rich that ... it is my will by which I want you to behave mercifully to the poor and do nothing more, so that they should not complain against you shedding tears. But, I want, from now on every one should pay better attention on his

neighbor, than was the course of many, for their general welfare and for his education” (Komenský 1910, p.16).

The nature of this reasoning shows a certain degree of interpersonal solidarity. Harmonisation of the features has in Comenius’s concept features of social bonds, a premonition of the welfare state with its primary function of solidarity. This is the real reciprocity of the relation of man to man without any violation of Comenius’s concept of social status of the rich and the poor. This limit of the economic reality is impossible to traverse. Social class stance within each group creates a structure of balance and empathy encircle by grace and understanding.

Comenius’s ethical tone is, in fact, too humane to be secularly real. Comenius concludes that, in the intentions of his faith and fatality, human misery is ruthless and natural leaving the solution in the hands of God. According to him, all the misery of the world, this great stage of our destinies, is the human portion and the answer is given into the hands of Christ, the sole judge of all living and dead. Therefore, Comenius addresses his call to him. Here, the depth of the socially ethical voice calling up to the heavens disappears and humble faith in the justice and generosity of each one according to his deeds assumes its place.

Comenius’s path leads the reader to the arena where the routes are not direct and truths are severed by shoots of evil and lies. Being on this path would mean to travel through his labyrinth and become a wandering pilgrim. The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart is not a philosophical work but the remedial, socio-critical work. The work is dedicated to Charles the Elder of Žerotín the author’s signature J.A. Comenius is the first known usage of the name Komenský – Comenius. The work is divided into 54 chapters and consists of two opposing parts of the “Labyrinth of the World” against the “Paradise of the Heart”. The first part is a journey through the labyrinth of the world where Comenius the pilgrim tries to leave the world of lies, hypocrisy, anger, injustice and oppression, false environment of stupidity, cruelty and violence. His guides have become the personifications of wickedness and pseudotolerance. The Mr. Delusion’s spectacles are a symbol of chiaroscuro of lies and deception, not just a mere delusion, but also subtle temptations, images of human depravity, cunningness and lust for power personified in the person of the Queen of the World of Wisdom.

These ideas of Comenius aim to remedy the society where everyone has their own social position established on an active relation to work and also appreciates its rich and high value. In the spirit of the market economy work is considered a conscious and purposeful human activity. Human personality is characterized by his activity, specifically expressed by the level of that activity. But his reasoning in this respect is one-sided and socially unbalanced. Each class in society is responsible for its position. The poor are responsible for their poverty because of “banquets, feasting, games and idleness” and he thus sustains the rich. In Panorthosia, he expresses very rigorously his position on social and civil obligations.” Anyone who does not work should not be tolerated by the state (p. 407) Determination of responsibilities in the spirit of the

Platonic division of the society is clearly specified and it is clear that besides the character, i.e. the division of labor according to social position, there is an effort to alleviate tensions between the two poles of society, between the rich and the poor.

It is a contradiction to his philosophical and pedagogical views that the light of wisdom is for all. The definition of this concept (Panorthosia, chapter Remedy of secular authority) determines education for the rich and labour for work poor. At two significant moments, Sedláček (2009) points out the shift of Comenius's view on the relation of the rich and the poor in his Letters to Heaven.

Comenius understood philosophy universally, like all wisdom, inclusiveness of things like the path to the sources of light. In this way, philosophy as conceived by Comenius, is general philosophy "because of the general nature of the subject, initiative and benefit". The generality lies in its simplicity, continuity, and will lead to genuine reconciliation of discrepancies through discovery of true ideas. Philosophy is conceived as a useful earthly discipline, where sensual knowledge plays a dominant role, and the goal is Pansophia, with its eight worlds, leading man to piety and eternal bliss. Like Plato and Leibniz, Comenius considers mathematics to be the most versatile logical expression eliminating irreversibly internal disputes and the way to the irreversibility of evidence. Comenius's philosophy should serve for the benefit and become equal to theological scholarship. The purpose of this philosophy is to train and educate the human mind. "Then...philosophy will no more deserve the name of theology's maid but her blood sister" (ibid., p. 336). Philosophy naturally leads to virtue. In Comenius's concept we can talk, like in Aristotle, about the moral virtues, which manifests itself in control of emotions and behavior. Their abundance and lack is a error and leads to a kind of "mediocrity", harmony with the opposites merging in the center. In Greek philosophy, we find two opposing concepts of dealing with contradictions. Anaximander regards the fusion of opposites destructive while Pythagoras solves the struggle of opposites by mutual penetration leading to the creation of an organic unity. Comenius's Pansophia is also conducted in this direction and we can even assume that, as in orphic concept of love, in Pansophia the love is a creative and unifying element stemming from this inspirational source. Both according to the Pythagoreans and Comenius, coordination of opposites, the same as harmony in music, also leads reconciliation of discrepancies. The fighting is solved by a new unity, which has all the marks of a democratic and humanistic society. It is created and shaped by a new general politics that directs the human society to perfect condition. This politics will be the basis of a peaceful age where human wisdom reaches a state (as a result of the improvement of man in the process of fulfilling his nature and humanity) that "[...] every man, untroubled from nowhere, had a chance to live peacefully and enjoy most freely the common freedom [...]" (ibid., p. 337).

Finding satisfaction in the labyrinth of the world

The social situation of the time of Comenius is in direct conflict with his ethical principles and moral dimension of his life. The relationship of the rich and the poor, in its very substance, carries all the features of usury and contempt for those who have only their hard work and humility before the righteousness of God. Human greed and desire for possessions prevails. Refusing to help others is just as sinful as the intentions of the rich. The dependence of the poor is crowned by usurious interests which are two- to three-fold. Comenius's economic thinking is humane, mutual and empathetic, it "lacks" usuriousness of business focus on one's own benefit. Mutual human interaction is not limited by freedom of both entities but by coercion and lack of conscience and condescension of the rich. Zero tolerance for the poor is in conflict with the Comenius's rejection of usury as a source of disruption of harmony and human nature.

Business must have characteristics of decency and surplus should be bought which is "... good, decent, needed ... (that...) serves the nations and the peoples by balancing what they have in abundance and bringing in what is lacking. Justice should be sought after, not only to benefit ourselves, but also those from which the buyers export, and for those to whom the seller imports: no damage and loss of big profits ..." (*Clamores Eliae*, p. 44).

The desire for free trade and partnership, ethical respect, are binding in international trade including Comenius's rigorous demand for banishment of monopolies and oligopolies because "... it is unbearable that what could be better done by more people, competing with each other in good zeal and effort, is done by an individual, though with some certainty of his own profit, but nonetheless with sure damage and detriment of the state" (*Panarthosia*, p. 408).

Comenius has incorporated some significant considerations into his last great work *Clamores Eliae* which was to become the eighth volume of General counsel about the Reform of Human Affairs. The protagonist of this work is the figure of the Old Testament prophet Elijah, a devout supporter and defender of justice (he lived in 9th century BC). Elijah is a reformer, a witness of God, an especially zealous servant of the Lord. Comenius's Elijah is understood in a pluralistic and civic, patriotical and internationally social way. Let's follow the line of vision of Elijah the Reformer who, in consonance with the views presented in the 14th century, was to reform religion and society. Always, however, he appears in the form of a dualism of two men revealing to the world the spirit and power of Elijah. Such pairs occur e.g. in Matthew of Genova who indicates Ioannes Milicius and Konrad Waldhauser as the two Elijahs. The Czechs labeled John Hus and Hieronymus Pragensis as these two apocalyptic witnesses of God. The name Elijah is not a proper noun but has the appellative function (general noun) identifying the subject of extralingual reality. Nováková (1977) notes in this context that "... the third Elijah of Comenius is not the third incarnation of the historical Elijah, the real redivivus, as it was thought until recently" (Nováková 1977, p. 49). It is beyond the capability

of the individual to take over the function of the reformer of the universe, but every nation needs, says Comenius, such reformers, restorers, Elijahs.

It is in this volume where Comenius turns against the burglarious nature of trade and international trade. Monopolies should be stopped and the prehensile and deceptive trade system too. Comenius stresses that only high-grade goods should be bought, "... surplus which is good, decent, needed" (*Clamores Eliae*, p. 44). In the spirit of business ethics "Good Ethics is Good Business" he remarks that trade should be understood in the mutual balance and its use must therefore be mutually beneficial and useful. This liberal thinking of Comenius, in his time of "the decay of mercantilism or cameralism", did not look friendly at international trade at all. The positive role was assigned solely to the export while the import was ... considered as depletion of national wealth" (Sedláček 2009, *ibid.*, p.135). In case of a land of abounding wealth, it is natural in Comenius's view that it should focus its business activity on its use and multiplication and the trade will be left over to those nations who have nothing "except water and sand".

It is essential that, in addition to these "fragments" of economic thinking, Comenius focuses, in the spirit of his syncretical method, on social issues, anchoring the man in the port of personal freedom and spiritual satisfaction in the labyrinth of the world. We will devote the final note to the pilgrimage of his prophet.

Last call

Comenius met the idea of chiliasm in his youth when he studied at the Theological Academy in Herborn, and he professed it at the end of his life in a rather apologetic writing *De cabbage* (1669), in which he emphatically distances himself from the Dutch millenarians – the Anabaptists of the 16th century and millenarian elements that are contained in the *Clamores* and *Consultation*. Nováková (1977) describes it as follows: "... the difference between corrective ideas of Comenius and the Millenarians is enormous. Comenius has been preparing this millennial kingdom for his whole life, lastly in *Clamores*. To call this codex (or planned file) chiliastic may be done only with many reservations. Comenius's chiliasmus (hardly orthodox!) is a synthesis of several factors: its the starting point is not the Apocalypse (though it is also cited) but the promise of the third Elijah in Matthew 17:11. He continued the tradition of the Czech reformist established the following equation: Elijah = the last reformer = the founder of the "last age" (*seculum ultimum*), the "Golden Age", "Heaven on Earth." He distinctively synthesized the tradition of Elijah, reformation and chiliasmus. This synthesis abounds in ideas ... of social politics, even in a mere notebook it (occasionally) goes into the specific details of the national economy. Therefore, we do not recommend *Clamores* to be regarded as an exclusively religious work. Its theme is, despite everything, the famous Comenius's PAN (all) including the welfare of the nation – *Gentis Felicitas*" (*ibid.*, pp. 57–58).

Clamores is a work of warning, correction, challenge, graciously conciliatory and principally illustrative, condemning the violence of war and malevolent verbal hassles, the fountain of love and call for restoration of a just, restored kingdom of Christ, reckoning with the “devil’s cunning”. At the same time, it highlights the problems of the world, poverty and wealth. The solution is unconflicted, conciliatory, finding comfort of the heart, inner paradise, escape and inner experience. It is addressed to all Christians, the whole mankind of God. Therefore it is not dreamy but dreamful, is not heretical but deeply human, is not final but prospectively thinking. He concludes with a general prayer. ”That everything that was predicted in the last age be turned into prayer. Like: that they shall beat swords into plowshares and say, “God, you are the God of peace – let the last age correspond to the first. Initially, there were no swords, spears, rifles in the world – but sickles, hoes and mattocks – Cain, Nimrod – Pharaoh – filled the earth with instruments of murders. Stop it – command to beat the swords, cannons into bells” (ibid., p. 51).

Comenius’s final work is not a mere theological treatise, it is not a twilight of Comenius’s intellectual forces, resignation and passive beliefs. Comenius is a single-minded reformer who firmly believes, despite his old age, in the need of activity to overcome the institution of passive faith changing it into a burning call for the general reconciliation and rectification of human affairs. He calls not for radical social change he does not solve the contradiction of wealth and poverty, and though his *Arx Fortune*, the castle of Fortune, is a point of reconciliation, we do not find in paradise in it since we carry it in our hearts.

Is it only hope that remains with the man? Much more! Also, desire and love of liberty, a belief in social justice and human future. Social Solidarity. The reality of today is quite different. There is a decline of solidarity to the “twilight of the welfare state” .. in virtually all areas that are affected by its internal problems, that is in the connection with the flexibilization of the work, in the connection with the family crisis, as a consequence of the population aging and the likewise” (Keller 2005, p. 92).

(These issues will be addressed in the final study: *Alienation of the man and the world.*)

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(Ne)dokonalý obraz boží dokonalosti

Komenského zamyšlení nad ekonomickými tématy nacházíme především v jeho spisech *Panorthosia*, *Listové do nebe*, *Labyrint světa a ráj srdce*. Jsou prodehnuty etickým přístupem ve vztahu mezi bohatými a chudými, snahou o vzájemné pochopení a soutěžením příkladným, horlivým. Komenský sice přiznává sociální rozdíly, nicméně sociální struktura je neměnná, daná stvořením světa, který je dílem Božím, a proto dokonalým. To je v Komenského pojetí onen (ne)dokonalý obraz boží dokonalosti.

Keywords: *Panorthosia*, mezilidská solidarita, pseudotolerance, labyrinty světa, bliss point, *Arx Fortunae*

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HRUŠKOVÁ, L., L. OPEKAROVÁ and M. SOMR. (Im)perfect image of God's perfection. *Littera Scripta*. 2012, 5(2), 53–62. ISSN 1802-503X.
