**The theory of knowledge in the context of philosophy of Jan Amos Comenius:**

**Critical Analysis and Research Applications**

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**ABSTRACT**

The text focuses on the analysis and comparison of John Amos Comenius' theory of knowledge and its influence on contemporary pedagogical approaches. It conceptually analyses Comenius' philosophy of education and philosophical positions, using methods of verification, comparison and synthesis in addition to analysis. Comenius emphasized sensory experience as the primary source of knowledge, which he shared with empiricism, but at the same time he enriched his philosophy of education with his syncretic approach, which linked knowledge of different fields. By comparing his theories with the ideas of Francis Bacon and Rene Descartes, it becomes clear that Comenius rejected dualism and the analytic method, preferring a unifying approach to knowledge. His work, especially in the field of pedagogy, offers timeless ideas about education and human development that can be applied in today's dynamic educational environment. The text emphasizes the importance of Comenius' universalism and its influence on the formation of modern pedagogical concepts.

**Keywords:** Jan Amos Comenius, epistemology, theory of knowledge, philosophy of education, methodology, pan-sophism.

1. **INTRODUCTION**

In the history of pedagogy and philosophy of education, the theory of knowledge together with the philosophical views of Jan Amos Comenius are of fundamental importance. The specific concept of his philosophy of education and philosophy as such is difficult for most philosophers and critics to assign among the contemporary-known philosophical trends. Some authors tend to evaluate his conception of thought as a return to ancient ideals, while others regard it as the most striking advance within the period of humanism and the Renaissance. Floss argues that one could even say of Comenius that he was an antimodern thinker in a good sense (Floss, 2005). For many, however, he represents a revolutionary who came up with new ideas. Comenius' theory of cognition placed great emphasis on sensory experience as the primary source of information and learning. This type of approach is not uncommon or unique in the philosophy and gnoseology of the time. The empiricism of the period in question was perhaps most prominently exemplified by Francis Bacon. As Švec argues: "(Francis Bacon - author's note) In agreement with Aquinas, he argued that our minds are tabula rasa, but that we have a gift in the form of reason, which can think and refine itself" (Švec, 2023, p. 23). This terminus technicus is defined by Švec as follows: "In the philosophy of education, this term represents the view of the human mind as an unwritten board that contains no information. One of the greatest protagonists of this approach was Aristotle" (Švec, 2024, p. 32). The ideas of the concept of "tabula rasa" were most widely adopted by Francis Bacon. Ideas about the need to promote a knowledge society, education and systemic education helped to develop intellectual abilities and in the space of Central Europe culminated in Maria Theresa's reformation of 1774, when compulsory schooling was introduced in Austria-Hungary for children aged 6-12 years old. The key aim of the article is to answer the research question *How does Comenius' theory of knowledge contribute to the formation of contemporary pedagogical approaches and where does it encounter its limitations?*

Comenius wrote at a time when scholastic medieval thought was already losing its validity, nominalists no longer wanted to use a realistic perception of concepts, but understood concepts as certain features of the human mind. The Renaissance and the humanist period saw many discoveries in the field of nature and the exact sciences. And it was at this time that Comenius decided to write about the re-acceptance of Christ's message and the universal reformation of the whole world (Hendrich, 1941). The period was characterized by a departure from Scripture and the world was rather oriented towards new information about the laws of nature. The Bible was not a universal authority of facts, and reliance on faith in the spirit or references from the Bible slowly displaced new ideas. Cognition was more concerned with presenting precise evidence for the existence of entities of the human mind than with faith, which is why many hesitate to classify Comenius as a neopagan or reactionary.

In this period, scholastic thinking was giving way to empirical and rationalistic approaches, which significantly influenced Comenius' pedagogical conceptions. Nevertheless, his philosophy of knowledge is contradictory: on the one hand, he acknowledged the importance of sensory experience and the systematization of knowledge; on the other hand, he remained a faithful follower of Christian theology, which to some extent limited his rationalist tendencies.

Comenius's guidance is true if it denotes the true nature of things and thus promotes unambiguity (Patočka, 2003). The syncretic method brings our minds to joyful, extensive knowing along with the subsequent proving and organizing of some things through others. The advantage of the method is speed in learning new things, due to the similarity of things with the same basis. That which has the same basis is well memorized. If the method is properly anchored, it provides holistic knowledge and irrefutable testimony about the matter (Komenský, 1966).

In his leadership, Comenius also opposed Aristotelianism, which argued that every science should have its own principles. On the contrary, according to Comenius, such a division of the sciences is not correct, but a unity of synthetic composition of knowledge is necessary. At the very top he placed the knowledge of the sciences and the light of lights denoting the infallible and perfect knowledge of everything (Patočka, 1998).

1. **METHODOLOGY**

The present study primarily uses the method of in-depth analysis of Comenius' attitudes and philosophy of education on key concepts such as dualism, empiricism, tabula rasa, and universalism. The study then applies a verification of the aforementioned insights through comparison, especially with the authors Francis Bacon and René Descartes. From the said comparison, conclusions are drawn that speak of common and divergent positions on the above key concepts. The conclusion of the work uses synthesis to obtain knowledge of a new quality.

1. **ANALYSIS AND COMPARISON**

Comenius's major work is considered to be the General Consultation on the Rectification of Human Affairs (De rerum humanarum emendatione consultatio catholica), which aims to make a concrete proposal for the rectification of the human community and also to highlight the urgency of this act. It is the idea of a completely new all-rectifying philosophical-theological-social system (Patočka, 1992). The work contains seven parts, the last of which is partially completed. The intentions of the whole work were discovered by Dmytro Chyzhevsky in 1934 in Francke's orphanage in Halle, Germany.

The General Consultation on the Rectification of Human Affairs is based on three key moments of Comenius' philosophy, on irenicism, by which he wanted to achieve the establishment of peace, tranquillity and reconciliation among Christians, on the all-knowing and also all-rectifying endeavour, and on the demand for social reform (Popelová, 1958). According to Comenius, it is a unique attempt to correct the contemporary education (eruditio), society (politia) and religion (religio). As he himself says, it is not new in terms of subject matter, but a new way of doing things. For he wants to proceed to the rectification of human affairs together with all other scholars of the Christian world (Patočka, 1992).

The first part of the work, entitled "Panegersia", has the task of defining what lies beneath the human things that Comenius wants to bring to the fore in his great work, and at the same time he wants to awaken in people the desire to remedy the dismal state of affairs at that time. Originally, this section was to be called 'The General Awakening'. The second part, entitled "Consultation, Panaugia" or alternatively called "The Path of Universal Light", deals with the actual path that the corrective effort should take. The third part of that consultative work is entitled "Pantaxia," presenting a proper understanding of the world, man, and God. Earlier Comenius had referred to this general ordering of things by the term "Pansofia". If we want to spread this knowledge further, we need a means to do so, and thus a universal language that all peoples can understand. The fourth part is the "Pampaedia" as the General Refinement of Minds. The fifth part is entitled "Panglottia", which denotes the general refinement of the tongues. The sixth book unites all these efforts in the "Panorthosia," the General Rectification, which seeks by its action to rectify the state of education, religion, and politics, and thus, under the command of God, to arrange for an enlightened and peaceful age. The last part completing the overall meaning of the work is called "Pannuthesia", which means "The Book of the General Exhortation" (Patočka, 1992).

In his work on the "All-New Testament", Comenius tends to universalism, which he bases on faith and the Bible. Patočka (1998) compares him to a post-Christian Plato because the same structures are repeated in all parts of the work. However, Comenius surpasses Plato's system in that he adds a higher purpose to the knowledge of one principle in the form of establishing a world order where there is none.

Comenius wants to achieve the discovery of the absolute Truth of God through true peace. Every man who discovers the absolute Truth is freed from thoughts of violence, and this is precisely the proof that he has found and truly experienced the concept of absolute Truth. In this way, reparation is to take place in a non-violent way, by the voluntary decision of each individual, because the universal reparation of society sets as a condition the change of man from within, and without a reformed humanity it is impossible to proceed to the reformation of the Church, the State, or society (Komenský, 1950).

**Against Descartes' dualism**

We note at the outset that, although the periods in which Bacon, Descartes and Comenius were active may appear identical, they need to be differentiated. According to Švec, Bacon's work is a milestone in philosophy to mark the beginning of the modern period: 'The beginning of the modern period is during the Humanism and the Renaissance, which is crowned by the work of Francis Bacon. The next modern period is classical modern philosophy beginning with the Baroque and the work of Descartes" (Švec, 2025, p. 11). A position that has puzzled many critics in Comenius' thought is his polemic with Descartes' philosophy of rationalism. It is this philosophy that is considered by today's society to be the origins of valid views, his views may appear to be outdated, and the relevance of Comenius' ideas may seem problematic (Floss, 2005). René Descartes and his Cartesianism oppose blind religious belief in God because it cannot be proven by calculations or graphs. They consider the analytical method as the method of investigation (Hendrich, 1941). On the other hand, Comenius opted for a completely opposite method and classified Cartesianism along with Copernicanism, Socinianism and atheism as fallacies having no validity (Floss, 2005).

Descartes builds his theory on facts and disbelief in what can be doubted, and he bases his knowledge of the world on the analytical method. All of these ideas, however, are rejected by Comenius. Descartes' dualism clearly separated matter from spirit, reason from faith, science from religion. Comenius, on the other hand, defended universalism, which created a sharp contrast between them. Because Descartes' dualism was popular not only in his time, but throughout the history of philosophy of education, Comenius' unifying beliefs were more likely to be misunderstood and often labeled as naive (Kuras, 2007). Comenius also rejects Descartes' status of man ruling nature. Descartes, along with Francis Bacon, viewed knowledge as a type of power, but Comenius viewed it as a means to a better being. He anticipated the possibility of a situation in which knowledge would become a product that could be bought. Comenius, on the contrary, due to his universalism, wanted knowledge to be accessible to all, to be within the reach of all layers of society (Floss, 2005).

**Comparison of the theories of J. A. Comenius and F. Bacon**

Comenius and Bacon agree on a number of ideas, namely their orientation towards nature, their opposition to Copernicus, and their initial grounding in the Renaissance tradition of thought. On Bacon, we will pause to add: "Francis Bacon is wrongly classed among the pure empiricists, despite the fact that he spoke of the necessity of rationally evaluating quantitatively collected empirical data. Francis Bacon was a critic of quantitative empiricism, which, in his view, merely mechanically collected data without a higher purpose or meaning." (Švec, 2023, p. 75). In general, the most common feature of these two thinkers is the methodology and orientation towards the method of scientific inquiry and cognition. Method in both of them acts as an imaginary machine or mechanism. For both Comenius and Bacon, the right method represents the force that will serve man to lead him to knowledge. While Bacon takes pride in practical guidance, Comenius focuses on universal guidance. Through universal knowledge he brings us to an understanding of the meaning of life and the mission of man. From the first sensory orientation, Comenius tries to get to the most general axioms as quickly as possible (Patočka, 2003).

Comenius highlights Bacon's focus on practical matters, where knowledge is meant to serve man. He was also impressed by the proposal of a radical correction of all knowledge through method. However, he departed from Bacon in the method itself (Soudilova, 1992). Comenius has two kinds of methods in his philosophy. One method focuses on the knowledge of the universe and thus on general and total guidance. The other method aims at establishing a perfect technique of teaching, and hence it is the method of practical knowledge. Comenius took his main inspiration from Bacon in the idea that the method should always be uniform. However, regarding induction and the attainment of general knowledge, they differ in opinion, for Comenius finds Bacon's inductive method too lengthy, complicated, and with uncertain results. The syncretic method was not chosen by Comenius in opposition to Bacon, but he chose it because it is quicker and reaches even where induction has its limits, that is, places elevated above nature. Comenius, like Bacon, seeks to understand things down to their primordial essence. Comenius argues that man is in a wrong position to God which causes us to also see nature and human nature wrongly and only an inner change can lead us to our centro securitatis and thus we can correct our human affairs, Bacon on the other hand sees our position as rightly placed (Patočka, 2003).

**Pedagogical ideas of J. A. Comenius**

J. A. Comenius can be called a revolutionary for the reason that his ideas did not try to reflect the ideas of the time, but on the contrary, he looked forward and his ideas were very close to the emerging trend of realism and rationalism. Important for him in education was the use of the mother tongue, because only thanks to it could the pupil understand everything correctly. Democracy in education was paramount for him and humanistic ideas were the basis of his teaching.

J. A. Comenius' ideas began to spread in Slovakia mainly through Latin language textbooks in the 17th century. In his textbooks he introduced a new method of teaching Latin. At the same time, the textbooks attracted attention by their content as they were oriented towards illustration and explained the natural way of functioning of human society, in a factual way they explored the living and non-living nature. Through concrete knowledge, pupils came to real knowledge, which impressed especially the new social class of the bourgeoisie and its intellectual advancement (Karšai, 1970).

He defines a new method of learning Latin in his textbook *Janua linguarum reserata sive seminarium linguarum et scientariumomnium*. He extracted grammar from it and instead of mindless memorization, he made a list of about 8,000 words, using them to create about 1,000 sentences from the simpler to the more complex. The encyclopedic textbook *The World in Pictures* was groundbreaking in the idea of illustration. In it, Comenius combined information with illustrations, and if illustrations were not available, he demanded that schools have illustrative aids, thus emphasizing sensory perception. Through the use of his textbooks, it was demonstrated that a new school system and a new school system were needed in Slovakia, which would be achieved through new means, methods and principles - and in the ways of Comenius (Karšai, 1970).

The research topic on Comenius and his philosophy of education is relevant in the context of contemporary pedagogy, which is facing challenges in the field of digital learning, inclusive pedagogy and linking theoretical knowledge with practical skills. Comenius' ideas on the universality of education offer potential solutions, but it is necessary to examine to what extent they can be applied in a dynamically changing educational environment.

The timeless concepts presented by Jan Amos Comenius in his philosophy of knowledge are still relevant in today's educational debate. He laid the foundations for contemporary teaching methods with his emphasis on education based on sensory experience, systematicity and accessibility for all. In addition to purely academic education, Comenius's concept of pan-Sophism, i.e. universal knowledge, sought to shape the whole person, including his or her moral and spiritual growth. Education can lead to social and personal progress as well as to the development of a more peaceful world. His theoretical perspectives on education and knowledge thus offer a strong foundation for the development of a philosophy of education and pedagogy as well as humanism in the present complicated world situation.

1. **CONCLUSION**

The philosophy of John Amos Comenius in the field of the theory of knowledge and education represents a timeless contribution that combines empiricism, rationalism and theological values. Thanks to his syncretic method, Comenius strove for a systematic and comprehensive knowledge that would be accessible to all, regardless of social status. His emphasis on sensory experience and universalism in education offers valuable ideals for today's world, which faces challenges in digital learning, inclusiveness and linking theoretical knowledge with practical skills. Comenius' philosophy of education, which emphasises the need for the unity of science, religion and the social sciences, is confronted with the limits of the current education system, which is often divided and oriented towards specialised areas. Nevertheless, his ideas on education as a tool for personal and social development, as well as for the formation of the holistic human being, remain relevant and provide valuable tools for modern pedagogical approaches. In today's context, facing global challenges and dynamic changes in education, Comenius' ideas of universal education and Pan-Sophism offer a strong basis for the further development of a philosophy of education. His educational ideas, based on humanistic values and knowledge, are proving to be a valuable source of inspiration for creating just, inclusive and peaceful societies that emphasise the development of the whole person. Thus, Comenius' contribution to pedagogy and philosophy of education continues to prove immeasurable, and his ideas are still valid in the modern challenges of the education system.

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