

Comenius' ethics: from the heart to the world

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Abstract

This paper deals with the ethical views of the 17th century Czech thinker Jan Amos Komenský, also known as Johann Amos Comenius. Comeniologic studies are focused on different aspects of his contribution to education, theology and philosophy but surprisingly there are only a few studies on his ethical standpoints. Jan Patočka classified Comenius's work in three periods: prepanosophic, pansophic and panorthotic. Here the focus is on the panorthotic works in order to trace the different conceptions of ethics, virtue and other ethical concepts specially the virtue of prudence (*prudentia/phronesis*). Furthermore, to have a broader perspective, a short analysis of his prepanosophic period book *The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart* is also included in order to contrast the evolution of the concept of prudence and the ethical sphere in his world-view. The methodology is based on conceptual analysis, the contrast of different references to ethics in his late period books. At the same time, this work is an attempt to extract secular elements for understanding his ethics, although the organic link between philosophy, theology and politics is recognized in his thought.

Keywords: virtue ethics, prudence, human reform, peace, moral universalism

Introduction

Most Comeniologic studies since 19th century are focused on the main contribution of the Czech author to Western cultural pedagogy. In contrast, there are only a few references to his thought on ethics, even character formation appears to be a forgotten theme in pedagogical studies (Hábl, 2011). The problem addressed in this paper is: What characterizes Comenius's ethics? Despite it generally being accepted that the thinking of Jan Amos Comenius is an organic system in which educational, religious and ethical views are all intertwined, here I focus strictly on his philosophical references to ethical concepts. Putting aside — whenever possible — the theological and educational links of those concepts, namely because the goal of this paper is to identify the particular features that appeared in Comenius's standpoints on ethics, in order to reconstruct his ethical views with some degree of independence from his other perspectives which are more broadly studied.

The hypothesis guiding this research is that Comenius's ethics has two main characteristics making it special for his epoch and worthy studying nowadays. First, Comenius's ethical views are a form of virtue ethics. There is a strong influence of Aristotelian-Thomistic, Platonic and Neoplatonic and Stoic elements in his views on virtues. Second, his ethical stance is a universalistic one, although still from a Christian-centric perspective. Both features can be understood as attributes of the spirit of the 17th century in Europe, a time when irenic perspectives started to be developed as a reaction to religious and nationalistic conflicts. Despite Renaissance anti-scholasticism, Aristotle was still an important figure during the period mostly in his scholastic interpretation; his ethical works were re-interpreted many times and adapted according to national and cultural circumstances. Notwithstanding, the way Comenius combined these two features with other traditional figures of virtue ethics — from Greek and Roman classics such as Socrates, Plato, Epictetus and Seneca to some Biblical figures like King Solomon — is original and worth studying nowadays, not only as a way of developing a better understanding of 17th century ideas but in order to promote better ethical responses for periods of religious conflicts and cultural clashes like our times.

In the following pages it will be reconstructed how these two main features — virtue ethics and universal irenicism — were developed by Comenius in a progressive way and the role other philosophers and thinkers have played in that development. In addition to classical philosophers, some contemporaries like Johann Valentin Andreae, Johann Alsted and Thomas Campanella were notorious influences on Comenius's ideas. Furthermore, the hypotheses will be explained as a transition from the pursuit of individual virtuous behaviour to his universalistic panorthotic programme in the search for world peace and the spreading of knowledge.

Before focusing directly on Comenius's ethical references, some remarks about the historical context in which his works were written and how they can be classified to understand better the evolution of his system might be useful. Comenius's writings do not have a linear evolution (Čížek, 2016, p. 15) and sometimes they appeared incomplete, in the sense that lacking a proper final edition (Šolcová, forthcoming) as a “work in progress” (Soudilová, 1990, p. 51). The latter can be due to the many trips Comenius was forced to undertake during his life-time in order to survive, and also to the many times his books were set on fire (Yates, 1972, pp. 200–202). The life of Jan Amos Komenský “Comenius” (1592–1670) is linked to the religious wars of the 17th century, namely the Thirty Years War and the decline of the Moravian Church of the Unity of the Brethren (*Unitas Fratrum*) to which he belonged as a bishop. He spent his adult life going from his home town in the Uherské Hradiště District,¹ to Přerov and Fulnek in Moravia; later, Herborn and Heidelberg in modern-day Germany; Elbląg, Orla, Toruń, and Leszno in Poland; Sárospatak in Hungary; and even Sweden, England and The Netherlands.

In order to explain the development of his system of thought some Czech scholars since Jan Patočka have proposed different tripartite classifications of Comenian works (Čížek, 2016, pp. 15–17), in clear accordance with Comenius's inclination to conceptual triads. In Patočka's classification there are three continuous periods (Patočka, 1997, p. 175). First, there is an encyclopaedic or prepansophic period which goes from 1610 to 1628. This includes his academic studies and his first teachings and duties as a bishop of the Unity of the Brethren. Comenius spent most of the time between Moravia and the educational centres of western German States, namely Herborn and Heidelberg. The second period is the Pansophic one, 1628–1641, which is characterised by forced exile to save his life and his family's. Comenius opposed on this biographical period of familiar and material losses an inflexible optimism in the pursuit of a universal wisdom or *pansophia*. Finally, the third period goes from 1642 to his death in 1670. This one closes the dialectical triad encouraging a reform of all human things in a non-violent way and was deeply influenced by his short stay in London, 1641–1642 (Čížek, 2016, pp. 17, 129).

In the following pages, different ethical references from some works of the prepansophic and panorthotic periods are extracted and analysed. From the prepansophic period the book *The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart* (written around 1623) was chosen, mainly because it allows contrasting the ethical views of a pessimistic period of Comenius's biography and how he classified ethical virtues in it. A short analysis of this is provided in section 1. Then the rest of the works *Janua linguae reserata* (1643), *Orbis pictus sensualium* (1658) — analysed in section 2 — and the *De Rerum Humanarum Emendatione Consultatio Catholica* (1644–1670, unfinished) — analysed in section 3 — belong to the Panorthotic period in which the virtue of prudence appears as an adequate bridge between two of the main characteristics of human nature: reason and free will. Through these works the author has tried to show how the ethical focus goes from an individual perspective of a good and prudent

¹ There is a debate whether Comenius was born in Uherský Brod, Nivnice or Komňa but in any case all three municipalities are located in the Uherské Hradiště District in the region of Zlín in Moravia, Czech Republic.

Christian to a universalistic and irenic one, or as it was summarized in the subtitle of this paper: from the heart to the world.

Ethics in the labyrinth: A secular interpretation

Some authors have warned about the misleading interpretation of Comenius works during the communist period and how setting aside the theological aspects of his thinking means betraying Comenius who considered himself above all a theologian (Soudilová, 1994, p. 25) and whose “philosophy and theology are inseparably bound” (Čížek, 2016, p. 12). However, the aim of this paper is not to deny the importance of Comenius’s theological thinking but to extract the explicit philosophical elements from some of his works, which are as important as the theological ones and are connected not as in scholasticism — in which philosophy was the servant of theology — but in a “sisterly [*sesterský*] relationship” (Soudilová, 1994, p. 25). This is a methodological and conceptual challenge because the theological and philosophical elements of Comenius’s system are all intermingled organically as in his metaphor of the tree (Červenka, 1969). But it is worth the effort to extract the philosophical elements from his references to ethics or moral virtues and compare them to other ethical and philosophical works.

The first text chosen to interpret in a secular way is extremely hard because it is a deep Christian consolation of his efforts, but it is worth analysing because it offers a clear contrast with some of the Panorthotic works that are analysed in section 2 and 3. The text is *The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of Heart* which Comenius rewrote many times. It is said he finished the first manuscript around 1623. That period was the beginning of many trips trying to save his life and including many losses, above all the loss of his wife and two children. Therefore, it is not a surprise that the emotions expressed are more prone to anthropological pessimism. The whole book is a complete criticism of contemporary cultures that sometimes recalls that of *Inferno* in Dante Alighieri’s *Divine Comedy* (1320) and Erasmus’ *Praise of the Folly* (1511). But probably one of his main influences was Johann Valentin Andreae’s utopia from 1619: *Reipublicae Christianopolitanae Descriptio* (Peuckert, 1928, p. 188) but other studies claim Comenius had more influences (Čyževskyj, 1953, p. 53).

Andreae’s works exerted a deep influx on Comenius’s thinking, not only on his pedagogic writings but also on his *Labyrinth...* Andreae’s utopia is described as a small island in which a group of Lutheran Christians developed a perfect community. In Christianopolis all is aimed at liberating oneself from the dirt of the world and to prepare for the joys of the Christian paradise in Heaven. The body is only a burden and life is a preparation for death. But at the same time, there is no place for idleness. One of the most interesting contributions of Andreae’s is how he described learned people as both skilful on bodily work and on literature and mathematics. The word “labyrinth” appears in the text: “Therefore they walk into a veritable labyrinth whosoever borrows poles and compasses from human philosophy which to measure the New Jerusalem, figure out its registers and sacred computation, or fortify it against the enemy” (Andreae, 2007, p. 222). Positive references to Aristotle and the Aristotelian system (Andreae 2007, pp. 110, 218) can also be found. The metaphorical element is explained from the beginning when Andreae says fantasy will take him through the sea of Academic issues. Some could see in the imaginary group of Christians — and their college with the many arts in the very centre of Christianopolis — another metaphor for the Rosicrucian invisible college.

Comenius repeats in his *Labyrinth...* the use of metaphors but the allegory is not a voyage to new worlds — as in utopias — but research on all the characteristics of the known world. At the beginning of the text, Comenius introduces it as an autobiography in which he took away the useless details of his life and kept those that could be of some use to his readers. The plot depicts the protagonist’s quest of his real calling. He is helped by a cicerone — as Vergil

in Dante's *Comedy* — named Mr. Ubiquitous — or Searchall — who will guide him in order to show them the many occupations of the world. That is the beginning of an exhaustive account of all the flaws, toils, and uselessness of the many occupations in the world. When, by the end, the protagonist is helpless after having witnessed how all the riches of human Wisdom are actually the futile matters of Vanity, he is saved by Christ who shows him his real calling: to follow the Christian lead.

Notwithstanding, as was mentioned above, the focus of this paper is on the features that can be separated from the theological aspects of Comenius's thinking. Hence the most useful passages of the *Labyrinth...* for a non-theological or a secular reading are those in which Comenius describes the court of Wisdom in detail, in which he makes a hierarchy of classical virtues. Mundane Wisdom is represented as queen of the world, and her counsellors: "On her right hand are Purity, Watchfulness, Prudence², Discretion, Affability, and Moderation; on her left hand are Truth, Zeal, Veracity, Bravery, Patience, and Constancy" (Comenius, 1998, p. 168). Her governors are Industry and Fortune, and her bodyguards are Craftiness and Power (Comenius, 1998, p. 169).

In this allegorical way, Comenius is depicting a hierarchy in which the centre is set around wisdom. But wisdom is not a passive or merely contemplative state, because it is linked to industry and it is not determined because it is related to changes of fortune. So here it appears that wisdom is an active faculty of humankind resulting from free will. Among the counsellors are mixed intellectual and moral virtues and the guardians are linked with basic needs for survival.

Furthermore, it is interesting that the figure unveiling the limits of human wisdom is King Solomon. On the one hand, this is appropriate because Solomon is one of the figures of the Wisdom Books from the Bible. On the other hand, he was the symbolic figure chosen by Francis Bacon to represent the founder of his utopia in New Atlantis: King Solomon is none other than King Solomon. Even the native name of New Atlantis's island is homage to him: "Bensalem" (Bacon, 2017, p. 72), it comes from *ben Shalom* or the "Son of Solomon" or "the son of peace" in Hebrew. This reference reappeared in Andreae's Christianopolis, who calls the island "Capharsalama" (Andreae, 2007, pp. 30, 143) which means "'sSolomon's village" or "peaceful village" in Hebrew. This recurrence of Solomon/Shalom can be explained as a result of the Christian utopian idea of creating a New Jerusalem. This is explicit on Samuel Gott's *Nova Solyma: the ideal city of Jerusalem regained* (1649).

In the *Labyrinth...* the two aspects of human nature in conflict — reason and free will — are surrendered willingly to God's will. The wisest option for the protagonist of Comenius's story is to choose to strengthen his will by choosing God's, and after that his will is going to become stronger and he will be able to tolerate all the evils and imperfections of the world. But again, this tolerance is not passive, it is aimed at helping others to diminish their suffering and find the true way, which is coherent with his view of free and active reason.

In addition, in the same book Comenius is very critical of philosophers in general but not with philosophy. The horde of philosophers are depicted as vulgar, useless, and lost. But at the same time a few of them are redeemed when they are mentioned again among the advisers of King Solomon. These privileged ones are "Socrates, Plato, Epictetus, [and] Seneca³..." (Comenius, 1998, p. 175). They represent a branch in the history of philosophy which considers virtue as a key element for well-ordered life on Earth. It is interesting to note that

2 The Czech word used by Comenius is *opatrnost* which has, among its meanings, that of prudence. Šolcová (forthcoming) in her analysis of the concept of prudence in Comenius uses *uvážlivost* and Soudilová (1990) employs *rozumnost*. In case some doubts can be raised from the translation in the cited passage, it is possible to reply that the meaning of prudence as practical wisdom can be implied from the set of virtues Comenius enumerates as counsellors of Wisdom (*moudrost*).

3 On the links between Comenius and Seneca see Soudilová (1990).

Aristotle is not mentioned among them. There is no explicit reason for that omission, but it could be of interest for an analysis on Comenius’s reception of Aristotelian thought.

Later on, during the so called “Panorthotic period” Comenius will be more optimistic on the possibilities of accomplishing the task of philosophy of making humans better, not only by improving his contemporary philosophy but through the whole reform and amendment of all human aspects. One could ask Comenius: Why do this if the true way is beyond this life? Why not stand the injustice of the world and later delight oneself in the endless joys of paradise? Because as the Slovak theologian Igor Kišš explains, there are millenarian aspects in Comenius’s thinking which make helping others in this material world also the duty of a true Christian. Comenius aims to prepare all his contemporaries for the Kingdom of God, first on the surface of this Earth and then in Heaven (Kišš, 2009). Christians should not detach themselves from the earthly duties, and — as in the Platonic allegory of the cave — those who saw the light must come back to the world to lead the others to the real kingdom by alleviating suffering on Earth for everybody, in all possible ways. In this plan the virtue of prudence will play a special role as it will be explained in the next sections.

Virtue ethics in Comenius’s thought: The role of prudence

In Comenius’s early Panorthotic works all references to ethics (*Ethica*) are unabashedly from the standpoint of virtue ethics. As an example it is possible to compare the little differences in his *Janua linguae reserata aurea* (1643) and the world famous *Orbis pictus sensualium* (1658). Just by taking a look at the hierarchical order of appearance of virtues, one can witness the importance of prudence (*prudentia*):

<i>Janua linguae reserata aurea</i>		<i>Orbis pictus sensualium</i>	
Chapter	Title	Chapter	Title
LXXXII	De ethica in genere	CXI	Ethica
LXXXIII	De prudentia	CXII	Prudentia
LXXXIV	De temperantia	CXIII	Sedulitas
LXXXV	De castitudo	CXIV	Temperantia

Both works are aimed at linguistic education and the ethical references are minimal. Despite that, there is a clear Aristotelian influence which becomes explicit in the image of Chapter CXI of *Orbis pictus*. There, it is represented a three-way path and the reader is invited to always stay in the middle way. As in Aristotle’s view, the middle term is the most virtuous choice between the way of defect and the way of excess. For this reason, in both books, the next concept explained is prudence as practical rationality or the capability of choosing wisely.

The concept of prudence or practical reason (*phronesis*) was a key element for Aristotle because it is moral virtue that allows the connection with intellectual virtues (Aristotle, 2011, p. 283). There is much debate about the role of prudence in Aristotle’s thinking but it is undeniable that it plays a key role in his ethical conceptions. Comenius seems to be a supporter of the interpretation in which intellectual and moral views are both necessary. The *bios theoretikos* (theoretic or contemplative life) is understood by the Czech thinker as a life not only of mental activity but of concrete physical work involving all senses. It is interesting to note that in *Orbis pictus* the concept of diligence (*sedulitas*) is depicted before temperance. The ethical subject must act and know his environment with his senses and transform it with his work. One could interpret the importance of diligence in a Weberian sense, i.e. as a result of the Reformation — as in Andreae’s *Christianopolis* — and as the rudiments of work ethics

(Weber, 2013). But this will not be done here due to the limits of this paper and the chosen approach focused on secular aspects of Comenius's conceptions.

In later works Comenius will emphasize some triads to define the human being, including generally: the faculty of reason, free will and operative faculties — or in some works emotions instead of agency (Čížek, 2016). There is some debate on the ontological priority of any of these three aspects. But it looks clear and in some extent consistent that during his Pansophic period Comenius was prone to give priority to reason. This can be explained as a consequence of Comenius adopting Aristotelian thought in which humans are rational animals. The special feature Comenius added is that we, humans, are also spiritual beings such as angels. This angelic attribution can be understood as an echo of Renaissance anthropological optimism as in, for example, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's *Oratio de hominis dignitatis* in which the Florentine philosopher says humans can be angel-like or beast-like due to their open-ended nature (Pico della Mirandola, 1998).

In addition, this can also be traced to Avicenna's thinking (Corbin, 2014, p. 187) but it is more likely Comenius got it through Tommaso Campanella, a direct influence on Andreae via Christian Besold's translations of Campanella's books. Campanella stated in his poem *Della Possanza dell'Uomo* (On the Power of Man) humankind has the dignity of a second god on Earth: "beautiful image, that man is called (...) but so proud, that from the world is considered as second god (...) and gives laws, God-like" (Campanella, 1834, pp. 199–200). Furthermore, Campanella divided human faculties in three aspects as many Christians have done including Andreae and Comenius: first, knowledge or *senno*; then, will or *amore*; and finally, power or *possanza*. This classification appeared in his poems (Campanella, 1834) and in the ministries of his *City of the Sun* (Campanella, 1963). If one compares both anthropological standpoints in Comenius and Campanella, then common elements overlap. For example, as some scholars remarked, the concept of human nature in Comenius has the key elements of reason, will, and agency (Čížek, 2016); one can see how those are easy to be compared with Campanella's. For Campanella, reason is described with the Italian word *senno* which means sense in the way of being able to perceive sensually the world and at the same time to be self-aware. *Senno* is knowledge; it is the faculty of reason in its broadest understanding. *Amore* is willpower and free will, the ability of wishing things. And *possanza* is the faculty of being able to accomplish things, our human power. However, it is possible that Comenius received this idea of the three parts of the human beings from many sources in the Christian tradition, for instance directly from Andreae (2007) or Jean Gerson's "*posse, scire, and velle*" of Augustinian inspiration (Pascoe, 1973, p. 185) or from Augustine's work directly "*nosse/scire – velle – posse*" (Čížek, 2016, p. 187). Although they are many authors that have remarked the links between the Calabrian Catholic's thought and the Czech Bishop of the Unity of the Brethren.

Another interesting link between the Panorthotic works of Comenius and some interpretations of Campanella's thinking is their universalism. When Comenius writes his *Consultatio* for starting a change for everybody in every way, everywhere; Campanella imagines a theocratic Empire reigning over all humankind — including Native Americans. And when the latter needs to reply to the political realist measures of his time, he appeals as Comenius did to the concept of prudence as opposed to Machiavellian *virtù* (Campanella, 1998, p. 82). Comenius's political elements in his ethical references will be analysed in the next section.

Ethics in *Consultatio*: Free will and universal peace

The most important book from this period is his unfinished *De rerum humanarum emendatione consultatio catholica* (*The Consultation on an Amendment of All Things Human*) written between 1644 and 1670. This is the apex of Comenius's systematic work. Despite

some terminological inconsistencies, the work is a summary of all previous trials and it has the higher goal of a universal reform of all human things. Basically, Comenius refers to three aspects of humankind as beings created in God’s image and as intermediaries between the material and the divine plane. These aspects or innate principles are: the desire of knowledge as in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* (2007, p. 1, Alpha 980a), free will or the most sublime gift from God, and the power to get the things done or agency — sometimes named *anima* or spirit (Čížek, 2016, p. 56).

For Comenius these three human principles are degraded during his contemporaneity. Then he establishes these must be not replaced but reformed due to the potentiality in them that every human has without exception. These principles are linked to the fields of philosophy (*philosophia* or *eruditio*), politics, and religion and all three areas of the humankind (*res humanae*) need to be reformed (Comenius, 1966). Therefore, Comenius developed a highly ambitious plan in his *Consultatio* aiming at the reformation of the three most important cultural aspects of humankind. Continuing with the methodological constraint enunciated in the first pages of this paper the main focus of interest here is the Pansophic section called “*mundus moralis*” (moral world).

As mentioned above, Comenius’s metaphysics of multiple worlds could come from Campanella’s metaphysics (Červenka, 1979). But in Comenius, these worlds make direct Biblical reference and have a cyclical aspect as in Neoplatonic emanationism in a process of constitution, destitution and restitution (Soudilová, 1990, p. 51). These worlds are eight in number and correspond to the different ways human beings are related to God and matter.

World	School of Life	God’s creation
Ideal	Birth	First day
Possible	Infancy	Second day
Angelic	Puerility	Third day
Material	Adolescence	Fourth day
Artificial	Youth	Fifth day
Moral	Adulthood	Sixth day
Spiritual	Senescence	Seventh day
Eternal	Death	God’s rest

This schema can be problematic and there is too much to say about how Comenius deals with the combination between theology and Campanellian metaphysics, however here the focus is just on the sixth day world: the moral world which is usually considered by Comenionologists as “the best source from which we can make a full picture of Comenius’s moral theory” (Soudilová, 1990, p. 51). *Mundus moralis* is characterised by the freedom of human beings who can only be ruled by themselves. This privilege is connected with the principle of free will and, as it was stated above, is God’s greatest gift. Comenius is coherent in establishing freedom as the token for morality. But again prudence plays a key role: *prudentia moralis* (moral prudence) in this context is understood as the human privilege of governing oneself. This governing capacity can be developed in many ways because it does not mean only to rule over oneself but to rule over others. The goal of ruling is to keep peace and human freedom is what makes humans fully responsible in their acts, and responsible for the state of the mundane world.

Prudence is the art of all arts and implies autonomy, self-governing, and autarchy. But ethics (*ethica*) is understood as the use of oneself in relation to prudence. Human beings are a

mix of animality, rationality, and spirituality. Again three aspects one could link with agency, reason, and free will or in Campanellian terms *possanza*, *senno*, and *amore*.

Moral prudence is the capability to rule over oneself and over others (*symbiotica*), to rule over members of other groups (*oeconomica*), over youngsters (*scholastica*), and over a republic (*politica*). The main goal in a republic is to attain peace. Peace is the condition to the amendment of all three principles (knowledge, will, and power) and all three human fields (philosophy, religion, and politics). In Comenius, as in Campanella and other thinkers influenced by Plato, ethics and politics are mingled. Prudence or the “dominion over one’s self is the axis of »all human happiness«” (Prázný, 2016, p. 361) and the importance of teaching to be prudent is key for the reform of all things human. “Like Plato, who conceived an empire of education (*imperium educationis*) in his philosophical reflections, Comenius puts the issue of politics *sub specie educationis*” (Prázný, 2016, p. 360).

Comenius’s holism makes it difficult to differentiate the strict ethical aspects in its only philosophical grounding. Ethics is so tied to religion as it is to politics. So if in the Aristotelian tradition, virtues traced a bridge between intellectual and moral capabilities, this reappears in Comenius’s thought. But the scope of Comenius is larger than any previous virtue ethics, with the exception of stoic cosmopolitanism. In Comenian ethics the virtue of prudence is key to extending reform from mere individual modification of one’s behaviour as in the *Labyrinth...* to a better world worthy of God’s kingdom. Prudence is the bridge between reason, free will, and agency. It is the ability to know what is better, to choose to do it, and finally to accomplish it. When these three aspects converge harmonically humans justify their special place in the ontological hierarchy as mediators among the material world and God. This optimism of the human capability to reform is not an echo of Christian Reformation but the spirit of the times to come.

Comenius’s panorthotic project, i.e. the reform of the three most important human fields is one of the earliest examples of utopianism in its modern sense. The belief that States need more than good laws and harsh enforcement, humans on Earth can change and this change should be expanded to the whole globe. Of course, it must be remembered that Comenius thinks that change is help by the peaceful hand of Christ and only the Christian message can achieve world peace. However the ground was set for the pursuit of multi-religious or also secular pursuit of that goal.

Conclusion

After this limited review of the works from two of the three different periods of Comenius’s thinking, it is possible to witness how Comenius’s references to ethical concepts mix: on the one hand, the classical set of virtues and on the other, a program of reformation for human culture in a broad sense that includes every individual of the world. This program is rooted in the idea that all humans are equal and have free will and reason. The irenic program of Comenius is universalistic but at the same time Christian-centric. Comenius wants everybody be taught everything useful to live a good life on Earth in every possible way. The most useful is a mixture of the improvement of perception of the phenomena of the world, the teaching of past wisdom, and Christian Scriptures.

Among virtues, Comenius places the virtue of prudence high on the hierarchy echoing the classical view of virtue ethics. Prudence (*prudentia*) has a strong Aristotelian-Thomistic implication and in ethical debates was considered as the virtue joining moral and intellectual virtues. Prudence is an adequate bridge between free will (to be able to do what one wants) and choosing wisely by ruling over oneself and over others (the most rational option or the most adequate one in order to fulfil the highest goals). Some stressed the dependence of Comenius’s ethics on stoicism and it is well-known that he regards Epictetus and Seneca to be models, but he also criticizes them. The Christian-centric element adds a positive feature and

at the same time a negative one, the positive is that the Comenian sage — as the Platonic one — should not only save himself but also others. This is what makes him more than an animal, an angel-like being. The negative is that the non-Christian cannot do that, they are considered inferiors by default. They cannot be prudent because they do not recognize the truth.

Comenius alternates periods of anthropological pessimism with those of euphoric optimism as can be seen by comparing *Labyrinth...* with *Consultatio...* Notwithstanding, what makes Comenius's contribution significant to virtue ethics – even from a secular point of view – is his insistence on embracing all human individuals in the pursuit of a pacific reformation. In Comenius's ethics, religious salvation is consistent with the effort to lessen the suffering of everybody. Comenius's legacy of education for peace and inclusiveness is still a valuable contribution to think about — and try to overcome — the ethical challenges of our times.

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