

THE ORDER OF THE CIRCLE. ON JOHN AMOS COMENIUS'S 'PRAGMATICS OF CONSENSUS'

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Abstract. The paper deals with the pragmatics of consensus in the work of John Amos Comenius. In the first part, "The order of the circle", three of Comenius's visual works, from the early novel "The labyrinth of the World", the schoolbook "Visible World in Pictures" and the theoretical work "The general triad", are compared. The famous drawing of "The labyrinth of the World" shows a confusing town landscape in a closed circle and symbolizes the chaotic life of man after his fall and the Babylonian confusion of tongues. The didactic emblem for "Visible World in Pictures" shows the world in harmony with God's will. The abstract scheme in "The general triad" visualizes the connections between things (*res*), thoughts (*mens*), language (*lingua*) and hand (*manus*). They form a stable and universal order in which thoughts, language and action are interconnected in a triadic relation. Especially the drawing of the labyrinth and the scheme in the theoretical work "The general triad" build a contrast between chaos and order. In the second part, "Pragmatics of consensus", it is shown that in Comenius's view the aim and the duty of the philosopher and teacher is to heal the unhealthy reality of communication. That should be done on

the basis of normative rules of harmonic and effective communication. These rules are developed by Comenius in his famous “General Consultation on an Improvement of All Things Human”.



Keywords: John Amos Comenius, pragmatics, Babylonian confusion of tongues, consensus, effective communication, general triad



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Even after four centuries, John Amos Comenius (Jan Amos Komensky, 1592–1670) remains more than an important figure of cultural and religious history. Until today, the topicality and relevance of his ideas are significant focal points of research. Following S. M. Marchukova’s remark (2008), this topicality is rooted in the period of Comenius’s work itself: Processes, which started in the Early modern period, carry forward to the present time and are at the roots of similar problems in both periods. Comenius’s topicality is especially striking in the areas of 1) pedagogy, 2) language, and 3) ethics of peace.

Since the publication of his textbook “Visible World in Pictures” (“Orbis sensuallium pictus”) in 1653, which was published in ever new editions throughout Europe until the early 19th century, as well as “The Great Didactic” (“Didactica Magna”, 1657), which laid the foundation for the European and finally global school system, John Amos Comenius’s role in the history of pedagogy and didactics remains undisputed. Considering that “Visible World in Pictures” was translated and published under different titles several times between 1768 and 1822 in Russia (Günther, 1984; Goncharov, 2018: 146–147), Comenius is known here mostly as the founder of modern pedagogy. Thus, in November 2017 the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation, the Russian Academy of Education and other important institutions in the field of education organized a major conference on the occasion of Comenius’s 425th birthday and the 250th anniversary of his first Russian edition (Bezrogov, Boguslavskii, Milova-

nov, eds, 2018). “Visible World in Pictures” can indeed be understood as an early attempt to rather modern, multimodal forms of learning and teaching, and thus may seem even more innovative than didactics of the 19th and early 20th century, which were focused mainly on writing.

On the other hand, the limits of Comenius’s topicality and modernity are quite evident, as well. For instance, his famous didactic universalism (“Teaching All Things to All Men”) in “The Great Didactic” is technocratic and teacher-centered in character, leaving little room for the student’s needs. The topicality of Comenius’s thoughts on language and his relevance as a pioneer of global piece can be judged in a similar way. Although his demand (in chapter 22 of “The Great Didactic”) of learning not only Latin, Greek and Hebrew, but also the languages of territorial neighbors, to facilitate direct communication within a geographical region sounds decidedly modern, this appreciation of multilingualism remained strictly functional in character. It was, moreover, connected with the ideological concept of the “Babylonian confusion of tongues”, thus framing multilingualism as misfortune and a form of Divine retribution (cf.: Kusse, 2019a; 2019b). Comenius’s call for an assembly of all people after the Thirty Years’ War, which was aimed at discussing and solving all the problems of mankind collectively, can be called modern, as well (cf.: Richter, 2018; Korthaase et al., 2005). This “wake-up call” — *Panergesia* — in his late work “General Consultation on an Improvement of All Things Human” (“De rerum humanarum emendatione consultatio catholica”, 1666) resembles contemporary global organizations like the United Nations. However, Comenius seems to have been sure that there was merely one single truth, which was only accessible to the truly wise ones. It may thus be argued that he saw himself in this role, and thus believed that his voice was crucial in the assembly (cf. Lischewski, 2019: 85–86).

While John Comenius was in many ways a pioneer and close to us in various respects, we are nevertheless separated from him by centuries. To be able to appreciate his topicality, and not only his historical relevance, it is therefore crucial to gain an understanding of his thoughts from within, without reliance on our contemporary expectations. Certainly, considering the extensiveness of Comenius’s work, this may be achieved only partially and in extracts. In the given contribution, I focus on the connection between language, didactics, communication and peace in Comenius’s work from “The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart” (1631) to “General Consultation on an Improvement of All Things Human” (1666). At the beginning of this connection lies a model of the world and of human communication which was used by Comenius — albeit with different functions and contents — throughout all stages of his work: the model of the circle (cf. Kusse, 2019a: 573–579).

The order of the circle

Comenius had illustrated his famous “Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart” with a drawing of his own, showing a circular cityscape with helical streets and a mob of people (image 1). “Visible World in Pictures” is preceded by a title vignette, depicting the circle of the world with its forests, rivers and mountains as a well-regulated creation of God, illuminated by the sun, moon and stars. Comenius’s motto “Let all flow freely; let violence be absent” (“*Omnia sponte fluant, absit violentia rebus*”) surrounds the creation (image 2). A third circle can be found in the text “The general triad” (“*Triertium catholicum*”, 1650–1670). In this illustration, Comenius depicts the connection between mind (*mens*), language (*lingua*) and hand (*manus*) and their mutual relation to all the things in the world (*res*) as a cycle of thinking or cognition (*cogitatio*), speaking (*sermo*) and acting (*operatio*) (image 3).

These three circular images demonstrate Comenius’s way of thought as well as the crucial position of language within his thinking. Based on the adven-

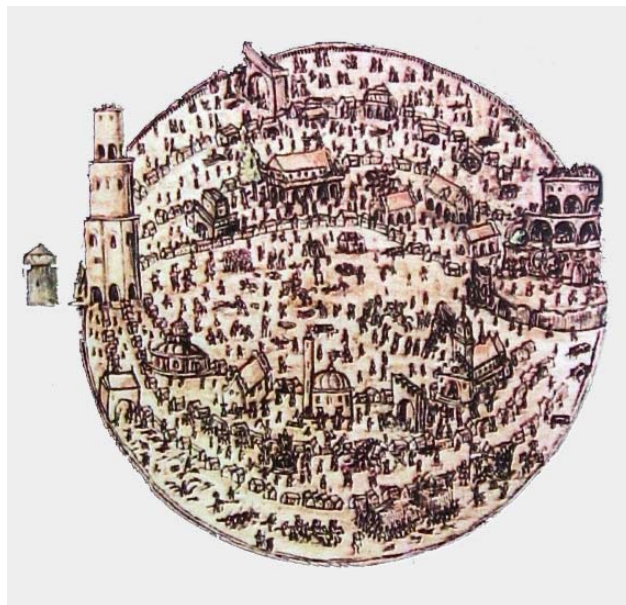


Image 1. Labyrint světa (1623)



Image 2. Orbis pictus

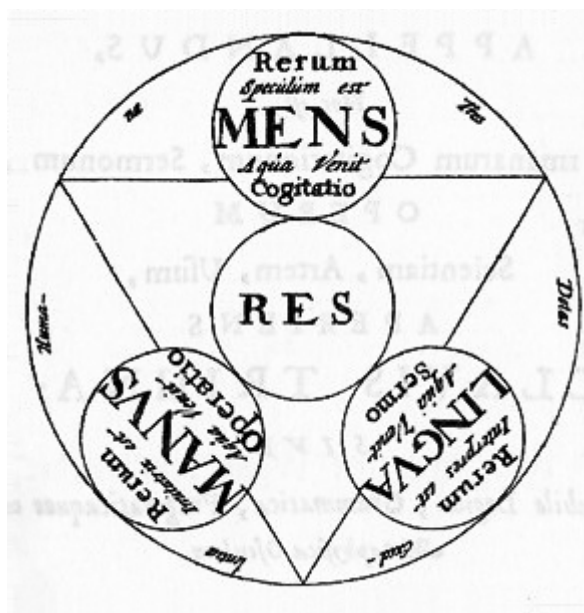


Image 3. Triertium catholicum

tures of a wanderer who struggles to find an exit from the city, “The Labyrinth of the World” reflects on the confusion in human life, society and culture. Here, the circle in the drawing represents the city wall, which, however, turns out to be a prison wall preventing people from escaping their false lives. In the second case — the emblem in “The Visible World in Pictures” — the circle represents the firmament, which warrants protection and promises freedom (as the inscription testifies). The protective circle surrounds the ordered, cultivated landscape with well-kept fields and pruned trees. The ideal of a harmonious landscape, cultivated by humans in accordance with God’s will, marks a sharp contrast to Comenius’s criticism of culture in form of the labyrinth. This ideal landscape ultimately represents a culture that corresponds to God’s order of creation (cf.: Lischewski, 2019: 74–78; Schaller, 2004: 65–67). Meanwhile, the illustration in “The general triad” gives a visualization of the precondition for human culture by arranging and connecting terms in an abstract way. This precondition is namely the successful coordination of mind, language and action, so that all the things in the world can be understood, changed and created according to the Divine order.

While the drawing of the labyrinth shows people and things, but does not include language, the emblem in “The Visible World in Pictures” creates a connection between the ideal, natural order and a didactic motto. According to this motto, the order is well cultivated by human beings, but it is not forced upon them. Finally, in the third circle in “The general triad”, language appears as a precondition for the good order. Without language, its cultivation and development, no human culture can exist in accordance with the Divine order of creation. In “The Labyrinth of the World” the wanderer meets the Babylonian confusion of tongues:

Pozorují také a slyším je k sobě rozličnými jazyky mluviti, takže na větším díle nic sobě nerozuměli, ani neodpovídali, aneb o jiném, než řeč byla, odpovídali, každý jinak. Někudý jich celá hromada stála, všickni třeba mluvili, každý své, a žádný žádného neposlouchal, ačkoli i trhali jedni druhými, vyslechnutí chtějí, však ho nebylo, spíše rvanice a pranice. I řekl sem: “Ale pro Bůh, což pak toto v Babyloně jsme? Tutoť každý svou píseň hude; můž-liž větší směsice býti?”

(Comenius, 1978: 283)

I also observe and hear that they talked among themselves in various languages, so that they mostly did not understand or answer each other, or they answered on something different from what had been said, each one differently. Wherever a large crowd gathered, almost all spoke, each one listening to himself and none to the others, although they plucked at one another to attract attention. But it happened not

thus; rather was there brawling and scuffling. And I exclaim: “In the name of God, are we then in Babel? Here each one sings his own song. Could there be a greater confusion?”

(Comenius, 1901: 80)

The topos of the Babylonian confusion of tongues, which was already firmly established in the 17th century (cf. Klein, 1992: 333), pervades Comenius’s oeuvre. In the passage on “Panglottia” in the “General Consultation”, it is connected to the metaphor of darkness, which in itself means the greatest distance from God. According to Comenius, the multitude of languages (*Multitudo Linguarum*) is a punishment (*poena*) leading “most peoples” to barbarism and darkness (*barbariei et horrendarum tenebrarum squalor*) (Comenius, 1966: II, 155–156). However, Comenius sees this disorder not as an original trait of the world, but as the result of living a false life that contradicts order. Thus, mankind ought to regain this good order with the help of didactics, “through which the Christina community may have less darkness, perplexity, and dissension, but on the other hand more light, orderliness, peace, and rest” (Comenius, 1907: 4; cf. Comenius, 1986: 37), as Comenius claims in his preface to “The Great Didactic”. This goal may be achieved, if the *master* succeeds in conveying the true order of the world to the *boy* in an understandable and convincing way. At the beginning of “The Visible World in Pictures”, the ideal master explains the meaning of “to be wise” to the boy: “To understand rightly, to do rightly, and to speak out rightly all that are necessary” (Comenius, 1777: 1–2). In the end, the master confirms the success: “Thus so hast seen in short all things that can be shewed” (ibid.: 197).

It is possible to “understand rightly” and “to do rightly” through notion and language because of the agreement between linguistic knowledge, world knowledge and the knowledge of the right action. Thus, through language humans recognize the world and learn to act according to the order. This is expressed by the stable circle of circles in “The general triad” (image 3). At its basis lies a representational language theory: Words represent thoughts that represent the things perceived in the world.

In “General Consultation”, Comenius calls language a painted image of things: “Sermonem esse pictam Rerum imaginem” (Comenius, 1966: II, 157). In “Visible World in Pictures”, language and image are so tightly related, that they represent the things and matters (*res*) of the world both on their own and together. Moreover, they figure as respective representations of one another, with language representing things, but also images of things, and images representing both things and words.

Pragmatics of consensus

Assuming that the Divine creation — the world — is well-ordered and this order is comprehensible even to a child, where do disorder and confusion come from, which Comenius laments in “The Labyrinth of the World” and experienced himself in the horrors of the Thirty Years’ War? As one reason, Comenius identifies the Babylonian confusion of tongues, which led to incomplete and imperfect languages, as well as the fact that people with different languages cannot understand each other. Thus, in the 17th century, not only Comenius hoped for the creation of a universal language for all mankind to come out of darkness to light self-sufficiently, i.e. to overcome the Babylonian confusion of tongues without waiting for a second Miracle of Pentecost. Comenius shared his goal and ideal of universal understanding, enabled by a universal language, with other polymaths, rationalists and early proponents of Enlightenment, for example Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716), who was half a century younger than Comenius. In “General Consultation”, pages after pages are dedicated to the question of language, because the *perfectissima lingua*, encompassing all languages for all people, needs to be created through a huge effort by all of humanity. However, considering more thoroughly the many passages in Comenius’s works devoted to the disorder of human life and the Babylonian confusion of tongues, one may reach the conclusion that the main problem is not so much the variety of languages, but communication itself. Even in “The Labyrinth of the World”, “various languages” are briefly mentioned, but most of all the wanderer witnesses communication failures: “each one listening to himself and none to the others”. Thus, the ideal language does not necessarily have to be a universal language. First of all, well-regulated communication is crucial. In his late work “General Consultation”, Comenius developed an approach towards a universal pragmatics of consensus, which is reminiscent of modern models of communication, especially Jürgen Habermas’s discourse ethics (Habermas, 1995; 1999; Kuchlbauer, 2011: 295–302; Kusse, 2019: 19–27). Here, Comenius elaborates on the conditions and rules for reasonable consultations:

3. Consultare, est de re quapiam optata, sed difficultatibus implicata, An quaerenda sit, et Per quid inveniri, Qpomodóve facillè obtineri possit, inter plures amica et prudens disquisitio.

4. Concurrunt itaque in omni Confultatione tria:

- (1) Propositum: Res aliqua utilis, sed ob intervenientes scrupulos, aut impedimenta, dubia.
- (2) Personae plures, eadem inter se agitantes.
- (3) Placida et prudens in omnia quae obveniunt Inquisitio, donec omnibus videatur idem. Tum enim cessat Consultatio, incipit Exsequutio.

(Comenius, 1966: I, 86)

3. Consulting means disputing with others in an amicable and knowledgeable way. The subject of consultation is any desired matter which raises trouble. It involves searching for a path, and how to walk the path with ease.

4. Every consultation involves three parts:

(1) The subject itself: a useful matter, which becomes questionable due to emerging qualms and obstacles.

(2) Several people debating the same subject.

(3) A peaceful and knowledgeable investigation of all relevant matters, until all agree on the same opinion. Then the consultation may be closed and the execution begins.

Following Habermas's classification of social interaction, which distinguishes between interaction, oriented toward reaching understanding (understanding-oriented), toward reaching agreement (consent oriented), and toward consequences (success oriented) (Habermas, 1999: 334), Comenius intended the consultation to be consent oriented. However, this pragmatics of consensus requires understanding. First and foremost, this involves linguistic understanding which can be guaranteed by language skills, transliterations or the one universal language. Nevertheless, Comenius is aware of the fact that the rules of communication should not merely dictate a general attitude, but must be formulated in a concrete way:

Sequemur enim Sapienter Consultantium Leges: QUID, PER QUID, ET QUOMODO, aliquid fieri necesse sit, planè exponendo: judiciúmque de omnibus et singulis hisce, hominum omnibus et singulis, liberum relinquendo. Ita vera erit, plenissimáque et utilissima, Consultatio.

(Comenius, 1966: I, 49)

Let us thoroughly consider all the aspects of the work in an intelligent way by setting forth what has to be done, by which means and how, so that every person may come to a free conclusion regarding the whole and all the details! This way, the consultation will be true, complete and useful.

Comenius develops these rules and elaborates on them in detail. Amongst others, they include the principle that every person should be involved in consultations that concern them. While it is not possible to fit all of humanity into a council chamber, it is well possible to enable everybody to participate by giving advice.

Et quia in causa communi cuicunque interesse licet, consilia quoque dare licet; jure nostrô utrinque utamur.

(Ibid.: 88)

Every person is allowed to attend this general matter, they are also allowed to give advice; this is merely making use of our rights.

During the time of the beginning absolutism after the Thirty Years' War, Comenius defended the fundamental right of all humans to freedom of expression, regardless of their position in the worldly hierarchies. Therefore, Comenius's "General Consultation" is nothing less than the utopia of a "democratic global society" (Kunna, 1991: 254). This was a politically motivated utopia, but it was also grounded in the mystical piety of the author, to whom a general consultation in the full sense of the word must necessarily include all voices of all mankind as the echo of God's word. To prevent these voices from becoming a caterwaul, common rules of communication are necessary. These rules are also the precondition for stable peace. With his focus on consent and his knowledge of the rules of communication, Comenius is more relevant today than ever.

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ПОРЯДОК КРУГА.

О ПРАГМАТИКЕ КОНСЕНСУСА ЯНА АМОСА КОМЕНСКОГО



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Аннотация. В статье рассматривается прагматика консенсуса в творчестве Яна Амоса Коменского. В первой части «Порядок круга» сравниваются три изобразительные работы Коменского из раннего романа «Лабиринт мира», школьного учебника «Видимый мир в картинках» и теоретической работы «Общая триада». Знаменитый рисунок «Лабиринта мира» изображает запутанный городской пейзаж в замкнутом круге и символизирует хаотичную жизнь человека после падения и вавилонской путаницы языков. Дидактическая эмблема к «Видимому миру в картинках» показывает мир в гармонии с Божьей волей. Абстрактная схема в «Общей триаде» визуализирует связи между вещами (res), мыслями (mens), языком (lingua) и рукой (manus). Они образуют стабильный и универсальный порядок, в котором мысли, язык и действие взаимосвязаны в триадическом отношении. Особенно рисунок лабиринта и схема в теоретической работе «Общая триада» выстраивают контраст между хаосом и порядком. Во второй части «Прагматика консенсуса» показано, что, по мнению Коменского, цель и долг философа и педагога — излечить нездоровую ре-

альность общения. Это должно быть сделано на основе нормативных правил гармоничного и эффективного общения. Эти правила разработаны Коменским в его знаменитой «Общей консультации по улучшению всего человеческого».



Ключевые слова: Ян Амос Коменский, прагматика, вавилонская путаница языков, консенсус, эффективная коммуникация, общая триада



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