The importance of Comenius for the debates over educational reform dating from the 1630s onwards is now coming to light, thanks not least to our better understanding of the history of the foundation of the Royal Society. That Francis Bacon played a significant role in these debates needs no emphasis. Bacon, like Comenius, set his programme of reform within a theological framework, but this remained on a modest scale, unlike in the case of the latter, who took his inspiration both from the Rosicrucian idea of a universal reform of humanity and from the encyclopaedic pretensions of his teacher Alsted. Comenius’ theological framework is that of a Platonically derived light metaphysics. Thus, in the middle of the seventeenth century Comenius effects a fusion of Platonic light metaphysics with educational reform.

FORERUNNERS OF PHILOSOPHY

Despite having already composed a slim work with the title of *Prima philosophia* at the beginning of his Lissian Exile, Comenius’ own philosophical system developed only gradually, in ever-new programmatic drafts. In the second half of the 1630s, he sketched out his Platonically inspired *Pansophia* in various different texts as a philosophico-theological reform programme. The incentive came from his contact and friendship with a circle of English scholars: the Scottish theologian John Dury, Samuel Hartlib from Elbing, and his young friend Joachim Hübner. The leading figure was Hartlib, who had set himself the aim of realising Bacon’s plan for an *instauratio magna* of science in a puritanically modified form, involving a renewal not only of science, but also of society as a
whole through a *Collegium* of eminent European scholars on English soil.\(^1\) In order to give this utopian programme of reform a thorough philosophical basis, Hartlib turned to Comenius, who sent him in 1637 his *Conatum Comenianorum praeludia*, published by Hartlib that same year in London without Comenius’ knowledge and to his great annoyance. This work—which makes his subsequent annoyance understandable—led within the brotherhood to the accusation that he conflated divine with human wisdom, and even led to formal proceedings against him.\(^2\) The following year Comenius composed his theological apologia, the *Conatum pansophicorum Dilucidatio*, which won the brotherhood around to his Pansophic approach. In 1639, Comenius published in London a revised version of the sketch he had earlier sent to Hartlib, the *Pansophia prodomus*, together with the *Dilucidatio*. In order that his apologia—written originally for the brotherhood—could be made more intelligible to a broader learned audience, he wrote finally between 1639 and 1641 the *Pansophiae diatyposis*, which, however, was only published in London in 1643. In 1644 in Leiden the *Pansophia prodomus* ran into its third edition. Thus the first phase in the elaboration of Comenius’ Pansophic approach was completed.

Comenius relates the *Prodomus* to his *Janua linguarum* by justifying the former work through his desire to make a door to things, or a gate to wisdom, which would aid the studious youth, after they have learnt to distinguish things outwardly with the help of the door to languages, to become accustomed to seeing the inwardness of things and grasping what each thing is in its essence.\(^3\)

Indeed, the scope of investigation should be extended to everything that is necessary for knowledge, action, faith and hope, and thus result in encyclopaedic knowledge or *Pansophia*. In his ambition Comenius presupposes humanity’s commitment to the quest for wisdom that was leading, especially in the seventeenth century, to a hitherto unparalleled flourishing of knowledge. Comenius sees this progress of knowledge as leading into a luminous Golden Age that lies at the end rather than at the beginning of history. To reach this goal, the door to the things themselves must be opened, not merely the door to the languages which denote them; only by this means can a universal knowledge of things, and thus a complete, all-inclusive, fully coherent wisdom—Comenius’ *Pansophia*—be achieved.\(^4\) Only when the human soul has attained this comprehensive wisdom will it become what it was created to be, namely, an image of the omniscient God.

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\(^2\) J. Kvacala (ed.), *Die pädagogische Reform des Comenius in Deutschland bis zum Ausgange des XVII. Jahrhunderts*, 2 vols (Berlin: Hofman, 1903), vol. 1, pp. 139f.


\(^4\) Ibid., p. 20.