

## FILOZOFIA I SOCJOLOGIA KULTURY FIZYCZNEJ / PHILOSOPHY & SOCIOLOGY OF PHYSICAL CULTURE

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### **The Labyrinth, not a barrier but instead a call to wandering / Labirynt, nie bariera, lecz określenie wędrowania**

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This paper examines the traditional understanding of a labyrinth as something impassable, impenetrable, characterised by fear of entrance. On the basis of a work by John Amos Comenius (17<sup>th</sup> century) *The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart* I would instead like to view it as a labyrinth which in contrast invites us to learn about it, to explore it, to wander. If the main modern way of getting to know the world is through tourism which does not make it possible to essentially experience and understand the place visited or perhaps only hastily, an alternative perception of the way can be offered involving the sense of the place and this in the conception of wandering, without, however, any religious background.

#### **The symbol of the labyrinth**

The labyrinth as a symbol of something unclear, complicated and impassable reigns in the general consciousness. It is not really important if this symbol originated in the actual structures of the palace on Crete where supposedly the paths, halls and room crossed and intersected to such an extent that they actually made up an extremely extensive maze of several storeys. Orientation in such a place must have truly been difficult and it is not surprising that legends regarding the unclearness and wandering continued past the period of the structure's actual existence. Pictures of double axes (labrys) were apparently often found there, a cult object of the Cretan faith, from where the origin of the name of this complicated structure comes [Svoboda 1974, p. 328]. Whatever the case the picture of the labyrinth is closely connected with the figure of the builder Dae-dalus (who built it at the request of King Minos) and further with the Minotaur, the prodigy of a woman and a bull, and his unenviable life in the confusing, only from the exterior inviting (however, not at all allowing he who entered to depart again) spaces. Theseus killed the Minotaur (fed up until that time by Greek boys and girls) and thanks to Ariadne's thread found his way out again. This should already indicate that the impassable labyrinth is not actually completely unbeatable! The maze of corridors can be overcome, though with the help of the magical means of Ariadne's thread. We should also not notice the fact that labyrinths do not only exist in this known Cretan setting but also in the Egyptian palace of the XII Dynasty (described by Strabo amongst others), as well as in castles during the Nordic bronze age. This would demonstrate a definite wider understanding of this symbol, or an intentional creation of elaborate structures in various cultural circles.

I would like, however, to suggest yet another possible way of understanding this symbol, in contrast to the model taken from Greek mythology. I will not attempt to determine how complicated the Cretan palace actually was or whether it was justified to establish mythological connections based upon these actual basic facts. Instead of looking at it for space for secrecy,

lostness, disappearance from human sight, we can view this symbol of the labyrinth as a call to pilgrimage and travelling. In order to do this the picture of the labyrinth in the works of John Amos Comenius will serve us in good stead.

### John Amos Comenius and his Labyrinth of the World

John Amos Comenius was born on the 28<sup>th</sup> of March 1592 in south-west Moravia (his life came to an end on the 15<sup>th</sup> of November 1670 in Amsterdam) and was one of the most renowned Czech theologians (he was, amongst other things, a bishop in the Unity of Brethren), philosophers and first and foremost educators. His best known works include *Didactica magna*, focused on teaching methods, *Orbis pictus*, a language textbook in pictures, or *General Advice on Improving Human Affairs* where he attempted to summarise all of the human knowledge of his day and saw the way of solving conflicts in the world through pansophy, universal knowledge. We will, however, be exclusively interested for present purposes in his work *The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart* [Comenius 1955], a satirical allegory criticising society. The main figure is Pilgrim, representing the writer himself, who enters a town, an allegory of the world, which appears to him in the form of a maze. He is accompanied through the town, divided up into numerous narrow streets with many people, by his guide Wise Man Everywhere-Been who provides him with the rose-tinted glasses of illusion, altering reality into a more pleasant form. The glasses are, however, not fitted properly and Pilgrim sees the true state of things through the corner of his eye, seeing the contradiction between the described beauty of the world and the reality of futility, falsity, vice and misery. He finds a way out of this difficult situation inside himself, in the paradise of the heart, in the values of religion.

Where is this difference between the labyrinth as a symbol of the world in contrast to the common concept of the labyrinth as confusing corridors which we should avoid? Comenius' *Labyrinth of the World and Paradise of the Heart* also contains the concept of the labyrinth in its known complexity, the maze and the loss of orientation. This identification of the labyrinth with the world provides a great service as we can consequently view another important level in this symbol. This work from the first third of the 17<sup>th</sup> century as a connection between reality and virtuality (or an artistic fiction) is an allegory of wandering through the world. We are not interested here in these connections in the lines of interpretation revealed in the form of the world when removing the glasses of illusion, or intend to focus on the various vocations which the Pilgrim gets to know or plan to examine the work as a satirical attack against hypocrisy and falsity. We are interested here in one picture, and that is a picture of the world and life as a labyrinth. The entire world (and all of our life) is so incredibly intertwined, interwound and unclear. Finding orientation in one's life and values is extremely difficult and can be based upon false views, in contrast to genuine forms of being. This is, therefore, the most important thing for our purposes: this maze, chaos and difficult unclearness challenges us to gain knowledge. It draws us to examine things, a challenge to pilgrimage and travelling. Until we set off into the labyrinth of the world, if we do not get to know it, do not travel and seek things out, we will not find our way to the paradise of the heart either, or its stillness and quiet. And that is a moment which is definitely worth fighting for and not only in the situation in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. This challenge to travel (we should recall that for Comenius' education was not complete and finished until the seeker of wisdom set out into the world) is valid today as well. And it would be difficult to accept the statement that the world is less unclear at present. Although the twisted bends of roads and paths are now straightened into motorways and flight lines, the entirety of this world is no less unclear than it was at the time of Comenius.

Can you feel this dramatic change? While in ancient Greek mystical and ideological circles the labyrinth is linked with a lack of orientation which is definitely not something we would like to visit (and if so only with the purpose of carrying out a heroic act and only with the assistance of some magical tool), Comenius transforms the picture of the labyrinth into something more attractive and appropriate to visit. The lack of clarity of the symbol remains, but its meaning is radically changed. We do not need to be afraid of the labyrinth because through travelling in it

we gain knowledge and only then a possible inner danger is released in the depths. This is the dramatization of a truly positive theatrical shaping (including this catharsis after dramatic wandering) and it is definitely not a coincidence that Comenius keeps this perception of the world as a theatre in the Renaissance ideological atmosphere wherein the world is a space for performance and de facto a stage which we can perceive as viewers.

Despite the fact that Comenius points out in the sub-title that the world “is nothing more than chaos and confusion, whirling and drudgery, illusion and deception, misery and sadness and finally regret about everything and despair” [Comenius 1955, p. 3] could we truly come to this conclusion if we did not set out ourselves into the world? We must obtain our own and non-transferable experience regarding the situation, and only then can we evaluate and realise when and where “true and full intellect comforting and joyful” arrives. One could of course read this work as a call to primarily reach an understanding of the true calm which is found in faith. One could also claim that it is a warning to not enter into the tangled and complicated world as this has already been done by Pilgrim along with Everywhere-Been. I believe, however, that this second-hand experience would not convince many people in this day and age. The post-Modern era emphasises one's own experiences in the wildest situations, thinking up thousands of possibilities for overcoming oneself through the means of adrenalin sports or games. Cailliois [1998] places this in the category of *ilinx*, in other words causing this dizziness and ecstasy which few would connect up with taking over presented information, without wanting to test its truthfulness ourselves. I see here a great hope because in contrast the present time is paradoxically typical for also at the same time taking over the experiences of someone else, relying on the truth of what we see on the television screen or what is printed in coloured magazines. This insufficient distinction between reality and virtuality, this lack of concern that the majority of those beautiful faces and bodies are technically altered by technology and that kind of reality cannot be found, as well as this banalising of evil which we receive every evening on the news is a huge danger. Each challenge to confrontation, to acquiring our own experience, is extremely beneficial. I also believe that the strength of challenges is still attractive today. That a challenge awakens the desire to carry it out. That even post-modern man can find the following challenge of interest, “to first look over all of the human affairs which exist under the sun, and then compare them with one another, choose in a state of calm and arrange finely these things for use peacefully in life on this world” [Comenius 1955, pp. 11–12]. And in similar fashion as hundreds of years ago, today we should also say after accepting this challenge: “The more I thought the more I liked this path” [Comenius 1955, p. 12].

And at this point our paths might part through inspiration from Comenius' work. This is because the main, that is the challenge to independent learning about the world, has been carried out. If we reach the same conclusions (on the basis of the same observation and evaluation) and we understandably do not know as in this period of exalted individualism the desire for some form of consensual agreement disappears. It is possible that we too might reach this conclusion after wandering throughout the entire world, “that it is not the will of God; the world is, the twisted state of the world where some wear jewels while others walk barefoot, some belch from overeating while others yawn with hunger, some earn money working hard while others spend it extravagantly, some live for pleasure while others moan in sorrow” [Comenius 1955, p. 131]. But we do not know this and will not know this until we set out into the world and get to know it ourselves.

### **Tourism versus pilgrimages and wandering**

The most common manner of getting to know the world these days is tourism. Unfortunately not only on foot, by boat or through mountains, requiring a certain amount of effort and relying on oneself, but in contrast through using various means of travel, as we need to save time and see as much as possible. Thus tourist sites are visited by crowds of people who want to be there but at the same time essentially do not see anything. Of course (as we know from Heraclitus), “the character of things likes to hide” [Svoboda 1962, p. 53] and requires careful searching for the

manifestation of form, thinking and questioning. But there is not enough time for that! We fly quickly to the Arab world, take a photograph with a camel and fly home again. Hurry to Peru, where the Incas lived of course, buy a woven cap and we can go again. Is this the way to get to know the world which is offered to us via Comenius? Certainly not. That is only visiting a place in order to see it. It is only confirming that the certain monument actually looks exactly the same as it does on a postcard or photograph, but that is all. How can we understand a place when we do not focus on it? And how can we get in tune with a certain environment when we are only thrown out of the bus and have ten minutes to hurry to an other place? This “whirling and drudgery” of the labyrinth does not make it easier. In contrast it makes things more complicated.

Do we have, however, another possibility? Without a doubt. We may use for it the word “pilgrimage” or “wandering”. The most obvious connotation is connected with carnivals with rides, cotton candy stands and the noise of crowds. This misplaced sense for an originally accompanying attraction is definitely not, however, the meaning which we would like to focus on. Wandering for us should be of interest for other characteristics, that is with the necessity of one's own efforts, the essential nature of the physical performance. For it is only with physical weariness that we can tune our minds to the aim of the way. Today, and not only because of the usual forms of tourism, we are not able to truly enjoy any locale. We live ahead of ourselves, looking forward to the goal we will achieve when we go somewhere. And when we are actually there, we are already thinking about what we can still manage to do that day. We are constantly thinking in the future and are unable to concentrate, unable to rest in quiet and enjoy the effect of the *genia loci*. This is characteristic for the economic period, valuing the future and disregarding consequently the present, in contrast to Buddhism and Husserl's phenomenological accenting of the present.

What are the basic contrasts to this kind of existence, those different ways of travelling? Certain parallels can be easily marked out although we have to first and foremost realise that the environment is in direct connection with human experience, “With a change in environment people change as well, their psychology, their dealings, their experiencing, reactions, perceptions. We function one way in church, another way on the playground, and otherwise in the forest, etc. We live in constant interaction (passive or active) and in confrontation with various types of environments” [Šípek 2001, p. 56]. The tourist returns home, or even sets out on a trip with full consciousness of his return, often even very early. The pilgrim (as well as the wanderer) simply wanders, seeking and overcoming themselves in the direction of otherness. The tourist is a new phenomenon, often strictly organised. The predecessors, pilgrims, can be found starting with Adam who had to forsake Paradise or with the patriarch of the tribe of Israelites who did not have a permanent home, with the wise men from the East who sought the newly born Messiah or Jesus' wandering with the apostles [Ohler 2002, p. 16]. Tourism is a branch of industry. International conferences are organised about tourism and interested bodies are grouped in international organisations. The wanderer “on the road” is uncontrolled and completely free, often travelling without an aim and fully enjoying the places where he finds himself. Life for him is full of movement and change, the way is more important than the goal. The pilgrim's goal is not only seeking but also evaluation. Even though he walks to a certain place, the place itself is not the goal, but the means, the spiritual experience. The goal of the pilgrim is the hope of a deeper and better life. The basis for wandering is also the willingness to give up that which we already have. In the manner that Abraham abandoned the “home of his fathers”, each traveller and each pilgrim must forsake the certainty of his own being. “The pilgrim begins his adventurous pilgrimage through two turns, turning **away** from everything which bound him and turning **to** longing. [...] If we do not believe that something better lies in front of us, we will not have the courage to go on pilgrimage” [Curtis & Eldredge 2005, pp. 119, 125].

Genuine wandering, however, teaches us modesty and concentration. The pilgrimage does not have to be essentially religiously motivated, despite the fact that we have the word primarily connected with religious systems. Perhaps we could view wandering as a worldly form of

pilgrimage which brings with it a basic religious background. The aim of a pilgrimage is the visit and knowledge gained from the place connected with the cult, the intensification of the religious experience. The aim of wandering can be the way to oneself through the means of experiences of getting to know natural and cultural localities. Religious pilgrimages are part of the religious cult of all advanced religious systems. They are documented in ancient Egypt, Greece and in Palestine with the greatest flourishing of pilgrimages in the period of the Middle Ages. At present people still make pilgrimages in India to the sources of the Ganges, amongst other places, all of the Islamic world travels to Mecca, Christians makes pilgrimages to Rome, Jerusalem or Compostela. Pilgrimage sites are often places with concentrated priestly hierarchy, connected with the activities of the prophets with visions or miracles. Natural areas connected with cults are visited, whether they be rivers or mountains. Pilgrimages are made to locales which are significant and interesting in some way, where something can be seen are where one can learn something deeper about the world. As early as the Middle Ages, pilgrims were men, women and even children, travelling included ill petitioners (the aim of the pilgrimage being a curative trip) or even pilgrims in arms (the Crusades). In addition to this, however, we can observe motifs of wandering for entertainment and learning, out of which modern tourism emerged [Ohler 2002, pp. 45–50]. Wandering need not only be a privilege for the religiously oriented population. A pilgrimage requires sufficient physical strength and durability, self-denial and overcoming pain and loss, combining frequent danger with long lasting trips. Each effort which leads to some marked out goal is also a kind of pilgrimage. Each trip where we have to concentrate and sacrifice ourselves in some fashion (perhaps our fatigue, pain and discomfort) when we concentrate on a point which awaits us, when we look forward to something and prepare for it, this is also a kind of pilgrimage. When we think with effort at that locale and are able to get in tune with it. It is only with that kind of preparation that we can see and perceive, only with that kind of wandering can we truly understand and deeply experience something. Or even, as Rupert Sheldrake [1994, p. 169] claims, I can strengthen that kind of place with energy, while tourists only suck energy away through their preoccupied presence. I would also agree with his faith that “a great deal of good would come about if tourists became pilgrims once again”. In this fashion a tourist would become the secular form of a pilgrim (it would become true wandering) as opposed to only moving from one place to another, impatient and anxious roaming. Instead the tourist would allow the visited locale to have an effect on him or her, with an attempt at authentic, if one wants, experiencing.

### **Pilgrimage as an adventure of physical spirituality**

“In the present day of total mobility and the automobile nature of society, walking and pilgrimaging related to it, have been rediscovered not only as a short-term form of relaxation, but also as a forgotten way of natural communication which makes a deeper connection with nature possible as well as with oneself” [Zemánek 2005, p. 9].

Is that spirituality? Perhaps it is. It is a spiritual level which does not require a religious dimension. Not every pilgrimage, or every trip in the labyrinth of the world has to lead us to the otherworldly paradise of our heart, which consists of God's presence. We can remain unaffected by this method of experience as “we are not given the gift of faith”. This does not mean, however, that we cannot sufficiently realise the unique nature and strength of the place where we wander to, experience its holiness and enriching calm. It is definitely not a coincidence that seeking spirituality and its connection with physical movement has become a theme which has met with increased interest. The *Centre for Spirituality and Sport* has actually come into being in Great Britain and in August 2007 organised an inauguration conference where philosophers, theologians and individuals interested in the study of sports got together. The value lacking and unanchored post-modern world is looking for new ways to obtain a firm support. Perhaps some of us can actually find it in sport and its potential spiritual dimension as the existential vacuum in which we live is unsatisfying. Life in even the most atheist country can thus acquire a new

dimension through the means of new ideological impulses, with possibilities for concentration and genuineness, the power of spirituality in sport performance.

The open society in which we live is a labyrinth of numerous possibilities which we have at our disposal. Nothing is forbidden, everything is allowed. But if everything is allowed, what is most important and what is less essential? Which of the possibilities should we go for? We have lost a central point for decision making (as no general accepted values exist) and this gives us much more demanding requirements, placing us in unanchored situations. We are thrown into the labyrinth of all possibilities, where we have to choose from only some of them, but at the same time we lack all of the respected criteria for choice. In this kind of situation with constant consuming collecting of flat experiences (which can be bought), even the extremely ordinary equipment of a small rucksack and setting out on a trip can help. As a "pilgrim with a light heart", without attempts at trying to transform the world, without the need to make more money once again. Only with one's own courage and faith, with the desire to see as much as possible of the labyrinth of the world and get to know it as deep as possible. With an attempt at not only visiting and seeing, but also first and foremost finding inspiration, feeling and deep experiencing.

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**Słowa kluczowe: labirynt, Jan Amos Komeński, wędrowanie, turystyka**

## STRESZCZENIE

Niniejszy tekst bada rozumienie labiryntu jako czegoś niemożliwego do przejścia, do spenetrowania, co wynika z lęku przed wejściem. Na podstawie pracy Jana Amosa Comeniusa (XVII wiek) pt. *Labirynt świata i raj serca* autor stara się postrzegać labirynt jako coś, co zachęca do poznania go, do wędrówki. Jeśli głównym współczesnym sposobem poznania świata jest turystyka, która uniemożliwia doświadczenie i zrozumienie zwiedzanego miejsca bądź też pozwala je poznać tylko w sposób powierzchowny, można zaproponować alternatywne postrzeganie obejmujące odczucie miejsca w koncepcji wędrówki, jednakże bez żadnego tła religijnego.