

drawn to the alternative way of reading, which is understanding those previous thinkers in their contexts.

One problem is that many political theorists enter the field because they have been impressed by the writings of one or a few famous thinkers. When they come to the professional study of these famous thinkers, they tend to learn about them in an ahistorical way. A 'canon' that jumps from Hobbes to Locke to Rousseau to Mill has long dominated the anglophone academic world. When people read these figures in isolation they are engaged in what I think of as an eerie conversation across the centuries and linguistic boundaries. They neglect the minor figures, who might have been more on the mind of a major figure than a distant 'great'. A Society for Intellectual History might draw their attention to these minor figures.

Many political theorists do look at context, but only at the narrowest of contexts. Besides missing 'minor' figures, anglophone theorists also miss 'great' figures from other languages, such as Pufendorf, who has been the subject of a revival only recently. Another service a Society for Intellectual History could perform would be to help American political theorists see outside of their narrow anglophone world. For example, recent work by an outstanding scholar, Richard Ashcraft, reads Locke only in an English context. It is a rather remarkable truth that no treatment of Locke's *Letter on Toleration*, written in Latin after several years of contact with Dutch scholars such as Limborch and Van Paets, reads Locke's work in its Dutch context. Raymond Klibansky's edition of the letter drew

the Dutch context to our attention, but he did not hazard an interpretation of its influence on Locke's meaning.

Yet another problem in political theory is that even if 'minor' and 'great' figures from several countries are surveyed, theorists may miss the importance of other fields. Few great political thinkers saw themselves as simply political thinkers. Most were involved in a variety of fields from natural science to *belles-lettres* to art. Sometimes their work in one field gave them ideas for their work in political theory. Yet another service that a Society could perform would be to help political theorists understand the history of ideas from other fields. Interchanges with historians of ideas in those fields can help the political theorists explore such possibilities. To take only one example, one of the major neglected fields among political theorists is theology, so much a part of the earlier intellectual world, and so absent in much of the American intellectual scene today. Political theorists may not even recognize a theological argument that is staring them in the face.

The upshot is that the major service of a Society for Intellectual History would be the opportunity to observe and interact with colleagues in other disciplines and from other countries. I know from my own experience that I have learned much more from interchanges with historians and philosophers than from other political theorists. I find most discussions of political theory at major national conventions rather sterile. I would prefer to have my work critiqued by people from other disciplines.

## VIEWS OF INTELLECTUAL HISTORY FROM THE CZECH REPUBLIC, SWEDEN, AND ISRAEL

### Comenius Studies and Intellectual History in the Czech Republic

Vladimír Urbánek  
*Acta Comeniana, Prague*  
(Czech Republic)

brief statement. First I will try to show some problems of Intellectual History as a field of study we are grappling with in the Czech Republic. In the second part, then, I will acquaint you with the projects of my department and with the review *Acta Comeniana*. My statement will be mostly limited to the period of seventeenth-century history, which is my own field of interest.

I should like to mention two subjects in my

Unfortunately there is no institution in the

*The very term 'intellectual history' has no equivalent in Czech, and usually Czech historians use terms such as 'history of thought', 'history of ideas', or simply 'cultural history' in a broad sense.*

Czech Republic specializing in Intellectual History. The very term 'intellectual history' has no equivalent in Czech, and usually Czech historians use terms such as 'history of thought' (*dějiny myšlení*), 'history of ideas' (*dějiny ideí*), or simply 'cultural history' (*kulturní dějiny*) in a broad sense. Traditional subjects such as the history of philosophy and the history of literature are naturally represented at the universities and the institutes of the Czech Academy of Sciences. However, neither the history of science nor the history of culture have their own specialized institutions comparable to the Institute for the History of Science in Warsaw or to the Centre for Renaissance Studies in Budapest. The ambitious team dealing to some extent with early modern intellectual history are well established at the Institute for the History of Charles University (which recently published two splendid volumes of the history of Charles University, 1347–1802), and at the Institute of Philosophy (Comenius Studies Department). Other interesting projects are connected with outstanding scholars and their seminars. Stanislav Sousedík (Charles University) analyses seventeenth-century Bohemian philosophy in his pioneering studies; Noemi Rejchrtová (Charles University) deals with the history of Bohemian Protestantism; Josef Petráň's (Charles University) voluminous work includes studies in cultural history, historiography, and the history of Charles University; Jaroslav Pánek (Charles University) studies political ideas in the context of Bohemian political history; and Josef Válka (Masaryk University, Brno) examines political and social thought in his brilliant works.

Although the Society for the History of Science and Technology publishes a journal, the position of the history of science at universities and at the Academy of Sciences is still very weak. The field is dominated by natural scientists, whose interests and methodological approach are usually isolated from broader historical discussions. There is a serious lack of authoritative works and scholars such as the late

historian of natural sciences and Kepler scholar, Zdeněk Horský (1929–1988).

In recent decades official historiography emphasized the Marxist concept of economic and social history, and this inhibited the free development of the history of ideas and intellectual history. Regarding seventeenth-century history, communist ideology considered the Baroque epoch as a deep decline in the history of the Czech nation. Thus serious research in the field was constantly subjected to prejudices, restrictions, censorship, and even to open persecution. The rise of Baroque studies in the 1990s is one of the most interesting phenomena of Czech early modern historiography. Many subjects hitherto neglected are now being addressed, especially in the field of literary history (for example Alexandr Stich, Martin Svatoš, Milan Kopecký, Jaromír Linda).

At present there are additional factors make it difficult to develop the field. There is a lack of finances for new institutions, teams, or projects wishing to study Intellectual History. A more serious problem is the traditional mutual distrust existing between historians and philosophers. The roots of this distrust go back to the end of the nineteenth century. Nowadays, historians ignore or belittle Philosophy and the History of Philosophy, and the majority of philosophers disregard History. In addition, new factors are arising. Many young philosophers doubt whether the History of Philosophy is Philosophy, and almost all historians distrust great theories. Another basic problem is the deficiency of specialized literature. Only one name comes to mind if one starts to think about English-speaking authors dealing with the intellectual history of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries who have had some influence upon Czech scholars during the last two decades—R. J. W. Evans. On the other hand, the works of Frances A. Yates, Charles Webster, Quentin Skinner, or Richard Popkin are known only within a closed circle of scholars. These books are very seldom found in Czech libraries, and almost none of them have been translated into Czech. The International Society might at the very least give us moral support and help us to find funding for translation and publication of important works on intellectual history into Czech.

Let me now turn to the second part of my statement. I work at the Institute of Philosophy, the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic as a researcher of the Comenius Studies Department. The main project of the department is the

preparation of an edition of *Johannis Amos Comenii Opera omnia*. The edition began to appear in 1969 and comprises up to the present day 15 volumes out of a proposed 60. The aim of the edition is to present a reliable text of the edited works and manuscripts, with a textual appendix recording the changes undergone by each work during the author's life. The explanatory notes deal with the context—historical, philosophical, theological, etc.—of Comenius' work, with its sources and textual parallels. The editorial team consists primarily of philologists, but historians and philosophers are also represented. Among the present members of the editorial team are two direct pupils of the founders of the edition, Dr Martin Steiner and Dr Jiří Beneš, both philologists and outstanding Comenius scholars.

Another project connected directly with the edition is the difficult task of establishing an authoritative edition of Comenius' correspondence. The project started in 1995; its aim is to create a computer database of all the surviving letters of Comenius and to publish two volumes listing his correspondence. This list will not only be of basic importance for Comenius studies, but furthermore it also relates to the study of seventeenth-century Bohemian cultural history, to the history of the Bohemian exile after the Battle of the White Mountain, last but not least to the history of ideas and intellectual communication in seventeenth-century Europe. In this broader context the project is closely connected with the Hartlib Papers Project (University of Sheffield) as well as with the project to establish a co-ordinated electronic database of crucial manuscript materials (particularly the correspondence of outstanding intellectuals) of the seventeenth century.

Let me now say a few words about the international review of Comenius studies, *Acta Comeniana*. The review followed the *Archive pro badání o životě a spisech J. A. Komenského* founded in 1910 by Ján Kvačala, an outstanding Comenius, Campanella, Alsted, and Leibniz scholar. After interruption to its publication during World War II, production of the journal was resumed in 1957 (with the sub-title *Acta Comeniana*). Since 1969 it has been issued as a serial published in the major languages. A respectable level of scholarship was maintained in the review during the last decade of the communist regime thanks to the general editor Dr Marta Bečková, an expert on Comenius and seventeenth-century Polish history. I collaborated with her as the co-editor of the last vol-

umes. After the 400th anniversary of J. A. Comenius' birth, commemorated also by Volume 10 of *Acta Comeniana*, we felt that some period of Comenius studies as well as of the history of *Acta Comeniana* had finished. We decided to change the orientation of the review slightly, opening it to wider discussion in the field of early modern intellectual history. The first result is Volume 11 of *Acta Comeniana*, which has been published recently. It contains seven articles dealing with matters other than Comenius: Descartes, political theory of the Bohemian Estates' Revolt, seventeenth-century panpsychism and hylozoism, Antitrinitarianism in Bohemia, etc. We have enlarged the number of book reviews and offer a good survey of books on Early Modern Intellectual History published by Central-European scholars in minor languages. We intend to publish *Acta* annually, but as you surely understand the realization of these purposes is dependent upon the interest of the international reading public. We shall probably lose some interested among pedagogues, but I hope we shall find many new ones among historians of ideas, historians of science, historians of intellectual life.

I was able to come to London thanks to the kind recommendation of Dr Charles Webster and his concern for the review *Acta Comeniana*. To conclude, I would like to express my gratitude to him and to the *spiritus agens* of the enterprise, Constance Blackwell, for their support.

### A View from afar—The International Society for Intellectual History

Susanna Åkerman  
University of Stockholm  
(Sweden)

Coming from a country on the periphery, with a language that few handle with ease outside Scandinavia, the first thing we realize is that nothing is more crucial than the way we write. History and ideas cannot be abstracted from language and national styles without a loss of the very essence of our cultures. While we all teach the central European canon, from Christine de Pisan to Machiavelli, from Vico to Walter Benjamin, most of us work in local archives and do research in our national traditions.