

Ethical teachings of Classical Antiquity philosophers in the poetry of Saint Gregory of Nazianzus

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Abstract

The paper focuses on the ethical teachings of Classical Antiquity philosophers in the poetry of Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, especially on the parallels between the author's work and the Cynics and the Stoics. The syncretic nature of Gregory's work, reflected in the assimilation of the teachings of ancient philosophical schools and the then expanding Christianity creates conditions for the explanation and highlighting of basic human virtues. Gregory of Nazianzus' legacy also draws on the teachings of such philosophers as Plato and Aristotle, but he always approaches them from the perspective of a strictly Christian worldview. He understands philosophy as a moral underlying basis from which one can draw inspiration for a virtuous and happy life. Gregory thinks that philosophy cannot harm Christians in the pursuit of a virtuous life. Nevertheless, Christian teachings and God are the highest authority. They stand above all philosophical schools or ideas advanced by specific philosophers. Gregory's moral poetry thus directs his readers, if they are to deserve eternal life, to follow the commandments, which is possible only if one lives a practical and virtuous life.

Keywords: Gregory of Nazianzus, moral poetry, Cynicism, Stoicism, virtues

The Golden Age of Patristic Literature, as the 4th and 5th century CE are often referred to, provides an abundance of material of great theological and literary significance. It is a period in which the declining culture of pagan antiquity meets the successfully expanding Christianity. The two cultural paradigms are also confronted in the works of St. Gregory of Nazianzus – a theologian and one of the most important church fathers of the Eastern Christian tradition, who also excelled as rhetorician and poet. He taught and explained basic questions of faith, provided reading of the Scripture, expressed his opinions on education, preached and praised, contemplated on being, offered insight into his innermost thoughts, pondered moral dilemmas, and, in doing so, he did not hesitate to draw on the ancient pagan philosophers, selecting worthy ideas and offering them to young Christians. Ultimately, each ancient philosophical system comprises ethical teachings or criticism of morality, calls for a certain way of behaving and entails life choices.

Moral education was highly regarded by the ancient Greeks. This is evidenced by the statements of the seven sages³ gathered in Delphi in order to sacrifice the fruit of their wisdom to Apollo in his temple. The sages' votive offerings were the inscriptions of words recognized today by the whole world (e.g. *Know yourself, Not too much of anything*).⁴ The inventory of these and other maxims and adages was engraved in stone near the temple. The habit of displaying similar inscriptions in public places, so that passers-by could always see them, spread throughout the Greek world (Hadot, 2004, p. 21). The tradition of educating the youth (*παιδεία; paideia*) in Greece had been flourishing since the time of Homer and maintained by those who had the so-called *ἀρετή (arete)*, an ability inherited by virtue of noble lineage, since it pertained to members of the aristocracy. The word *ἀρετή* denotes something that is appreciated, conspicuous and inspiring awe. In Homer's times it was prowess in battle and physical perfection. Nevertheless, the Greeks had gradually shifted from admiring military

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³ Thales of Miletus, Pittacus of Mitylene, Solon of Athens, Chilon of Sparta, Periander of Corinth, Bias of Priene Kleobulos z Lindu, Cleobulus of Lindos.

⁴ Cf. Plato, *Protagoras* 343A and Plutarch, *De E* 385f.

valor to praising mental capabilities. Thus, the meaning of *ἀρετή* shifted from the physical domain to the domain of the soul that excels in knowledge, goodness and morality. For the philosophers, *ἀρετή* became virtue and nobility of the soul (Hadot, 2004, p. 11).

The subject has been explicitly treated by St. Gregory of Nazianzus in two of his moral poems. Poems I,II,26⁵ and I,II,27⁶ have identical names, *In nobilem male moratum*, implying, that they are addressed to someone of noble descent, but lacking morals. Poem I,II,26 starts with a reference to an exceptional man,⁷ who, despite being of low origin, countered ridicule by fittingly saying *Τὸ γένος ἔστιν ὄνειδος ἔμοιγε, γένει δὲ σύ*.⁸ Gregory strongly recommends that the addressee of the poem behave in the same way and not approve of anything but virtuous behavior.⁹ According to Gregory, the evildoers, those who do not practice *ἀρετή* and do not ennoble their soul are slaves. On the contrary, he calls the free *aristos* (the best).¹⁰ At the end of the poem the author states that it is better to be the best offspring of vile lineage than to be the worst of a noble one. For a rose also grows out of a thorny bush. And yet, it is a rose. Though, if in good soil a bramble sprouts it fits only to be put on the fire.¹¹ And he develops this further: If you are vile and yet boast of noble ancestry, you are but a donkey with the pride of a horse.¹² The donkey and the horse also appear in the poem I,II,27. Nevertheless, compared to the previous poem, the latter is more emphatic and articulate in the treatment of the nobleness of the spirit: *ὁ τρόπος δ' ἐμοὶ γένος*.¹³ Gregory of Nazianzus also addresses the matter marginally in other poems. Of these, let us mention the one that precedes the above mentioned poems in the collection *Patrologia Graeca*¹⁴ (PG) and deals primarily with anger (I,II,25 *Adversus iram*). In it, Gregory identifies the nobility (origin) as a child's toy,¹⁵ clearly debasing those who capitalize on the merits of others and implying the worthiness of virtue.

The roots of the teachings on ethics can be found in works by many ancient philosophers. Plato considered the cardinal virtues of temperance, wisdom, courage and justice¹⁶ as prerequisites for the success of civil society (Plato, *The Republic* 427d–434c). The most important objective in Plato's *Academy* was to learn and adopt a philosophical way of life. Such life then ensures the happiness and salvation of the soul (Brisson, 1993, p. 480). To live a philosophical life means to adhere to an intellectual and spiritual life, to accomplish a “conversion” in which the “whole soul” and all moral life are at stake (Hadot, 2004, p. 65). However, it was Aristotle's school that offered training in an exclusively philosophical way of life.¹⁷ Aristotle viewed virtue as the improvement of human nature itself – i.e. reason (Störig, 1985, p. 185). According to Aristotle, it is in reason that one can find the primary type of

⁵ PG 37, 851–854.

⁶ PG 37, 854–856.

⁷ Although Gregory does not specify who the exceptional man was, we know that he reacted similarly to Cicero, when he was advised to change his name (Cicero = Chickpeas) in the senate when he entered political life (Plutarch, *Cicero* 1).

⁸ My family is my shame, but you are the shame of your family (I,II,26,4b–5a; PG 37, 851).

⁹ I,II,26,5–6 (PG 37, 851).

¹⁰ I,II,26,29 (PG 37, 853).

¹¹ I,II,26,36–38 (PG 37, 853–854).

¹² I,II,26,39–40 (PG 37, 854).

¹³ Ethics/morality is my family (the way of life) (I,II,27,10; PG 37, 854).

¹⁴ *Patrologiae cursus completus. Series Graeca* (1857–1858). Accurante J. P. Migne. Paris.

¹⁵ I,II,25,448 (PG 37, 844).

¹⁶ According to Plato, temperance is the ability to find a true balance between enjoyment and ascetic life, wisdom is the domain of reason and courage comes from the will. Justice is the balance of the three abilities mentioned above.

¹⁷ Although conducting mathematical research and practicing philosophical discussions, Plato's school had a political agenda.

happiness,¹⁸ philosophical happiness, which is associated with *θεωρία* (*theoria*),¹⁹ i.e. the way of life that is devoted solely to intellectual activity (Hadot, 2004, p. 80). The Greek *θεωρία* means observation, exploration, knowledge (Panczová, 2012, p. 616). The Greeks sought wisdom, that is, knowledge that originates in the perception of what is *seen*. Since people mostly want to see only what they like, for the Greeks, the purpose of *θεωρία* was also a happy life (Špidlík, 2010, pp. 13, 24).

The topic of philosophical happiness was also developed in the writings of St. Gregory of Nazianzus, who approached it from the vantage point of disease.²⁰ The issue is addressed explicitly in three short moral poems (I,II,35²¹ *De philosophica paupertate*; I,II,36²² *De eodem argumento*; I,II,39²³ *De fortuna et providentia*). In the first two, Gregory uses the image of disease. Its purpose is to create and confirm the stereotypes of restraint but also of justice (and in so doing, further reinforce their overall significance in his writings). These fixed patterns and perception of reality stem from the very nature of Gregory's work. His moral poetry targets and shapes the recipients. The author clearly declares his attitudes and urges the reader to follow his example. This creates space for internal projection, which makes the reader understand *disease* through comparative reflection. Gregory urges the doubtful to *see* the virtues in such perspective that they understand that bliss and earthly pleasures lead to downfall. In the third poem²⁴ the author no longer needs the archetypal paradigms – *abundance* and *misery* – pertaining to disease, which may affect the rich and the poor alike. Yet, the rich lose seemingly more, since they do not fear only the loss of health or even life, but also the loss of wealth. In the poem, Gregory divides people into two categories: those who are blissful, happy and enjoy all things profane, and those who are moderate and guided by reason. The final verse of the poem “An abyss of bliss is not worth as much as a drop of reason”²⁵ reminds the reader of the morality of fables, which is accentuated by the image of the abyss. Although of colossal proportions, it ultimately is of lesser significance than a drop of reason. The same image advances the idea of void, in which bliss becomes misfortune for those who fall for it.

Relegating the notion of *θεωρία* exclusively to the domain of what is perceptible by reason corresponds to Platonic tradition and was later confirmed by Aristotle. However, this position had been discredited by the Stoics. The Stoics despised philosophers who did not reflect the acquired knowledge in their behavior (Špidlík, 2010, p. 186). Likewise, Gregory of Nazianzus, in the poem I,II,33 *Tetrastichae sententiae*, asks in the very first verse: Do you prefer practice or theory?²⁶ J. Lemaître, as cited by T. Špidlík, states that Gregory is still a Christian of classical

¹⁸ Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* X, 1178–1179. Aristotle distinguished between two types of happiness. First, happiness one finds in an active life, in politics, and that is achieved by leading a virtuous life; and, a second type called philosophical happiness.

¹⁹ As far as Christians are concerned, the apostolic fathers did not even have this word in their vocabulary. It appeared only with Clement of Alexandria and Origen in the 2nd century CE. It was appropriated by St. Gregory of Nazianzus as the basis of the Greek understanding of knowledge, and it became the basis for his own approach to knowledge (Špidlík, 2010, pp. 31, 33).

²⁰ I,II,35: *Hedonist, when you are ill, do you enjoy the riches? If you are tormented by illness, know that you have got the cure too. On the other hand, there are those who are poor and modest. They are neither tormented nor in need of the cure. But know that in such a case I would prefer he who is rich and weak and confused to he who is poor, healthy and already wise.*

I,II,36: *Imagine somebody getting ill and in need of medication and who wants to get rid of the hardship. Imagine someone else, who is healthy and does not need anything. Who will you say is happy? Everybody says it is he who is healthy. He might live in great poverty, but is happier still than he who possesses gold and is sick.*

²¹ PG 37, 965.

²² PG 37, 965.

²³ PG 37, 967–968.

²⁴ I,II,39: *Once a luxury loving person said: “I would rather have a drop of luck, than a bucket full of brains”. And a wise person replied: “A drop of wisdom is worth more than an abyss filled with luck.”*

²⁵ I,II,39,4 (PG 37, 968).

²⁶ *Πρᾶξιν προτιμήσειας, ἢ θεωρίαν*; (I,II,33,1; PG 37, 928).

cultural heritage. His notion of *θεωρία* is marked by the thoughts of Aristotle and the Stoics. He believes the knowledge stemming from *θεωρία* is reached through reason, but reason then further examines the knowledge, scrutinizes it and explores (Lemaître, 1953, 1814 in Špidlík, 2010, p. 188). Nevertheless, Gregory knows of yet another form of knowledge that he deems real, spiritual. It arises from *πρᾶξις* (*praxis*), i.e., the way people behave. *Πρᾶξις* was for Gregory the sum of all virtues (Špidlík, 2010, pp. 189, 197). This view is supported by the verses of his poem I,II,33, where he states that salvation rests more with deeds without words than with words without deeds,²⁷ and that grace is not given to those who speak, but to those who do good.²⁸

Revisiting the teachings on virtues in individual philosophical schools, the above-mentioned Stoics saw virtue in the ability to recognize good from evil, that is, in a kind of inner moral strength (Störig, 1985, p. 195). It is the teachings of the Stoics that are reflected in Gregory's poem I,II,25 *Adversus iram*. The poem is all the more interesting, since it lets the reader contemplate Gregory's own feelings. In the poem's prologue, the author expresses anger over his own anger,²⁹ and the fact that he cannot prevail over it.³⁰ Gregory fights against anger inside him as well as against the anger he feels towards his enemies. He intends to defeat anger by redirecting it from the outer world against himself. The approach he takes is to stay silent, to adopt a strategy of deeds without words. And although, like the Stoics, Gregory yearns for the complete elimination of passions, he is content to at least tame them. He welcomes any progress in the fight against these as he calls them, ailments or diseases. Although, he is aware that *ἀπάθεια* (*apatheia*; state without passion), the supreme goal of human *askesis*, is attainable only with the help of God.³¹

After the introductory remarks, Gregory delves deeper into questions on anger: where it comes from and how to fight it. In defining anger, he relies on the writings of the *men of long ago*,³² philosophers who devoted their time to seeking the origin and nature of things, in this case, passions. Gregory, in his approach, uses three definitions. First, physiological (vv. 35–38),³³ for which anger (*ἔκστασις*; *ekstasis*) is the boiling up of blood in the heart.³⁴ Second, psychological (vv. 39–42),³⁵ which understands anger as an effort to retaliate, distinguishing two subcategories: a) *ὀργή* (*orgé*) when anger breaks out, and b) *μνησικακία* (*mnesikakia*) when it remains in the soul and waits for appropriate opportunities.³⁶ Finally, the third, combined (vv. 43–45),³⁷ in which the willingness to retaliate causes the physiological phenomenon.³⁸ Gregory concludes the topic and does not deem it worth further reflection. Nevertheless, he further underlines the importance of reason. Verses 47–53³⁹ read: For they all undoubtedly know that reason rules everything. It is an ally in the fight against passions given to people by

²⁷ I,II,33,21 (PG 37, 929).

²⁸ I,II,33,24 (PG 37, 930).

²⁹ The poem was written following Gregory's experience in Constantinople in 381 (Oberhaus, 1991, p. 2), when he was the bishop there and for some time he also chaired the then held council. He was bishop there for only about six weeks, when he abdicated as bishop and chairman. Nonetheless, he was deeply wounded and disappointed that 150 bishops accepted his resignation without major objections and that the Emperor accepted his departure too (White, 1996 p. XXIII; see also Brodňanská, 2017, p. 33).

³⁰ For more information on the poem see Oberhaus, 1991, p. 1–10.

³¹ I,II,25,1–30 (PG 37, 813–815).

³² I,II,25,33 (PG 37, 815).

³³ PG 37, 816.

³⁴ Cf. Plato, *Kratylos* 419E.

³⁵ PG 37, 816.

³⁶ This characteristic is provided by Diogenes Laërtius (VII 113), but also by Cicero (*Tusc. disp.* IV, 9, 21).

³⁷ PG 37, 816.

³⁸ The definition of anger as correlation between body and soul was also entertained by Aristotle (*De anima* 403a16–28).

³⁹ PG 37, 816–817.

the Lord. Our houses protect us from the hail, bushes from the cliffs, bastions from abysses and walls protect those who have to escape the battle. Likewise, reason protects us from mounting anger. Gregory calls the reason a teacher of good things⁴⁰ and one of the means of helping people face anger.

Gregory of Nazianzus sees another means of combatting anger in the *guidance of the soul through speech*,⁴¹ in which speech should enchant the mind with positive examples. Consequently, the author uses examples taken from the Bible, but does not avoid profane sources either, because, as he writes: it is useful to take the fruit of lesser works (i.e. pagan) since they might hide something good and useful.⁴² The figures of the Old Testament – Moses, Samuel, and David –, as well as the ones of the New Testament – the Apostle Peter and the Martyr Stephen depicted as the embodiment of Christ's deeds –, are complemented by the figures of profane world: Aristotle,⁴³ Alexander the Great, Pericles, and Constantine II, who, meanwhile, became a Christian emperor.

Gregory does not hesitate to use exorcism in his struggle against anger, in accordance with Socrates, who recommended it as a means of curing anger. It is the poem's epilogue⁴⁴ in which the author refers to this method of protecting himself from the works of the demon, i.e., anger.

In his poetry, Gregory of Nazianzus constantly emphasizes the importance of knowing God. The crucial part of knowing God was, in the Eastern Roman tradition, associated with virtues, namely the practice thereof (Špidlík, 2010, p. 197). Gregory himself indicates in one of his speeches that it is necessary to practise virtues because they adorn the house of the soul (i.e., body) until it is illuminated by the light of knowledge of the divine mysteries, for only similar phenomena apprehend one another (*Or.* 39, 10). In this regard, the poem I,II,10⁴⁵ *De virtute* offers a more general and comprehensive lesson on virtues. It is addressed to a young man, apparently Gregory's nephew Nicobulo (Crimi, 1995, p. 30). In an extensive introduction (vv. 1–217), Gregory discusses the true role of man, which is to approach God. He specifies all the things he deems superfluous in search of God and he questions the value of the things people cherish. He also ponders the subject of the existence of wisdom among the Greeks and questions how one could call them wise if they do not know of the existence of one God. Consequently, Gregory references the teachings of the ancient philosophical schools pertaining to the moral lessons not only by using allusions, but also by explicitly naming the representatives of the individual philosophical schools. Gregory uses these devices to educate his nephew, even though the philosophers in question were pagan. He further declares that some of these “wise” men can place virtue first. Gregory generally refers to the wise by using a comparison, such as in yet another poem *Adversus iram*: “But I will mention some of them, so that you learn about virtues. It feels as if I was picking roses from among thorns, when I am learning the best from the non-believers” (I,II,10,214–217).⁴⁶ Pointing to the outstanding men (representatives of the profane world as well as characters from the Bible), Gregory draws the attention of the young man to four aspects of virtue. They are *εὐτέλεια* (*euteleia*; modesty, poverty), *ἐγκράτεια* (*enkrateia*; temperance), *ἀνδρεία* (*andreia*; bravery) a *σωφροσύνη* (*sofrosyne*; morality, prudence).

The first of the virtues Gregory mentions is poverty, highlighting its many faces: modesty, simplicity, selflessness, restraint, and independence from property. Simplicity, understood as satisfaction with the little, was practised by all philosophical schools of Antiquity, especially

⁴⁰ I,II,37,364 (PG 37, 838).

⁴¹ Cf. Plato, *Phaedrus* 261A.

⁴² I,II,25,256–257 (PG 37, 831).

⁴³ In his verses, Gregory speaks about a man from Stageira (birthplace of Aristotle) who has overcome his anger and has not hit a slave. This is probably Gregory's *lapsus memoriae* because the anecdote pertains to Plato.

⁴⁴ I,II,25,516–546 (PG 37, 848–851).

⁴⁵ PG 37, 680–752.

⁴⁶ PG 37, 695–696.

by the Cynics. Of these, St. Gregory chose for his nephew the example of Diogenes of Sinope and Crates of Thebes (I,II,10,218–258).⁴⁷ Diogenes used to sleep behind the Athenian city walls in a discarded amphora (the famous barrel), ate what he found, got rid of his property and was said to be wandering with his wife. Gregory further praises the poverty of Cleanthes of Assa (I,II,10,286),⁴⁸ one of the Old Stoics, who is said to have come to Athens so poor that he had to make money by drawing water and voluntarily died of hunger. The author also admires the unselfishness of Aristid who, despite managing the Athenian treasury, had almost no money at the time of his death and had to be buried at state expense (I,II,10,341–349).⁴⁹ When addressing moderation, Gregory recalls the wise maxim he had heard of the need to practise restraint when eating⁵⁰ (I,II,10,56–587).⁵¹ He adds that a fat abdomen does not make a sharp mind. This idea resonates in many of Gregory's poems, but in the above mentioned poem he wants to give explicit examples to Nicobulo and highlights the behavior of the Cynic, Kerkides and the Stoics, since they provide only “modest” bread and water with vinegar (I,II,10,595–611).⁵² Regarding courage, Gregory asks Nicobulo who is the object of his admiration. The young man admires the courage of Leos and his three daughters, who were sacrificed in order to save Athens⁵³; for the rescue of Thebes, Menoikeos⁵⁴ sacrificed himself. He admires how Epictetus and Anaxarchus⁵⁵ could endure pain, but also the fact that Socrates drank poisonous hemlock (I,II,10,676–696).⁵⁶ Finally, Gregory highlights Xenocrates, Epicurus and Polemon, who tried to live virtuously and were able to overcome the seduction of pleasure. He also praises Alexander, who, although having captured Darius' beautiful daughters, did not approach them inconveniently (I,II,10,774–828)⁵⁷ (Brodňanská, 2008, pp. 109–114).

When we examine the examples used by Gregory, we notice that he resorts mainly to the Cynics and Stoics. Cynicism was exclusively an ethical and practical philosophical movement. It understood philosophy as the art of life and life as philosophical practice. Its practitioners sought to make decisions based on their own rationale so that they could freely shape their lives (Flachbartová, 2015, pp. 11–13). Although the works of the early Cynics have not been preserved, we have a rich doxographic and literary legacy that portrays their actions. In it, biographical elements are intertwined with fiction. However, these texts “are important for the understanding of the philosopher's stance. They also display an ethical message in practical situations” (Flachbartová, 2015, p. 30). “Cynic philosophical principles were absorbed into the Stoic tradition in the late-first and second centuries, and became largely indistinguishable from the Stoic agenda. As Christians absorbed Stoic models of thought, elements of Cynic thinking became part of Christian philosophy” (Krueger, 1993, pp. 29–30).

The ethical message hidden in the stories Gregory addresses to Nicobulo – as well as other readers – not only reveals his ideas about what makes a good life. It is a reminder that only those who really live a virtuous and ethical life can achieve it and that it is not enough to know about such a life. For it is *πρᾶξις*, not *θεωρία*, that is but the sum of all virtues. *Πρᾶξις* leads to *θεωρία*, i.e., spiritual knowledge that is the real knowledge (Špidlík, 2010, p. 189).

⁴⁷ PG 37, 696–698.

⁴⁸ PG 37, 700.

⁴⁹ PG 37, 705.

⁵⁰ Charés, *Sententiae* 2, 2–3.

⁵¹ PG 37, 722.

⁵² PG 37, 723–724.

⁵³ The legendary Attic figure Leos was said to have sacrificed his three daughters – Praxithea, Theope and Eubule – in order to save Athens from plague and famine (Buol, 2018, p. 30).

⁵⁴ The son of Theban king Creon, who voluntarily sacrificed himself in the War of the seven against Thebes, when the city was in danger of being defeated.

⁵⁵ Anaxarchos of Abdera was a Greek philosopher of the school of Democritus and was a contemporary of Alexander the Great.

⁵⁶ PG 37, 729–730.

⁵⁷ PG 37, 736–739.

Practising the four virtues that Gregory of Nazianzus presents in the poem *De virtute* (I,II,10), should inspire people to lead a good life. Poverty offers him freedom, temperance guides him on the path of good deeds, courage helps him overcome fear – the strongest weapon of Evil –, and morality, closely related to prudence and wisdom, helps him approach God. It is precisely the knowledge of God, that is for Gregory the purpose of every endeavor (I,II,10,931).⁵⁸ However, only knowing God is not enough. It is necessary to love, because love is a hospitable friend of knowledge (I,II,10,984)⁵⁹ and those who do not love God cannot grasp Him (I,II,25,363).⁶⁰

One of the main features of the moral poetry of Gregory of Nazianzus is not only the return to older philosophical schools, but also the use of their means of expression. He uses practical examples of respectable behavior, called *chreiai* (Crimi, 1995, p. 41), in which the emphasis is on usefulness (Flachbartová, 2015, p. 31). These maxims held a specific place in cynicism and we can find them in Gregory's poetry, where they are used mainly as a means of enlivening interpretation but didactic significance is undeniable too (Crimi, 1995, pp. 41–42). Moreover, Gregory of Nazianzus often uses the form of the so-called *diatribe*,⁶¹ which was originally a witty satirical sermon preached by wandering philosophers, and turned later into critical or even shaming writings. *Diatribe* was often used by cynics and stoics, and some of Gregory's moral poems (or parts of them) can be considered *diatribes*, of which *De virtute* (I,II,10) and *Adversus iram* (I,II,25) are two examples.

Gregory of Nazianzus sought to influence young Christians by his poetry. He explained not only moral, but also dogmatic, autobiographical and lyrical themes with the explicit intention of advancing Christian ideology, while the poetic form was chosen deliberately as a more pleasant and attractive means of delivering the message. Moreover, Gregory sought to write Christian poetry that could rival and be an alternative to the appealing Hellenistic poetry. The quality of Gregory's poems disproved the contemporaneous polemical view that Christians lacked education and literary works (Drobner, 2011, p. 381). Gregory viewed Ancient scholarship (philosophy, literature, but also mythology) as a foundation upon which young Christians could rely under condition that they think critically and choose only the good and useful parts. He himself adopted an attitude of controlled acceptance of pagan teachings. He embraced what is good, but did not forget or constantly remind himself that above all is Love, Scripture (*Logos* in the fullest of its meaning), God. Gregory's poem I,II,40⁶² *De rerum humanarum vanitate* expresses this attitude in its entirety. Since the poem concludes the moral poetry in the collection *PG*, it can be seen as a final reminder of the inevitability of death, for it is then that people face God's judgment. The ending also implies the importance of practising virtues on the way to knowing God:

Those who mimic spider fibers
and rejoice in the delicacies in life
let them know how easy the wind will dispose
all that the spider finds pleasing.
You, whose thrones are beautifully decorated,
who are proud of the prestige that is anyway ephemeral,
beware of the final judgment
that nothing can escape.

⁵⁸ PG 37, 747.

⁵⁹ PG 37, 751.

⁶⁰ PG 37, 838.

⁶¹ *Diatribe* typically contain elements of dialogue, rhetoric questions, shortened expressions, exclamations, imperative mood, comparisons, the use of gnomes, examples, etc.

⁶² PG 37, 968.

Philosophy is, in the work of Gregory of Nazianzus and in his overall attitude to life, one of the instruments, but not the ultimate goal of human existence. Despite its significance, it remains a mere instrument that sets the boundaries and leads to an understanding of the virtues and their meaning.

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The literary works as a code of ethics in Great Moravia

Vasil Gluchman¹

Abstract

The author studies selected fundamental literary records from Great Moravia of the 9th century (*The rules of the holy fathers* [Zapovědi svatých otců], *Judicial law for laymen* [Zakon sudnyj ljudem], *Nomocanon* [Nomokanon], *Adhortation to rulers* [Vladykam zemle Božie slovo velit]) presumably compiled, translated or created by Constantine (Cyril) and Methodius, the Thessaloniki brothers. In the context of defining early and medieval Christian ethics, the author concluded that the texts in question contain elements of the Christian code of ethics, by means of which Constantine (Cyril) and Methodius, following the model of the Byzantine Emperors Leo III and Constantine V, wished to form the social morality of Great Moravia. Based on this, the author holds the opinion that the history of Christian ethics in Moravia, Slovakia and Bohemia goes as far back as the activities of Constantine (Cyril) and Methodius and the period of Great Moravia.

Keywords: Constantine (Cyril), Methodius, Great Moravia, Christian ethics and morality

Introduction

In the history of Slavic peoples, Great Moravia played an immense role, especially in the second half of the 9th century, having laid the grounds for their culture, literature and language. In the context of Great Moravia, such significant literary works of the period are mentioned as *The Life of Constantine*, *The Life of Methodius*, *Foreword (Proglas)*, *Judicial Law for laymen (Zakon sudnyj ljudem)*, *Nomocanon (Nomokanon)*, *Adhortation to Rulers (Vladykam zemle Božie slovo velit)*, and many others; moreover, literary, cultural, religious as well as legal documents of the given era have been interpreted (Avenarius, 1992, pp. 91–94; Betti, 2014, pp. 49–50, 75; Dvornik, 1956, pp. 84–85; Ivanov, 2008, pp. 316–318; Goldberg, 2006, p. 271; Jakobson, 1985, pp. 133–134; Kantor, 1983, p. 69; Kučera, 1986, pp. 171, 209; Mahoney, 2011, p. 26; Michalov, 2015, pp. 194–197; Pauliny, 1964, p. 81; Ratkoš, 1990, pp. 114–115; Sommer, Třeštík & Žemlička, 2013, p. 249; Třeštík, 2001, pp. 205–206; Vašica, 2014, pp. 74–92; Vavřínek, 1985, p. 232; Vavřínek, 2013, pp. 203–207; Vlasto, 1970, pp. 59–66; Zozul'ak, 2019, pp. 13–21). The aim of the present paper is to analyse the nature of the literary works in question and study to what extent they are works of a moral nature and whether they can be considered to have laid the grounds of ethics, or Christian ethics, in Great Moravia.

Nature of early Christian ethics

In order to identify its features in the selected Great Moravian literary works, Christian ethics of the given period needs to be defined. Francine Cardman holds the opinion that theology, doctrine and Christian ethics of the period in question were not closed systems, only possible to be understood through their internal logic but should be perceived in a broader social, cultural and political context. She claims that early Christian ethics should not be studied exclusively by ethicists or, even, Christians, but a much broader community (Cardman, 2008, pp. 932–933). In her view, the development of early Christian ethics can only be observed indirectly by means of rituals, prayers, prophecies, etc. Early Christian ethics should be perceived as a Great area, i.e. all main components of religious history and historical theology are considered ethical resources dealing with such topics as war, peace, sexual morality, church order and discipline. Most preserved texts, regardless their authenticity, are related to the study of early Christian ethics. The same author points out that texts directly dealing with morality are rather rare. Only

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a small number of them, if any at all, deal with theoretical reflections on ethics, albeit it secondarily (Cardman, 2008, p. 936).

Wayne A. Meeks also claims that should one, with regard to early Christianity, “[...] that when we speak of morality or ethics we are talking about people. Texts do not have an ethic; people do” (Meeks, 1993, p. 4). An effort to understand who these people were, what they did, what relationships they had, what they hoped for, and how they lived their lives is the essence of the study of early Christian ethics. It cannot be comprehended without understanding how a community works. In this author’s view, Christian morality of the given period cannot be reduced to some theological or ethical documents. He holds that to study ethnography of the past means to search for the forms of culture and social practice that could be of importance for early Christian morality (Meeks, 1993, p. 11). He believes that to understand early Christian ethics, studying the moral directives created by early Christians (including their literary works) is of great importance (Meeks, 1993, pp. 66, 73). Eric Osborn also states that determining ideas in ethics are never only ethical, which can also be fully applied to early Christian texts (Osborn, 1976, p. 2).

Cardman considers the following as the main topics of early Christian ethics: the body including sexuality, asceticism and the care of the self, martyrdom and suffering. The topics of poverty, slavery, providence as well as history, religious intolerance and elites were also part of social ethics (Cardman, 2008, pp. 937–947). Henry Sidgwick claims that, in Christianity, the concept of morality as a positive law of a theocratic community is a novelty. In Christianity, the moralists’ method determining the right conduct is, to a large extent, analogical to that used by lawyers when interpreting the codex. Holy commands were implicitly given for all life situations, or derived from the application of general rules included in the Holy Scripture. The moral view was defined as having knowledge of Divine law following an authority superior to human reason, which is only supposed to interpret the rules and apply them to more complex problems (Sidgwick, 1988, pp. 110–111). According to Sidgwick, faith is an inevitable precondition and essential motif of good Christian behaviour; however, adhering to the law and moral value of Christian duty depends on love. First and foremost is love towards God based on Christian faith, followed by love towards all those who are objects of God’s love. This concerns derived Christian philanthropy regarding Christian pursuit of social duty (Sidgwick, 1988, p. 117).

Sidgwick further claims that, apart from faith and love, other important components of medieval Christian ethics were purity of heart, obedience, distancing oneself from the world and physical desires, patience, and charity. Purity of heart was not only understood with regard to sexual depravity, but was primarily connected to the entire sphere of morality. Another significant feature of the Christian understanding of morality as a code was unconditional submission, i.e. the virtue of obedience to authority, followed by a dismissive attitude towards the natural world and a devaluation of earthly social and civil relationships of the natural man, typical for the Roman pre-Christian world. Under the influence of Christianity, this was transformed into universal philanthropy, or related to a religious, or Christian, community. Part of it was the hate of one’s body as a burden and obstacle in reaching the spiritual world. Originally, an integral part of Christian ethics and morality was the requirement to passively resist violence, which, however, gradually changed with the transforming status of Christianity in the Roman Empire (Sidgwick, 1988, pp. 118–121).

Sidgwick claims further values of Christian morality to be humility before God, which is the essential precondition of any true Christian good. The author also claims that the sphere of ethics was expanded by its interconnection with Revelational theology. The added religious power and sanctions proscribed the usual duties, related to religious faith and ceremonies, a moral dimension. In Christian ethics, the rightness of religious faith is viewed as essential for good and heresy as the gravest deadly vice destroying the sources of the Christian life. Sidgwick

holds that Christianity created a legal concept of morality in the form of a code, whose breaking deserves supernatural punishment, as opposed to the philosophical perception of morality as a method of achieving natural happiness (Sidgwick, 1988, pp. 124–126). The development of church law in the Middle Ages was, according to him, probably an inevitable part of the great role of the Christian church in the effort to maintain a moral system in a highly anarchic period of the early Middle Ages (Sidgwick, 1988, p. 135).

Early Christian morality in Great Moravia

In the context of defining the scope of the topic in question it could be stated that individual features are valid for both early Christian philosophy and ethics and the period of the 9th century, especially as far as Great Moravia is concerned, as the then society of Great Moravia was a true early Christian society. In these lands, Christianity had not long before been adopted (Bartoňková et al., 1966, pp. 341–342) which is why society and its elite did not yet fully identify with the new religion; a great number of the neighbouring countries and peoples did not adopt Christianity, or professed pre-Christian religions. Great Moravian society can, thus, be considered an early Christian society, although the adopted and spreading Christian teachings were more advanced since they had undergone some modifications passed by Christian councils. Still, the forms in which Christianity was presented to Great Moravian society primarily corresponded with the fundamentals of Christian teachings and morality and were to enhance its enrooting in the everyday lives of the faithful.

In the process of reasoning on the origins of ethics, or Christian ethics, in Great Moravia, it is vital to realise this does not concern the introduction of morality into the life of Great Moravian society. Should one accept the view which considers morality to be all that relates to a person's behaviour and actions, then it must be admitted that, even before the arrival of Constantine (Cyril) and Methodius as well as the first Christian missionaries from various parts of Europe, Great Moravian society had its own pagan, or pre-Christian, morality. Some of its features are known from period resources, such as descriptions by Arabic explorers who visited the lands inhabited by Slavic people or other authors (Bartoňková et al., 1969, pp. 343–348, 411–420). Descriptions of old Slavic people point out such characteristics as their promiscuous sexual morality, but also courage in military campaigns, etc. (Bartoňková et al., 1969, pp. 360–362, 418). Slavs also held many pre-Christian religious rituals which included a great number of deities (Eliade, 1985, pp. 29–35; Rybakov, 1981; Slupecki, 1994, p. 7). This polytheistic religious system also involved certain moral requirements and rules which were preserved by tradition and passed on by word of mouth (Váňa, 1990). The adoption of Christianity and Christian morality by Slavic people followed some moral elements, customs and traditions of the previous period, which was also reflected in the more or less forced acceptance of pre-Christian customs and traditions which survived more than a thousand years and, in many cases, until the present day (Shrovetide, the drowning of Morena effigies, whipping and throwing water at girls at Easter, Pentecost, Midsummer Night bonfires, customs relating to St Lucia's day, etc.) (Nadaská, 2012; 2014).

Nevertheless, Christianity brought about new values, a new worldview for old Slavs and their everyday lives and relationships, and also, possibly, new view on what is right and wrong. The polytheistic Slavic system was replaced by a monotheistic Christian system with a single God, which, in many cases, required old Slavs to leave traditional modes of behaviour and actions behind, including promiscuity and polygamy, and adopt, together with a new faith, a new way of life. The need to enforce new values in newly Christian peoples and countries usually came from above, which means that the latter principle 'cuius regio, eius religio' (i.e. whose realm, his religion) was in force even back then. This meant that Christianity was primarily adopted by kings, princes and other representatives of the ruling strata who, consequently, Christianised the population of their lands.

Christianity could only be enforced and spread in the turbulent Middle Ages by bringing about and enforcing new values (MacIntyre, 1998, p. 114). What was, however, vital was for the given values and norms of Christian ethics and morality to be maintained in the Christianised lands and communities. A highly efficient tool in the realisation of this intention was the Christian code of ethics (as Sidgwick also stated), which in a clear, simple and accurate way defined, or ordered, what was desirable and prohibited undesirable forms of behaviour and actions. The code also explicitly specified the norms of Christian ethics and morality and contained implicitly suggested Christian ethical values which formed the essence of the normative system of the ethical code.

The most appropriate form and means to achieve the goal was a law which was both binding for all and enforceable, also with the aid of the secular force, as it was actually this force that it was in service of, since it was the secular influence and the ruler's status and that of the social elite in a country that were to be strengthened. This is how a synergic effect came into being in medieval society, as by adopting Christianity and, especially, strengthening its influence (also with the aid, or support, of the Christian code of ethics), the internal political climate in the country and society became more stable, and the ruler and the elite were empowered. On the other hand, the status of Christian religion in society improved, which affected the Christian religion and the increasing ideological as well as power-related status of the Christian clergy in the country.

The most common form in which the Christian code of ethics was spread was a literary work expressed especially in legal regulations, since, in the Roman Empire, law had a long tradition and was an integral part of its life. The aim of the legal regulations was to define norms of Christian ethics and morality reflecting the values of Christian faith on the one hand, and the values of Christian ethics on the other. As Michael Thomas George Humphreys put it, Emperors Leo III and Constantine V in their *Ecloga*, for instance, tried to, by means of legal regulations, morally reform Byzantine society and its inhabitants, and to create a New Jerusalem and new Israelites. The aim of the *Ecloga* was to give rise to a new Christian society based on the teachings of Jesus Christ, which would pursue the values and norms of Christian ethics in the everyday life of society and its citizens (Humphreys, 2015, pp. 94–105; Freshfield, 1926). It was, presumably, the great goal set through the *Ecloga* by Emperors Leo III and Constantine V which inspired Constantine (Cyril) and Methodius to choose none other than this document as a starting point to set the values and norms of Christian ethics in order to, in this way, accomplish their task, or requirement, included in Rastislav's message to the Byzantine Emperor Michael III which, among other things, asked to give law to the Moravians (Kantor, 1983, p. 65).

Forms of Christian ethics in Great Moravia

During the rule of Rastislav (846–870), the mission of the Thessaloniki brothers gained univocal support from the state power; nevertheless, even then it encountered obstacles from Frankish missionaries operating in Great Moravian lands. I think that Constantine (Cyril) and Methodius viewed their mission as an opportunity to realise a grand goal also lying in the moral elevation and reform of Great Moravian society and its inhabitants; however, unlike the intellectually, culturally and literarily advanced Byzantine society, they came to a country whose culture was at a rather low developmental stage, including almost a complete lack of education. That is why it was, first of all, necessary to adapt the goals and expectations to real possibilities. In this way, translations of the literary works as *The rules of the holy fathers* (*Zapovědi svatých otců*), *Judicial law for laymen* (*Zakon sudnyj ljudem*) and *Nomocanon* (*Nomokanon*) came into being, as well as the original literary work *Adhortation to Rulers* (*Vladykam zemle Božie slovo velit*) and many other original literary works and translations.

Presumably, one of the oldest preserved literary works from the period of Great Moravia is *The Rules of the Holy Fathers*, which is a Church Slavonic translation of the original Latin penitential, i.e. an anthology of directives on repentance for various kinds of sins.² Looking at sins and punishments included in this penitential, it is clear that contemporary Great Moravian society, or the church authorities, considered, in the context of the behaviour and actions of people living in Great Moravia in the given period, altering the most common forms of immoral actions an act of the highest importance. These included mortal dangers (murder, abortion), property offences (theft), sexual offences (fornication, adultery, bestiality), family offences (spousal abandonment, or divorce) and church offences (related to religious services).

Based on the punishments imposed it could be concluded that bestiality by a married priest was considered the worst sin, followed by sins for which a less strict penance was imposed, such as bestiality by an unmarried priest (15 years of penitence), premeditated murder, sodomy, adultery by a bishop, a priest leaving his own wife for another woman, and premeditated abortion as a consequence of adultery (all 10 years of penitence). More lenient punishments were administered for fornication by a priest, giving false oath, poisoning, arson and theft of church items (all 7 years of penitence); other penances were given for manslaughter, theft of livestock and other valuables, adultery by laymen and worshipping the Devil (all 5 years of penitence). Yet less strict, such as three year-long penances followed a minor theft, adultery by a priest, a mother killing her child, seduction of a female stranger, abortion, fornication with a widow or a virgin, or a priest hunting. Equally sinful was carolling (as pagans would) and being angry at one's brother, cursing him, or eating meat from a dead animal as well as acts related to the protection of altar bread from mice, dripping from the chalice during communion, sleeping in church (Bartoňková et al., 1971, pp. 138–146).

According to historians, the oldest Slavic legal literary work is *Judicial law for laymen*, which is, to a great extent, a translation of the Byzantine *Ecloga*.³ *Judicial law for laymen* deals with fighting paganism and also pays great attention to sexual morality, biological as well as spiritual marriage and kinship. A third of all the articles deal with issues of sexual ethics and morality (Bartoňková et al., 1971, pp. 181–186, 195–197). Other articles are concerned with the functioning of the judicial system in the country, morality in warfare, property matters, such as arson, theft, kidnapping and the sale of a free man for slavery (Bartoňková et al., 1971, pp. 187–194). From the above overview it is obvious how great an emphasis was placed on individual areas, which undoubtedly expressed the real needs of the functioning of Great Moravian society. It seems that the most serious problems both in Great Moravia and among its inhabitants were sexual morality and the need to protect marriage, which was, presumably, a serious issue in the given period in general not only in Great Moravia, as is documented in contemporary annals (Bartoňková et al., 1969, pp. 163–167, 171–172). Another serious problem of the period in question was theft, i.e. morality related to the protection of property.

² The above regulations in the Frankish area and also, presumably, in Great Moravia, were already in place before the arrival of Constantine (Cyril) and Methodius' Byzantine mission. The author of the translation is unknown and historians claim that the assumptions of Gorazd as the translator and St. Clement of Ochrid as the editor have not yet been proven. The Church Slavonic translation is merely a selection of original Latin regulations (Bartoňková et al., 1971, p. 137).

³ In essence, it mainly concerns a translation of the Greek original of *Ecloga*, a known code of laws by the Emperors Leo III and Constantine V. The code was issued in 726 and mainly included penal regulations. Historians point out several deviations of the Slavic translation from the Greek original, which, as they believe, means that this document reflects a different situation to that where the *Ecloga* originated. Nevertheless, *Judicial Law for Laymen* is an unsystematic and incomplete manual (Bartoňková et al., 1971, p. 147). Josef Vašica refuses the hypothesis of the document's Bulgarian origins and, in connection with the claims of similarity to Pope Nicholas I's responses to the Bulgarians and *Judicial Law for Laymen* states that the similarity is merely incidental (Vašica, 2014, p. 82). According to historians, *Judicial Law for Laymen* is a Great Moravian record and its author is most likely Constantine (Cyril) who could have been aided by Methodius as an experienced lawyer (Bartoňková et al., 1971, p. 176).

Exceptional attention is also paid to the functioning of the judicial system in the country in order to centralise the enforcement of judicial power in an effort to eliminate arbitrary executions of justice, determine the rules of investigation and proving someone guilty or innocent. Last but not least, rules for the behaviour and actions of soldiers were also determined.

In the case of literary works, historians point out that these are not original works which came into being in Great Moravia, but mainly translations – selections from, as well as supplements to (or, in the case of punishments, amendments of originals), the original documents. Historians believe these were of particular significance and contributed greatly to the existential needs of Great Moravian society. Historians consider as a truly original Great Moravian literary work the sermon *Adhortation to rulers*,⁴ which states that divine law commands rulers to love justice and do just deeds as the start of a journey to achieving a blessed life, which is why one needs to pay attention to what prevents them from achieving this goal and what should one abstain from. In this sermon, equality before the law, or justice, is considered vital; the judge is not allowed to view anyone as better, and only pronounce the verdict of guilt and punishment after a careful investigation rather than superficial judgment of the whole argument. When dealing with a conflict, the judge is not allowed to side with his father, his mother, his child or friend; this is the only way to achieve true justice in the spirit of divine law (Bartoňková et al., 1971, pp. 199–200).

According to *Adhortation to rulers*, every prince should teach divine law to all his serfs and subordinates. Included in the requirements of divine law is not wronging the weak, avoiding pagan customs and oaths, respecting baptism and not marrying one's godparents or godchildren. In line with divine law, every man should be happy with his wife and not chase the pleasures of the flesh. He who breaks these laws and has been baptised, will be punished. It equally confirms the sanctity of marriage with the exception of such cases where the woman committed the sin of adultery. In the given context, Christ's word is mentioned saying that he who drove out his wife caused her adultery and he who shared the bed with her, also committed adultery, since two people joined by God shall not be separated. In a similar spirit, it is also stated that every man should have that woman who chose him according to divine law and that is how it should be regarded. Rulers are also warned and encouraged to maintain divine law not only by word but also by deed. They shall not, due to ignorance, moral flabbiness or physical love, assume that the requirements of divine law as well as the punishment for breaking it do not concern them. Sins and disobedience of divine law can also be punished by the loss of power, which, for instance, happened to the Jewish Old Testament King Saul, who disobeyed God. *Adhortation to rulers* also states that justice uplifts nations while sin and injustice lead people to decadence. On the other hand, the reward for those who are firm in their faith and maintain divine law lies in the hope of a blessed life in future (Bartoňková et al., 1971, pp. 201–204).

Adhortation to rulers can be considered a contemporary analysis of the status of Christian ethics and morality, especially in the most fundamental areas of life of Great Moravian society, especially the enforcement of judicial power, marriage and behaviour and actions of the nobility. In the case of the nobility, it could even be assumed that instantiation of the regulations found within *Judicial law for laymen* is concerned in relation to magnates, which could be caused by squires approaching the norms of Christian ethics and morality, including the norms contained in these laws, in a rather relaxed manner; they marginalised them and did not take them seriously at all. As the fundamental principle of enforcing state power, *Judicial law for laymen* as well as *Adhortation to rulers* defined justice in all areas of social life, starting with an impartial approach to its execution, including investigating accusations. The author(s)

⁴ According to historians, *Adhortation to rulers* is a sermon or warning to princes and rulers to maintain the divine law contained in *Judicial Law for Laymen*, from which, in their view, it follows that this is a Great Moravian literary record whose author was Methodius (Bartoňková et al., 1971, p. 199).

view(s) justice as a guarantee of nations and countries flourishing; on the other hand, in injustice, they see the cause of decadence and, in the case of rulers, the loss of power.

Another important area that *Adhortation to rulers* pays attention to is marriage and its protection, as a consequence of enforcing the values, or norms, of Christian ethics and morality in the fight against paganism, its customs and traditions persisting within sexual morality. In the literary works in question, the fight against paganism is contained more implicitly than explicitly – it is mentioned rather rarely; however, the fight for consciousness or the souls of the inhabitants of Great Moravia is indirectly present in a vast majority of norms included in *Judicial law for laymen*.

Nomocanon, i.e. an almanac of church law,⁵ is yet another highly significant literary work from the Great Moravian lands, preserved from the period in question. *Nomocanon* paid most attention to church discipline and possible immoral behaviour and actions of persons holding clerical posts, starting with clerics, priests, and deacons all the way up to bishops. In many ways, *Nomocanon* paid great attention to the institution of marriage, also with regard to the clergy which, in the 9th century, could, under certain circumstances, get married. It seems that in many cases the clergy suffered the same moral failures or, in other words, committed the same sins as laymen. If Methodius as the translator and compiler of *Nomocanon* (as well as the archbishop of Pannonia and Great Moravia) selected from among a great number of titles of the original document none other but these articles, it means he needed to strengthen the moral status of the clergy operating in Great Moravia (Bartoňková et al., 1971, pp. 250–259).

The second part of *Nomocanon*, which deals with formulating secular laws, contains certain peculiarities, since it does not place godliness above marriage and family, or the cohabitation of a man and a woman. In several cases, under the threat of punishment, casting out one's wife from the marriage under the pretence of godliness is disapproved of and so are other deeds for which godliness would be given as a reason, such as a woman having her haircut, wearing men's clothes, leaving her husband, etc. The disapproving attitude is justified by the opinion that the Lord created man and woman in the form He did; thus, anyone who should dispraise or refuse such phenomena actually dispraises God's work (Bartoňková et al., 1971, pp. 304–307). Heretics should be approached in a highly strict way and are placed at the same level as murderers. Such an attitude towards heretics is a reflection of the fight for the purity of the church and Christian teachings, since the early medieval church was involved in intense ideological as well as political battles against various interpretations of Christian teachings. That is why it was vital, albeit at the expense of strict punishments, to strengthen the status of the Christian church and the clergy in society; moreover, it was necessary to strengthen the Christian faith in society and its inhabitants. Similarly strict sanctions were imposed in the area of sorcery and all kinds of seers (Bartoňková et al., 1971, p. 333).

In this part, *Nomocanon* also pays attention to punishment for murder, premeditated abortion, adultery of lay men and women, abduction of girls with the intention of marrying them against their own will and/or the will of their parents and the upper class, which was strictly forbidden and punished. Similarly, bigamy in all its forms was forbidden and punished. In the same group of sins in the area of marriage and sexual ethics, or morality, is bestiality, which was punished most strictly of all human sins (25 years of penitence) (Bartoňková et al., 1971, pp. 334–347).

⁵ Historians claim that the Moravian translation of the *Nomocanon* was not merely an interpretation of the Greek original *Synagogy* by St John the Scholastic, Patriarch of Constantinople (565–77), which included materials ranging as far as the Council of Chalcedon (451). In a sense, however, this was a new self-standing work (Bartoňková et al., 1971, p. 210). Methodius is considered the author of the translation, who, however, in a significant way, reduced the original extent of Scholastic's *Synagogy*. Cyril Vasil' claims that the Moravian *nomocanon* only contains 37.5% of all canons in contrast to *Synagogy* by St John the Scholastic (Vasil', 2000, p. 73). At the same time, he used the *Syntagma* structure of 14 titles, which is why, according to him, it would be appropriate to call this *nomocanon* *Methodius' Syntagma* (Vasil', 2000, p. 71).

Characteristics and assessment of Christian ethics in Great Moravia

Nomocanon is the most complex legal and moral code from the times of Great Moravia, as it contains a summary of the most significant moral problems of the period and definitions of Christian ethical norms valid for basic areas regarding the civic activities of the inhabitants of Great Moravia. *Nomocanon*, together with *Judicial law for laymen*, *The rules of the holy fathers* and *Adhortation to rulers* formed the fundamentals of Christian ethics and morality in Great Moravia, which could be considered a highly significant outcome of Constantine (Cyril) and Methodius' Byzantine mission to Great Moravia. With regard to their activity among Moravians, the cultural and religious impact on the lives of Great Moravians is emphasised as well as their role in the creation of language, literature, and translation of works; however, no one has yet paid attention to the fact that, by translating original works from Greek into Church Slavonic, they formed the fundamentals of Christian ethics and morality in Great Moravia, as they determined norms of behaviour and actions of Christians, starting with laymen, clerics, priests, up to bishops, which also concerned the upper classes.

I think that just like *Ecloga* had the ambition to morally reform the Byzantine Empire and create a New Rome (Constantinople), the above Great Moravian literary writings had the same ambition, albeit without expressing it explicitly. Unlike Constantinople (or Byzantium), which was a culturally and religiously rather well developed powerful world centre, Great Moravia had only recently been Christianised and the status of Christianity among princes as well as the general population was presumably quite weak, a great number of pagan customs and traditions were kept and, possibly, pagan gods were worshiped, who were much more 'accommodating' and 'understanding' of the existing life of princes and common Moravians. Although direct moral imperatives are not expressed solidly in the existing statements contained in the literary works in question, in reality they are the core of all the documents, as it concerns a formalised explicit form of the norms of Christian ethics and morality and an implicitly formulated form of Christian moral values, which the norms in question follow. The above literary works can be considered the main ethical writings of the Great Moravia period.

The emphasis of the centralisation of the enforcement of judicial power and the refusal of individualised and subjective execution of punishment for unjust actions can be considered another highly significant aspect, especially in *Judicial law for laymen*. This involved a great strengthening of the state power in the country and a transition from a tribal to a feudal legal system where the power of individual tribal chiefs was replaced by a central power in the form of a single ruler or king. Here, monotheistic Christianity played a positive role, as a similarity between a single Christian God and a feudal ruler, or a monarch, arose, which replaced the previous polytheistic pagan system and a corresponding system of tribal chiefs. Centralisation of power, also with the aid of Christianity, enhanced the efficiency of the execution of power and its functioning at all levels, naturally within the given social, economic, political, ideological, cultural, religious, etc. environment. This also applied to the contemporary morality of medieval, including Great Moravian, society.

Should the characteristics of early, or medieval, Christian ethics be mentioned, as expressed by Cardman, Meeks, Osborn, and especially Sidgwick, it is also true with regard to Great Moravian society and its literary and ethical, or ethical-legal, writings, that they functioned as instructions of how to live well in the spirit of Christian ethics and morality. The basis of these teachings, values and norms differed from those of the ancient era, i.e. they followed the understanding of the Christian God as the highest good embodied by Jesus Christ as the model of behaviour and actions. In the period of Antiquity, the focus was on how to live well in the context of ancient society and realise the values required by society. In the case of Great Moravian society and its code of ethics, fulfilment of needs and requirements following social intentions was also concerned; however, this society had adopted the Christian faith and strived to implement its moral values in the everyday life of society and its inhabitants.

In the Christian ethics known in Great Moravia, the primary focus was not on the development of the individual, but mainly the fulfilment of requirements related to the behaviour and actions of an individual with regard to society, or, more precisely, to God. These, for a believer, stemmed from Christian teachings, including Christian ethics and morality. From an autonomous moral agent in ancient times, a Christian individual becomes a heteronomous moral agent whose behaviour and actions are subjected to external requirements and his own development is merely a function in the fulfilment of social interests and needs on the one hand and, on the other hand, realising transcendental goals related to life after death, which was the main focus of medieval society and man.

The main literary and ethical writings in Great Moravia do not directly deal with the care of the self; this topic can be rather found as part of other documents, such as *The Life of Constantine* and *The Life of Methodius*. In these literary works, there are passages dealing with a description of Constantine (Cyril) and Methodius being forced to leave their hectic lives and enter monasteries, where, in the quiet, they contemplated on spiritual matters directed at religious elevation (Kantor, 1983, pp. 33, 41, 65, 109). Nevertheless, in the main literary and ethical works of Great Moravia, one can find indirect mentions of the care of the self via the emphasis on repentance, the need to regret one's sins, which is, however, presented as punishment rather than a positive programme for the formation and development of the Christian faith and morality.

All the above main literary and ethical writings are, to a great extent, influenced by the fact they formulate a Christian code of ethics in a negative way, i.e. as a set of prohibitions and punishment threats, which is partially connected to their legal character, as this resulted from the effort to increase their importance, as well as enforcement, in the life of Great Moravian society. Such character of the main literary and ethical documents, especially *Judicial law for laymen*, *The rules of the holy fathers* and *Nomocanon* was a reaction to the existing situation in Great Moravia, which means that it reflected the need to cope with the persisting customs and traditions in the behaviour of its inhabitants. Mircea Eliade calls these (in general) archetypal types of behaviour and actions found in almost all primitive, as well as in a great number of traditional, including pre-Christian, religions (Eliade, 1959, pp. 10, 27–29, 34–36).

From the overview of the main topics of early Christian ethics it follows that literary and ethical works of Great Moravia dealt with almost all main issues forming the core of not only early Christian ethics, but also medieval Christian ethics in general. Sexual ethics, including marriage, was paid greatest attention to in all main Great Moravian literary and ethical writings and concern was also extended to the topic of asceticism, since the issue of purity in various forms, especially sexual 'purity' in marriage as well as in relationships between men and women in general (including the purity of intentions) was also dealt with. Martyrdom and suffering is not directly included in the main literary and ethical works, it is rather found in *The Life of Constantine* and *The Life of Methodius*, where, by means of the stories of both Thessaloniki brothers, their suffering comes to the forefront, which is most significantly presented with regard to the fate of Methodius who was captured, imprisoned and tortured by Bavarian bishops (Kantor, 1983, pp. 119–127; Bartoňková et al., 1969, pp. 167–170). In this category also belong a great number of hardships that Constantine (Cyril) and Methodius had to face during their operations in Great Moravia caused by the Frankish clergy and its bishops, who stirred up a lot of intrigue and ill feeling with the intention of getting Methodius accused of heresy before the pope and prevent his further activity in Great Moravia and Pannonia (Bartoňková et al., 1967, p. 231).

Should one accept Cardman's classification of the topics dealt with by early Christian ethics into two areas, individual and social ethics (Cardman, 2008, pp. 932–956), then, it could be stated that literary and ethical Great Moravian works are even more complex than it would first seem, as they contain individual ethics (although it is not the focus) as well as social ethics.

Individual ethics was covered above. As far as social ethics is concerned, for instance the topic of poverty, one can find solutions to theft-related problems (Bartoňková et al., 1971, pp. 138–146, 192–194) although this could also be regarded as a negative programme, since no literary and ethical writing deals with how to resolve the problem of poverty, but attention is only paid to it when it comes to the surface and harms society or individuals and the thief is to be punished. This means that attention is only paid to the protection of property owned by an individual or society, including the church, but neither community nor the literary and ethical works in question dealt with poverty as such.

Much great focus goes to other pressing contemporary topics, especially the fight against heresies and heretics with the aim of supporting official explanations of Christian teachings adopted by Christian ecumenical councils. This also transpired in the fates of Constantine (Cyril) and Methodius who were, on several occasions, accused of heresy not only for using a Slavic liturgical language but also for conflicts present in the given period regarding the trinity teachings (filioque – i.e. deriving the origins of the Holy Spirit not only from the Holy Father but also His Son) (Bartoňková et al., 1967, p. 225), where both brothers held the view of the Byzantine church on refusing novelties which had been not approved by any council. According to preserved literary works, this conflict was officially the main reason for expelling Methodius' disciples from the Great Moravian lands, as they refused to acknowledge the practices of the western rite church, also strongly supported by the Frankish clergy (Bartoňková et al., 1967, p. 231).

Spiritual and secular elites were also a significant part of, especially, literary and ethical writings, as solving conflicts related to the behaviour and actions of Great Moravians often involved the clerical hierarchy, who strived to disengage from the authority of the secular upper class and took possession of the right to judge the secular upper class, which resulted in a great number of conflicts and, according to some authors, also (could have) contributed to king Svatopluk taking the side of the Frankish clergy in their conflict with Methodius' disciples. Apparently, the Frankish clergy was more lenient in judging the sins of the secular upper class, including Svatopluk's profligate life and polygamy (Bartoňková et al., 1967, p. 213). This may also have regarded the behaviour of other magnates, which was criticised by Methodius in his *Adhortation to rulers* (Bartoňková et al., 1971, pp. 199–204).

I think that in relation to the literary writings regarding the efforts of Constantine (Cyril) and Methodius' mission to introduce Christian values and norms into the Great Moravian social and moral life, it could be stated that it primarily concerned Christian social ethics, as the Christian community was the main object in the effort to pursue moral reform. All requirements for the behaviour and actions of an individual regard the interests and needs of the Christian community of which an individual Christian believer is a member. In the articles of *Judicial law for laymen* or the titles of *Nomocanon*, it is not an individual Christian and his life lived in accordance with the values and norms of Christian ethics that is the goal, but rather the needs and requirements of a Christian community which an individual is to respect and realise; i.e. to live a life which would be beneficial for the entire Christian community.

Since a primary recorded form of introducing the values and norms of Christian ethics in the social life of Great Moravia is concerned, attention is not really paid to more complex issues regarding the relationship between the earthly and celestial worlds. All requirements are primarily connected to the earthly world, i.e. solving moral problems in the everyday lives of the faithful with the end to increase the awareness of values and norms of the Christian faith and ethics. The process of adopting Christianity was often quick and superficial, sometimes even violent, without actual internal identification with the Christian faith and acceptance of its values and norms regarding the behaviour and actions of Christianised members of pagan nations and countries.

In the context of the existing studies, I hold the opinion that, in Great Moravia, a Christian code of ethics came into being which, in the form of literary works, expresses the fundamental values and norms of Christian social ethics, which were supposed to regulate and direct the behaviour and actions of Great Moravians. From the above analysis of the literary writings in question originating in Great Moravia it could be concluded that one of the main matters of interest was the morality of Great Moravians. All literary works relevant from the viewpoint of state administration are, to a great extent, aimed at directing, or regulating, social, or interpersonal, relationships in the context of Christian ethical values. Even though they often came in the form of a clerical or secular law, in reality, it was a Christian code of ethics. At this point, it could be stated (also following Sidgwick) that this was a contemporary form of Christian ethics. Thus, it could be concluded that all the literary writings that have so far been presented as legal documents or files are actually ethical, or ethical-legal, documents, since it is ethics which forms their core and is their main content, even though they take the form of a clerical or secular law.

Conclusion

Based on the assessment and analysis of the presence of the main elements, or topics, of early Christian ethics, as Cardman and Sidgwick defined them, the existence of Christian ethics in Great Moravia can be confirmed in the sense of ethics dealing with morality, i.e. the behaviour and actions of people living in Great Moravia. In spite of the fact that none of the literary works includes the word 'ethical' or is a theoretical reflection or elaboration of a compact concept, in essence, a fairly well elaborated system with the existence of an essential Christian code of ethics (*Judicial law for laymen*) was formed, supplemented by further Christian ethical codes (*The rules of the holy fathers* and *Nomocanon*), and also takes the form of an analysis of its application to the life of Great Moravian society (*Adhortation to rulers*). Apart from these, there are also other literary works (*The Life of Constantine* and *The Life of Methodius*) which support the presented values and norms of Christian ethics included in the main ethical writings. I hold the view that, albeit in a reduced form, in the twenty years of Byzantine mission in Great Moravia, a rather complex model of Christian ethics came into being.

Constantine (Cyril) and Methodius can, thus, be indirectly considered the first ethicists of the given region during the existence of Great Moravia and their operations in this territory. It is true that they did not form an ethical system or write any philosophical or ethical works in spite of the fact that Constantine (Cyril) was called the 'Philosopher'. Their work can be, at best, regarded at the level of ethical and moral views of Constantine (Cyril) and Methodius, since, by the choice of works, their translations or completions (such as in the case of *Judicial law for laymen*) or their statements contained in *Adhortation to rulers*, they created the first ever version of a Christian ethical (or moral) code of ethics in Great Moravia, based on original works by missionaries, as well as Byzantine philosophical-ethical and legal traditions reflecting the needs of the era and its people. They truly significantly contributed to the development of Christian ethics and morality in the given region, which was followed by the literary works of their disciples in Bulgaria and, later, Kievan Rus', after they were expelled from Great Moravia. Their literary, philosophical, ethical and legal work later morphed into the form of Russian medieval codes of law, which decided the character of Christian morality and law in Russia till as late as the 16th century. This is where the immense credit and significance of Constantine (Cyril) and Methodius' work for literature, philosophy, ethics and law lies.

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Morals and culture at the time of *Decameron*

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the theme of the moral condition during the Black Death epidemic in Florence within Boccaccio's group of young people in his *Decameron*. The disease in the region of Florence caused many existential and moral tragedies. A group of young people transferred the joy of life and moral principles to the gardens outside the city of the disease. They describe different moral and philosophical thoughts in their songs at the end of each day.² These songs represent ten parts of nature and form the basis on which the allegorical character of the works is further developed. They are also carriers of the laws of nature and natural wisdom.

Keywords: *Decameron* cornice, Aristotle's ten categories, Black Death, epidemic, moral

Introduction

The world around us is not a vague whole. It works according to the principles which determine different ways of its functionalities. These principles form The Categories defined by Aristotle in his work of the same name. Aristotle describes the functioning of nature using these ten principles and The Physics³ interprets them. This is my own personal attempt to interpret Boccaccio's *Decameron* as an intellectual product of the times it was written in using references I have researched for the last five years.

“Since we are exploring nature as a beginning of movement and change, we must not neglect to define what movement is, lest unclearness about movement lead us into inevitable unclearness about nature; and then, having defined movement, we must in the same manner take up the terms which follow from it. Thus, movement being continuous, what is infinite becomes evident primarily in what is continuous, with the consequence that the continuous is often defined in terms of the infinite: “That is continuous which is infinitely divisible”. In addition, movement is held to be impossible without place, the void, and time. Clearly, then, we must investigate and find out what we can about each of these topics, not only for the reasons stated but also because the features mentioned are general and common to all the things with which our science deals and a theory of special traits must come after theory of common traits” (Aristotle, 1961, p. 41). The Categories can be divided into ten parts as Aristotle presents them: *substantia, quantitas, qualitas, ubi, quando, habitus, actio, situs, relatio, passio*.

Boccaccio and his Aristotelian cornice of *Decameron*

The ten young people in Boccaccio's *Decameron* represent ten parts of nature and form the basis on which to develop allegory in the work. They are the carriers of the laws of nature and natural wisdom. Love is also the common character, which covers all the songs. From essence to passion, love in all its forms can cover a diverse identity of these ten young people in the harmony of life and its moral and sensible human existence laws. “Everyone says, I am, and then when he talks about his love, at the same time he also betrays his identity. Boccaccio in these verses brings together the original lyrics through a complex metamorphosis that reworks the doctrine by translating it into a language commonly used in love poetry. Only the person who knows the original text can identify it, cut out the verses of poetry, and make it again a

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² A hundred novels are narrated in ten days, at the end of each day a song is sung by one of the characters of the cornice.

³ The Physics takes its title from the Greek word *phusis*, which translates more accurately as “the order of nature”

philosophical text. The way the author creates its own system of doctrine, shows his extraordinary abilities” (Gagliardi, 1999, p. 181).

Decameron is the story of the journey behind the search for natural wisdom, which determines the goodness and the greatness that a person can achieve in different situations of a separate and common existence. This path forms a framework in which individual novels are inserted in logical order. The young people, after leaving Florence, are switching from the negativity of the Black Death⁴ to the utopia⁵ of a new beginning. Their route is displayed on a map of symbolic events, which are, for them, to become stops on the road to knowledge. Their path forms their spiritual development, on which they must go through tragic events so that they can recreate the world, destroyed by the apocalypse of the Black Death and human inability to face destruction. The path forms a closed circle and the young people, after the search has successfully been completed, will eventually return to where it all started. They eventually find out that the meaning of being is living, which is also the meaning of the existence of man.

“The unclear silence of the joyful entertainment of young people hides the idea that is not to be clearly accessible, the deepest idea of Decameron. Poetry takes over the role of guardian of hidden ideas, disturbing ideas, intellectual expressions of faith in contrast with the power of prohibitions. What is illegal must become unreadable. In these songs one can understand how the author transforms syllogism⁶ into metaphors, and the forbidden language of poetry creates a mask under which the philosophical discussion can be further developed. The apron of irrelevancy, which poetry gives to the deepest idea, allows a silent dialogue with those living in the same intellectual harmony in the common understanding” (Gagliardi, 1999, p. 199). At the end of the day, ten songs reveal the intellectual identity of their performers, doctrinal content, and offer interconnectivity between love and sense through the ten Aristotelian categories.

The primary meaning of the work is the part of being, nature and everything. When you move to a lower level of text, you can discover that the work itself is organized in multiple layers. Through the symbols for the ten categories one penetrates the depth of the doctrine and the story itself, and discovers not only the core, which Boccaccio has inserted deep inside, but also a dialogue with his own times which highlights similarities and differences. Being is also an analogy that applies equally to all the categories. Being is good, true, substance, nature, life. Here, naturally, it is not for Boccaccio to define being as an existence, as a metaphysical abstract concept, but to verify its content in the context of the gender and human nature of the law. First, Boccaccio wants to verify the meaning of the claim: “The substance is the cause of the existence of all things, and for living things to exist is to live, and the soul is their cause and principle” (Aristotle, 2018, p. 28). Gagliardi writes in regard: “Boccaccio almost certainly is not the author of this symbolic statement. For symbols to be understood, they must be part of the Universe that communicates them. It is very likely that this statement originates in the intellectual environment of Florence, if it has not been part of the heritage of poets and painters” (Gagliardi, 1999, p. 202).

The path of the symbols is the same, on which the ideas come. The analogy of the fresco *The triumph of death* at the necropolis in Pisa was pointed to a few times.⁷ The theme of the ten Aristotelian categories, which can be seen in the ten young people (three men and seven

⁴ The epidemic which devastated Medieval Europe, known as the Black Death, struck particularly hard among urban populations, including the Italian city of Florence. A major center of art, religion, and politics. Caused by the bacteria *Yersinia pestis*, it killed an estimated 30 to 60% of Europe’s population.

⁵ An imagined place or state of things in which everything is perfect.

⁶ An instance of a form of reasoning in which a conclusion is drawn from two given or assumed propositions (premises); a common or middle term is present in the two premises but not in the conclusion, which may be invalid (e.g. all dogs are animals; all animals have four legs; therefore all dogs have four legs).

⁷ *Triumph of death* (former fresco, 14th century) attributed to Buonamico Buffalmacco at Camposanto of Pisa, Tuscany, Italy.

women), has also been present in the intellectual circles around Boccaccio even before he published his works. Their voices reverse the symbolism of the fresco and transform the triumph of death into the triumph of life. “Fresco becomes an inverted text and the antidotes submit a dilemma that can only be resolved by the one who knows its logic and rules” (Gagliardi, 1999, p. 202).

Songs are built to duplicate the meaning and truth, on a double level of clarity and assume two different readers. One who knows the rules can decipher the hidden meaning. A reader who does not belong to an inner circle can only benefit from the surface of the text. Technical, logical and poetic knowledge links the text and allows its true meaning to pass under the obvious: its victim or culprit are not only victim of Brother Cipolla⁸ but they could also be other readers.

Describing each character from Decameron and her/his songs at the end of each narrative day

1) Emilia: Substantia, Substance⁹

The most important of the ten categories is substance. The term “substance” (ousia) is an abstract noun formed from the participle “being” (ousa). It might literally be translated as “beingness” (Cf. *Phaedo* 65e, where Plato says that the Forms are the ousia of sensible objects).¹⁰ The term is thus a traditional one, but Aristotle gives it the new prominence. “Looking at what he says about substance will reveal the main features of his “ontology”, his understanding of what exists and of the nature of being. Aristotle takes the hallmark of substance to be that, if it did not exist, nothing else would either” (Bradshaw, 1998, p. 48).

The essence, which is present in the first story, is the first, Divine essence, God. According to the Aristotelian text, God talks about himself, about his naturalness. At the outset, only the indication of God can be noticed, while the second part of the text contains scattered components of the original text:

Whene’er I mirror me, I see therein. That good which still contenteth heart and spright.
Nor fortune new nor thought of old can win. To dispossess me of such dear delight.
What other object, then, could fill my sight, Enough of pleasance e’er. To kindle in my
breast a new desire? (Boccaccio, 1886, p. 47).

The poetic text is a reprocessing of the twelfth book - *The Metaphysics* - by Aristotle¹¹ with comments made by Averroes.¹² “The obvious dualism among themselves and others is due to

⁸ The tale of Frate Cipolla, one of Dioneo’s contributions, finds themselves distinctive among the ten stories by virtue of their position (the last in each formal segment, with one exception) and freedom of argument (chosen by Dioneo himself, independent of the group’s wishes).

⁹ Substance (ousia, “essence” or “substance”). Substance is defined as that which can neither be predicated of anything nor be said to be in anything. Hence, this man or that particular tree are substances. Later in the text, Aristotle calls these particulars “primary substances”, to distinguish them from secondary substances, which are universals and can be predicated. Hence, Socrates is a primary substance, while man is a secondary substance. Man is predicated of Socrates, and therefore all that is predicated of man is predicated of Socrates.

¹⁰ Some think that nothing besides perceptible things are substances, but others, like Plato, think that other things exist and that eternal things are more real. Thus Plato lists the Forms and mathematical objects as two substances, and the substance of perceptible things as a third (1028 i6-21). After mentioning modifications of Plato’s view by his successors, Aristotle concludes that the project is to determine which of the foregoing statements are correct and which are not, which things are substances, whether there are substances besides perceptible things or not, in what sense these perceptible substances exist, whether there is some substance that exists apart from material things, and if so why and how, or whether there is no such substance in addition to perceptible things.

¹¹ What is known to us as *metaphysics* is what Aristotle called “first philosophy”. *Metaphysics* involves a study of the universal principles of being, the abstract qualities of existence itself.

¹² Averroes, medieval Latin Averroes, also called Ibn Rushd, Arabic in full Abū al-Walīd Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Rushd, (born 1126, Córdoba [Spain]—died 1198, Marrakech, Almohad empire [now in

the plurality of God's names and the way God reports itself. God is the beauty and desire (fascination) after God there is only a desire for himself, after his own glory. God knows only himself. In God, the entity meets with an object in love and knowledge" (Gagliardi, 1999, p. 207). Under these conditions, God becomes the goal of human knowledge as knowledge of himself. It is in Him where intellectual fortune is satisfied according to Averroism.¹³ If in a state of happiness, where we find ourselves now, God is also constantly present, it is amazing. If He is in a state of even greater happiness than us, it is even more amazing. And He is in that state. He is also the life too, because the activity of intelligence is life, and he is the activity. His activity, which exists in itself, is the culminal and eternal life. In fact, we say that God is living, eternal and great, and so God belongs to eternal and infinite life, and thus this is God. "The substance loves primarily itself and thinks of itself. The beauty in this philosophical circle brings together all connotations. Beauty and good are the basic concepts that characterize God and with this duality the mind is split, mind that thinks of itself, and the beauty as a desire for itself" (Gagliardi, 1999, p. 207).

I burn for mine own charms with such a fire,
Methinketh that I ne'er
Of other love shall reck or have desire
(Boccaccio, 1886, p. 45).

The good that makes the mind (man) happy is God. The rational knowledge of God can be summarized in this synthesis. This is Averroistic concept of rational happiness. A sense of enjoyment for oneself has a common origin in God and is not preceded by anything. God is the subject of the pleasure of himself, because he is also the object at the same time. Therefore, there is no other desire. Desire and the object of desire have been mirrored one into another from the very beginning.

What other object, then, could fill my sight,
Enough of pleasance e'er
To kindle in my breast a new desire?
(Boccaccio, 1886, p. 45).

"The Answer is: none. It is worth noting that the concept of the object became part of the intellectual language, as seen in the work of Aristotle, in terms of aim and end, to which the peace of desire and knowledge of someone, or something is leading. There can be nothing new in God because the relationship with himself is closed and formed only by himself" (Gagliardi, 1999, p. 208).

2) Pampinea: Quantitas, Quantity¹⁴

The main theme of the second song is also love. The original text, which speaks about the Categories, is scattered in the episode and can only be collected in its complexity. All the characters of the quantity are present without reciprocal alignment and only function as a new

Morocco]), an influential Islamic religious philosopher who integrated Islamic traditions into ancient Greek thought.

¹³ The doctrines of Averroes, whose teachings were mainly written in the form of Neoplatonically influenced commentaries on Aristotle differed from Avicennism in affirming that the whole world is created all at once by God directly, eternally, and continuously and that individual souls are not immortal except insofar as they participate in a universal intellect.

¹⁴ Quantity (*poson*, "how much"). This is the extension of an object and may be either discrete or continuous. Furthermore, its parts may or may not have relative positions to each other. All medieval discussions about the nature of the continuum, of the infinite and the infinitely divisible, are a long footnote to this text. It is of great importance in the development of mathematical ideas in the medieval and late Scholastic period.

warp. Concepts like “Each”, “Little”, “More”, “Larger”, “The same”, “How many” form part of the language of this category and determine its logical function. The relationship between sizes and the size itself is displayed through the superior, which defines the correlation between different parts. We can go through the whole song and watch a tangle of quantitative relationships that make up the real link between the person singing and the subject of their love.

Thou settest, Love, before these eyes of mine
 Whenas thy fire I entered the first day,
 A youngling so beseen
 With valour, worth and loveliness divine,
 That never might one find a goodlier, nay,
 Nor yet his match, I ween.
 So sore I burnt for him I still must e'en
 Sing, blithe, of him with thee, my lord most high
 (Boccaccio, 1886, p. 126).

“In these verses, quantity is clearly expressed. It is also supported by negation in the lyrics. The opposite of the same is uneven. Both expressions correspond to Aristotle’s concept of quantity” (Gagliardi, 1999, p. 209). Boethius¹⁵ explains the fact that, just after the essence, the author deals with quantity, even before quality. The reason for this is that the first, unlike the second, covers everything. Each thing is one or more, it is still the same mass, which itself does not form or poses qualitative definition.

3) Lauretta: Qualitas, Quality¹⁶

All species come from God and connect with matter to create individual living creatures. The type or universal form becomes a basic form of beings, while the connection with the material condemns them to death. He who reigns over the sky and the stars, created me graceful and beautiful for his enjoyment, and gave the creatures down there a sign of beauty too, the beauty that marks his face. “God created a universal form to give every sensible creature a sign of beauty that is around him. But the beauty that is around God is God himself. God is the beauty that knows itself and loves itself. This can be understood as the most complex part of Averroism. The theory on intelligent species, science, and the way to get from the species that originated from the matter to the vision of God” (Gagliardi, 1999, p. 216).

Inside the beauty that a person can experience and which can bring him to the knowledge of the beauty of God, hides the indirect expression of the definite. The struggle between the spiritual nature of the species and their matter, the weakness that brings death, represents the critical moment of individuality. Species remain versatile, but the creature is identified by gaining a tangible body. The final comment of the author gives this contrast a realistic understanding of the song with the way he interprets it. The divine, the best and most real reason. This difference appears in all the songs. From sensory perception, through the intellect (high because it was cultivated by knowledge and virtues by the model of Dante Alighieri).¹⁷ There is an obvious reference to the first song and to God, which is mirrored (eternally, indefinitely) in its own glory. From the beauty of woman to the beauty of God, notice here the path of intellectual knowledge, which assumes previous sensory knowledge of the form. “We

¹⁵ Boethius (c. 480-524/525) was one of the most influential early medieval philosophers. His most famous work, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, was the most widely translated and reproduced secular work from the 8th century until the end of the Middle Ages.

¹⁶ Quality (*poion*, “of what kind or quality”). This is a determination which characterizes the nature of an object.

¹⁷ Regarded as one of the finest poets that Italy has ever produced, Dante Alighieri is also celebrated as a major influence on Western culture. His masterpiece, the epic poem *Commedia* (The Divine Comedy), is universally known as one of the great poems of world literature.

are totally in the Aristotelian physics (in texts such as *De generatione et corruptione*¹⁸ and all those Aristotle's [sic] works where principles such as form, matter, lack of the form are mentioned). There is a complete discrepancy, the contrast that finally leads to death. Lack does not know the form just because of the ontological relationship contradicts the form. On the other hand, the contrast with deficiency, which is expressed here in human form (low appreciation, despising me) is part of the quality" (Gagliardi, 1999, p. 216).

4) Filostrato: Ubi, Position¹⁹

Position is the settlement of personality in a certain state of skill, quality and passion. Filostrato's "Abito" represents an internal condition that becomes permanent over time. These are character definitions that are gradually acquired and difficult to remove. Filostrato's *habitus* (his state) is the fruit of unreturned love that brings hopelessness and death. It was a woman who left him for another man. "The time logic should give an answer to the question of the importance of the persistence of the individual's internal status. The link between the past, presence and the future shows the continuity of anxiety: this is the *habitus*" (Gagliardi, 1999, p. 224). "However, Fortune, the enemy of the happy, denied him this solace, for that, whatever might have been the cause, the lady, after complying awhile with Tedaldo's wishes, suddenly altogether withdrew her good graces from him and not only refused to hearken to any message of his, but would on no wise see him; wherefore he fell into a dire and cruel melancholy; but his love for her had been so hidden that none guessed it to be the cause of his chagrin. After he had in divers [sic] ways studied a man to recover the love he seemed he had lost without his fault and finding all his labour vain, he resolved to withdraw from the world" (Boccaccio, 1886, p. 158).

"This is an 'amore heroes', a deadly disease that has already evolved in [the] poetic development of Guido Cavalcanti.²⁰ Maybe it's him, who is hiding in a persona that speaks the poetic language of Cavalcanti. In the second story of that day, the young man finds himself in the same situation" (Gagliardi, 1999, p. 224). Obviously, habits are statuses that last long and are hard to change. Habit is different from skill because it persists longer and resists change, while skill can be changed more easily. Filostrato himself points out that his state of being submissive to love and grief has already become a habit, and that it has not changed since his beloved has left him and remains the same until his death.

The habit Filostrato is singing about is the fruit of missing love. The loss of a loved one is the cause of enormous pain in his soul, which resulted in the loss of love for life and desire to die. To be able to define the *habitus*, it is necessary to meet the condition of persistence over time. In this case it is time inside the story. The past and probable future show that the state of anxiety is already rooted, and it is impossible to eliminate its consequences. The reason that caused the grief has already become a part of nature and transformed its existence into fate.

¹⁸ On Generation and Corruption (Ancient Greek: Περὶ γενέσεως καὶ φθορᾶς; Latin: *De Generatione et Corruptione*), also known as *On Coming to Be and Passing Away*) is a treatise by Aristotle. Like many of his texts, it is both scientific, part of Aristotle's biology, and philosophical. The philosophy is essentially empirical; as in all of Aristotle's works, the deductions made about the unexperienced and unobservable are based on observations and real experiences.

¹⁹ Position (*keisthai*, "to lie"). The examples Aristotle gives indicate that he meant a condition of rest resulting from an action: 'lying', 'sitting'. Thus, position may be taken as the end point for the corresponding action. The term is, however, frequently taken to mean the relative position of the parts of an object (usually a living object), given that the position of the parts is inseparable from the state of rest implied.

²⁰ Guido Cavalcanti (c. 1255 – 1300) was an Italian poet who was one of the founding members of one of the most important movements in all of medieval poetry, the *Dolce Stil Novo* (*The Sweet New Style*) which in the eyes of many scholars would mark the transition from classical poetry of the medieval world to the new emerging styles of what would become the Renaissance.

Love, with clasped hands I cry thee mercy, so
 Thou mayst betake thee where my lord doth dwell.
 Say that I love and long for him, for lo,
 My heart he hath inflamed so sadly well;
 Yea, for the fire wherewith I'm all aglow,
 I fear to die nor yet the hour can tell
 When I shall part from pain so fierce and fell
 As that which, longing, for his sake I dree
 In shame and fear; ah me,
 For God's sake, cause him know my torment dire
 (Boccaccio, 1886, p. 488).

“Pain and crying, which were born in the abandoned heart, still persist. This is the *habitus*. The state of pain turns to the state of hope. Filostrato speaks of the presence from which the unchanged future can be estimated. His knowledge was rooted into the constancy and became a fate that can no longer be decommitted” (Gagliardi, 1999, p. 224). It confirms the mortality of the soul of an individual but remains an unspoken finding of the immortality of the sense of human beings as one of the species. This is a key point of the whole Averroism of the soul, which does not allow for ambiguity. Filostrato believes in the mortality of the personal soul. At the same time, religious virtues can also be found in the text: faith, hope, mercy. All these virtues associate man with God. The soul, which, at the moment of death curses faith, hope and mercy, indirectly curses God himself. This soul is foreign to the Christian vision. The death of the soul is suddenly confirmed in a single idea, the absence, or rejection of the Christian God, and the Christian vision of man. Here is a deeper, hidden meaning in the text that opens not only the following text, but where the sense snaps into the next.

5) Dioneo: Quando, Time²¹

“Since every motion is in time and a motion may occupy any time, and the motion of everything that is in motion may be either quicker or slower, both quicker motion and slower motion may occupy any time: and this being so, it necessarily follows that time also is continuous. By continuous I mean that which is divisible into divisibles that are infinitely divisible: and if we take this as the definition of continuous, it follows necessarily that time is continuous” (Aristotle, 2019, p. 747). “The presence as a moment in which there may be memory along with expectations, is located at this border, where memories of the past are suspended and smoothly pass to expectations of the future, which once occurs” (Gagliardi, 1999, p. 227). Dioneo is singing about this mental state, the moment of suspension between memories of love and the expectation of a happy future.

O Love, the amorous light
 That beameth from yon fair one's lovely eyes
 Hath made me thine and hers in servant-guise.

The splendour of her lovely eyes, it wrought
 That first thy flames were kindled in my breast,
 Passing thereto through mine;
 Yea, and thy virtue first unto my thought
 Her visage fair it was made manifest,
 Which picturing, I twine
 And lay before her shrine
 All virtues, that to her I sacrifice,

²¹ (*pote*, “when”). Position in relation to the course of events.

Become the new occasion of my sighs
(Boccaccio, 1886, p. 294).

This confirms that love, as for Aristotelean knowledge, comes through vision. The imagination of the face of a beloved woman thus emphasizes the difference between a real person and a sighting. The power of imagination thus can tame the overwhelming tension of desires and in the absence of a beloved woman will not allow the predominant tendency to self-destruction. The sighting of a beloved woman thus creates an independent inner life. “We should not doubt that Boccaccio himself is identified by the picture of Dioneo. Not just because he re-used a name that had previously belonged to him. But there is an autobiographical follow-up in the intellectual style of fantasy love, apparently referring to the ‘Amorosa visione’” (Gagliardi, 1999, p. 227).

6) Elissa: Habitus, Have²²

The category shall indicate ownership where one thing is the property of the other. Similar to how a woman is owned by a man. This is the case with this love song where the woman sings about how she feels caught by the man who refuses her. “Possession is denominated in many ways. In one way as the action of a thing according to the nature of that thing, or according to the impulse of it. Wherefore, both a fever is said to possess a man and tyrants are said to possess states and those that are clothed a garment. And in another way we term possession as that in whatever anything is inherent, as being receptive; as, for instance, the brass possesses the form of a statue, and the body possesses disease” (Aristotle, 2007, p. 118, 119). “The song of Elizina presents the picture of a bird, a big vulture that plunging on his prey, flies over her and keeps her clutched in her claws. On the background the story flows. She, a young girl who found herself in the struggles of love and gave up any defense because he thought she would find peace this way. When she was spotted defenseless by the cruel tyrant Cupid, he immediately plunged and rushed her claws to her to imprison her” (Gagliardi, 1999, p. 231).

Then, wound about and fettered with thy chains,
To him, who for my death in evil hour
Was born, thou gav’st me, bounden, full of pains
And bitter tears; and syne within his power
He hath me and his rule’s so harsh and dour
No sighs can move the swain
Nor all my wasting complaints to set me free
(Boccaccio, 1886, p. 321).

7) Filomena: Actio, Action²³

Action and passion are in mutual relationship. It can be defined as an act of modifying something. The woman sings about the love connection, as she first experienced it and perceived it with all her senses.

If once again I chance to hold thee aye,
I will not be so fond
As erst I was to suffer thee to fly;
Nay, fast I’ll hold thee, hap of it what may,

²² State or habitus (*echein*, “to have”). The examples Aristotle gives indicate that he meant a condition of rest resulting from an affection (i.e. being acted on): ‘shod’, ‘armed’. The term is, however, frequently taken to mean the determination arising from the physical accoutrements of an object: one’s shoes, one’s arms, etc. Traditionally, this category is also called a habitus (from Latin *habere*, “to have”).

²³ Action (*poiein*, “to make” or “to do”). The production of change in some other object.

And having thee in bond,
Of thy sweet mouth my lust I'll satisfy.
Now of nought else will I
Discourse. Quick, to thy bosom come me strain;
The sheer thought bids me sing like lark at morn
(Boccaccio, 1886, p. 364).

The correlation between activity and passivity in Aristotle's categories refers to a verbal form, while these two concepts of Aristotle's are discussed in his other works. In general, activity means an act that changes something that can be changed. "There are three things in the soul that are authoritative over action and truth: sense perception, intellect, and longing. But of these, sense perception is not the origin of any action, and this is clear from the fact that beasts have sense perception but do not share in action" (Aristotle, 2011, p. 116). "Goodwill seems, therefore, to be the beginning of friendship, just the pleasure stemming from sight is the beginning of erotic love. For no one falls in love who is not first pleased by someone's appearance- though a person who delights in another's looks does not for all that fall in love, except whenever he also yearns for the person who is absent and desires his presence. In this way, therefore, it is not without goodwill to become friends, but those who have goodwill do not for all that feel friendly affection" (Aristotle, 2011, p. 196).

8) Panfilo: Situs, Place²⁴

The place itself is known and evident for Aristotle. There is something mysterious in this song, and it appears in the final verse. Where did Panfilo actually live? And where is that place which made him so happy? It is Dante's language that accompanies us to a place normally inaccessible, where full happiness can be achieved – bliss.

Who might conceive it that these arms of mine
Should anyway attain
Whereas I've held them aye,
Or that my face should reach so fair a shrine
As that, of favour fain
And grace, I've won to? Nay,
Such fortune ne'er a day
Believed me were; whence all afire am I,
Hiding the source of my lisse thereby
(Boccaccio, 1886, p. 427).

"This place, which cannot be described and approached, is supernatural. It's the way we approach God in Dante's Divine comedy and the storyteller is Dante himself who has visited this mysterious place personally. Boccaccio along with Guido Cavalcanti (Filostrato) and Dante becomes the secret hero of his work" (Gagliardi, 1999, p. 235). In order to fully understand the meaning of what Panfilo has experienced and what brings him this sense of happiness, it is important to guess where the places were. The final comments show that the experience of Panfilo compared to the other young people was exceptional. None of them can grasp the words of the song, and whatever they try, no one has captured its true meaning. When Panfilo's song ended, everything in it was explained for the present people. All of them focused on the lyrics with more intensity than appropriate, and they tried to guess why he wanted to keep secret what he sang about. They assumed different explanations, but no one was near the truth. "Despite diversity of the places that are mentioned in the song, it creates a significant space in which the identity of the character is located. Panfilo talks about places that are not tangible and belonging

²⁴ Place (*pou*, "where"). Position in relation to the surrounding environment.

to his inner world, or to the metaphysical order” (Gagliardi, 1999, p. 235). The theme of intellectual happiness has already been discussed in the first and third poem and has now returned in full significance. The song expresses intellectual happiness, which the figure tells from his own experience. Dante sees Boccaccio as the one who has experienced intellectual happiness through sensory experience of transcendence²⁵ and gained the knowledge of the highest goodness on his way to God, as he says in the Divine Comedy.

A flame of love that rest nor day nor night
I find; for, by some strong unwonted spell,
Hearing and touch
And seeing each new fires in me did light,
Wherein I burn outright
(Boccaccio, 1886, p. 364).

“As it seems Panfilò is in a state (synonym of the word *habitus*) of lasting happiness. His State of happiness surpasses it, which can be a scare of senses, because it is greater and more valuable than the happiness they offer to the senses. This is a key point where intellectual happiness replaces all biological activity and its objectives” (Gagliardi, 1999, p. 237).

9) Neifile: Relatio, Relationship²⁶

A relationship combines two things. Through a logical link, things can have a relationship with each other. The most common method of relationship is comparison. The similarity of things that can be in a reciprocal relationship is based on logical roots.

I go about the meads, considering
The vermeil flowers and golden and the white,
Roses thorn-set and lilies snowy-bright,
And one and all I fare a-likening
Unto his face who hath with love-liking
Ta'en and will hold me ever, having aye
None other wish than as his pleasures be
(Boccaccio, 1886, p. 461).

Similarity is based on the principle of substitution: the flower takes over the place of a beloved man: the pleasure of seeing flowers is like seeing his face. “Neifile is like the characters in Botticelli²⁷ paintings, she collects spring flowers on the meadow. When comparing the beauty and colors of flowers to the beauty of the face of her beloved, in her gestures there is an incarnated relationship” (Gagliardi, 1999, p. 239). “Things are relative as double to half, and treble to a third, and in general that which contains something else many times to that which is contained many times in something else, and that which exceeds to that which is exceeded. As that which can heat to that which can be heated, and that which can cut to that which can be cut, and in general as the measurable to the measure, and the active to the passive. Knowable to knowledge, and the perceptible to perception” (Aristotle, 2019, p. 2392). Properties of objects are compared through their mutual relationship. The beauty and colour of flowers is compared to the beauty of a beloved man’s face. Neifile loves and is loved, she feels the certainty of

²⁵ Existence or experience beyond the normal or physical level.

²⁶ Relation (*pros ti*, “toward something”). This is the way in which one object may be related to another.

²⁷ Sandro Botticelli, original name Alessandro di Mariano Filipepi, (born 1445, Florence [Italy]—died May 17, 1510, Florence), one of the greatest painters of the Florentine Renaissance. The Birth of Venus and Primavera are often said to epitomize, for modern viewers, the spirit of the Renaissance.

eternal love. Her only desire is to satisfy the men's wishes. The relationship of substitution can become apparent: the flower takes the place of the person through smell and sight.

Ay, and that pleasure which the eye doth prove,
By nature, of the flower's view, like delight
Doth give me as I saw the very wight
Who hath inflamed me of his dulcet love,
And what its scent thereover and above
Worketh in me, no words indeed can say;
But sighs thereof bear witness true for me.
(Boccaccio, 1886, p. 461).

"Words are not enough to express the pleasure that comes from the flowers, the physical enjoyment that crosses the senses, just as we perceive the delight of the beloved man. The relationship thus passes through the text and connects people and things in one symbolic unity to flow without obstacles" (Gagliardi, 1999, p. 241).

10) Fiammetta: Passio, Passion/Affection²⁸

Passion is the opposite of activity, but in this song, it is about singing through jealousy of passionate love. "But to these jealous men will on no wise consent; nay, those days which are gladsome for all other women they make wretcheder and more doleful than the others to their wives, keeping them yet closelier straitened and confined; and what a misery and a languishment this is for the poor creatures those only know who have proved it. Wherefore, to conclude, I say that what a woman doth to a husband who is jealous without cause should certes not be condemned, but rather commended" (Boccaccio, 1886, p. 336). The list of Aristotelian categories concludes with Fiammetta and her jealousy. The summary of all categories thus forms nature. In the Women's Valley, the bathing of young people became a depiction of the intellectual act, knowing the whole meaning, which predetermines the happiness of the knowledge of God by Averroes. The integrity and the plasticity of symbols allows Boccaccio to introduce the most complex philosophical topics. The category of passion refers to the whole nature and indicates the ability to endure something or to be transformed by an active principle. "Passion also is sometimes reckoned as courage; those who act from passion, like wild beasts rushing at those who have wounded them, thought to be brave, because brave men also are passionate; for are passion above all things is eager to rush on danger, and hence Homer's put strength into his passion' and 'aroused their spirit and passion and hard he breathed panting' and his blood boiled'. For all such expressions seem to indicate the stirring and onset of passion" (Aristotle, 2019, p. 2689). Jealousy accompanies the fierce passion and becomes the true object of the song. Love (desire) and jealousy (envy and hatred towards another woman) have one origin and affect each other. It seems that anger (desire for revenge) is a typical form of emotional jealousy.

If love came but withouten jealousy,
I know no lady born
So blithe as I were, whosoe'er she be.
If gladsome youthfulness
In a fair lover might content a maid,

²⁸ Affection (*paschein*, "to suffer" or "to undergo"). The reception of change from some other object. It is also known as passivity. It is clear from the examples Aristotle gave for action and for affection that action is to affection as the active voice is to the passive. Thus, for action he gave the example, 'to lance', 'to cauterize'; for affection, 'to be lanced', 'to be cauterized.' The term is frequently misinterpreted to mean a kind of emotion or passion.

Virtue and worth discreet,
 Valiance or gentillesse,
 Wit and sweet speech and fashions all arrayed
 In pleasantness complete,
 Certes, I'm she for whose behoof these meet
 In one; for, love-o'erborne,
 All these in him who is my hope I see
 (Boccaccio, 1886, p. 524).

Conclusion

“When this journey of knowledge ends, they will be able to return to the city. They will know how to renew social order and laws. When young people return to Florence, their initial negative experience is linked to the knowledge of natural wisdom and life, just like in the church, at the place they first saw death and destruction throughout their devastating power, the utopian moment of their journey for exploring ends there, at the place of reconciliation with death, accentuating it by the contradiction with their intellectual experience. The initial utopia thus becomes the intention, because now they know what death and destruction have brought to them” (Gagliardi, 1999, p. 181). “Protecting life is the main goal of every human and natural activity. Life is the existence of living beings” (Aristotle, 2018, p. 83), says Aristoteles in his work *On the soul*. “Life is a natural activity that refreshes itself according to the universal order until it achieves the primary goal, to the birth of a human being. Words that Pampinea said in the church become the main idea, the general law and the code to interpret the work, because it is *Logos* the principle of the sensible being.

From the metaphysical to physics, from ethics to rhetoric and politics, life is a project that expands to become the foundation of being and thinking. The goal of all goals, the greatest good that makes the next good” (Gagliardi, 1999, p. 181). When the two texts are combined, the intellectual terminology is hidden into the interior of the lingual storyboard, which repeals the specificity of the philosophical significance. This creates the text which is dissolved in another text and contains itself, veiled, and practically unidentifiable as a separate text. This is a text that no longer exists and has become a watermark of another storyboard. Once identified, dogmatic terminology must be converted into the original philosophical text and only then proves its own syntax and meaning. The final canzones of Decameron have such a structure; a weak storyline with intellectual terminology, renovated in the obvious text of love poetry.

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“True peace of mind” allegorical narrative as a tool of moral (trans)formation in J. A. Comenius’s *Labyrinth*

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Abstract

Labyrinth of the world and paradise of the heart belongs to the jewels of Czech literature. The author – Jan Amos Comenius – consciously uses allegorical narrative for didactic purposes – mainly for his own moral self-reflection in the face of suffering. His method proved to be very effective. The goal of this text is to explore the potential of the literary method from the perspective of moral (trans)formation. The key question is: How did Comenius convey the moral content of his “lesson” in the *Labyrinth*? Or in general: How does allegorical narrative work as a tool of moral (trans)formation – both for the reader and author of the text. Specifically, this paper attempts to show several literary functions of the *Labyrinth* as a tool of moral (trans)formation: the therapeutic function, the emphatic function, the imitation function, the organizational function, the performative function and the plot function.

Keywords: Comenius, *Labyrinth*, morality, (trans)formation, self-understanding, learning.

Introduction: Comenius, *Labyrinth* and education

In 1678 John Bunyan’s famous *Pilgrim’s Progress* was first published. It is an allegory about a pilgrim who wanders through the world trying to escape its vanity; after many adventures he eventually reaches the “Celestial City”, that is salvation. About half a century before *Pilgrim’s Progress* (in 1631) Jan Amos Comenius’ *Labyrinth of the world and paradise of the heart* was published. It is an allegory about a pilgrim who wanders through the world trying to escape its vanity and seeking the “true peace of mind” in human life; he eventually finds it in the Paradise of the heart. Interestingly, almost everybody in the English-speaking world knows Bunyan’s book, but almost nobody knows Comenius’ book. The reasons are obvious; first, it is the language in which both works were written. Secondly, the unfortunate circumstances of the Counter-reformation in 17th Century Bohemia doomed Comenius’ literature to oblivion. This article, therefore, may serve the English reader as a short introduction to comparative study of late the Renaissance genre of didactic allegory.

Allegory is usually considered to be a literary tool, not a didactic one, and yet one of the greatest pieces of Czech allegorical literature serves primarily the didactic purpose. That is how most Comenius scholars interpret the *Labyrinth*. Comenius himself already discloses the didactic intention of his writing in the introductory chapter, called “To the Reader”, where he says the work would be nothing less than a search for the “true peace of mind” in human life. He admits that it’s not an easy task, but it isn’t impossible. He believes that in the same way Solomon himself looked for “highest good” (*summum bonum*)” but couldn’t find it anywhere until his eyes were opened to “catch a glimpse of the multifaceted futility and miserable illusion that is hidden everywhere under an outer glow and glory that at first glance is so attractive—and then he learned that peace and safety of the mind is to be found elsewhere”.²

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² Citations from the *Labyrinth* are my own translations from the Amsterdam edition of 1663, which was released under the review of Antonín Škarka in 1974. To compare the English text, see James Naughton’s translation of the *Labyrinth* available online <<http://www.labyrinth.cz/en/>> [Retrieved February 14, 2015].

Let me highlight the word “learn”. When facing the White Mountain Battle consequences Comenius “learnt” something important.³ He says that the book was written so that he could “more clearly present” his experience, “both to himself and to others”. This didactic objective could have been achieved using the traditional treatise form, as was the custom in Comenius’ time, which was to describe the problem, analyze it and respond with the appropriate argument. Comenius himself also employed that method in many of his other works from that time and later—for example, *Hlubina bezpečnosti* [*The Depths of Safety*], *Pres boží* [*God’s Press*], and his thorough analysis of “human affairs” in the introductory chapters of the *Velká i Česká didaktika* [*Great Didactics and Czech Didactics*] and “public affairs” in *Obecná porada* [*General Consultation*]. In *The Labyrinth*, however, he chooses a different method. Instead of a theoretical essay he displays narrative scenery, creates a plot, lets allegorical figures do the talking and raises questions like: “Did you ever hear about the Cretan Labyrinth?” Didactically, psychologically and aesthetically the effect is powerful. Let us explore and analyze the method.

Stories have special power. It is said that truth clothed in story can enter any door. This is made evident in the fame of *The Labyrinth*. Comenius wrote many quality works, but none reached the level of recognition and popularity which *The Labyrinth* reached in both the lay and professional communities. This is attested to not only by the number of reprints but also by the unprecedented abundance of references to it in literature: “one of the best books in all of Czech literature” (Bílý, 1939, p. 9), “[a][D]iscerning view of the world, massive and fascinating flight of imagination [...] deep and honest emotion” (Bílý, 1939, p. 9). Similarly, in Antonín Škarka’s judgment the *Labyrinth* “surpasses every other work of our older literature” (Škarka, 1974, p. 9). Jan Patočka even says that the *Labyrinth* is a work which has no “precedent in Czech literature” (Patočka, 2003, p. 400).

It’s evident, then, that in the *Labyrinth* Comenius succeeded in, on the one hand doing justice to a theme which spoke and still speaks (not only) to the Czech soul, and on the other hand choosing a very effective format. I believe it is precisely in this that its “magic” lies. In contrast to Comenius’ other works the *Labyrinth* is a story, and a didactic one, which is important for the theme of this paper. The term “didactic” isn’t used here in the modern sense of the word, that is, as a theory that pertains to the systematic aspects of teaching, but in the wider sense, in the same way Comenius uses the word in his later *Didactics*. It rather indicates a philosophical approach to education, or to the educative purpose, which is carried throughout the work.

Comenius already discloses both his didactic and moral intention in the introductory chapter, called “To the Reader,” where he reveals the work would be nothing less than a search for the “highest good” (*summum bonum*) in human life. In this he reveals the breadth of his educational aim. He intends to lead the reader into the area of practical philosophy, that is, ethics—which Josef Jungmann pointed out in his *History of Czech Literature* where he ranks the *Labyrinth* among the “moral writings” (Nový, 1983, p. 95). But it will also be an epistemological quest, for the author will seek the “true” good and the “real” truth against all depravity and deceit. Comenius further informs the reader that when he was thinking about how to “more clearly present” these things, both to himself and to others, the idea of “story” occurred to him. The contents of the story is revealed in the subtitle—using his well-known dualist style Comenius states that first we will see the “vagueness and confusion, whirling and grinding, illusion and deceit, poverty and want...” of the world, and then the “true and full intellect, satisfaction and joy” to which it’s possible to attain in one’s own heart.

³ The battle of White Mountain, on November 8, 1620, occurred about 13 km (8 miles) west of Prague. The death and destruction was shocking. Many people from Comenius’ circles began to flee as refugees. It was a sad turning point in regional history.

Good educators and teachers intuitively know the power of story and have used it literally from time immemorial. In pedagogical terminology: they communicate their curriculum in a narrative form. Remember, for example, the stories of Moses, Homer, Plato and Jesus, whose “teachings” still have a significant cultural influence today. Joseph H. Miller noted that we don’t know of “any human society [...], that hasn’t had its stories and narrative customs, its myths, [...] tribal legends and stories about its heroes” (Miller, 2008, p. 30). Nor has the commencement of the rationalistic paradigm of modernity managed to eliminate narrative poetics from educational areas (even though it has almost happened in the university sector of the school system).⁴ This raises the key question, what is the “magic” of the narrative form? Where is its formative strength? What gives the story (in our case, allegorical) such didactic functionality?

Narrative as a tool in moral education

The telling of a story is a form of self-understanding. *The Labyrinth* is no exception. From the outset of his story Comenius warns us that it will be an almost therapeutic experience. Comenius himself describes the therapeutic content of his writing in a letter to the Dutch publisher Petr Montanus:

When the darkness of calamity deepened in 1623 and it appeared that there was no hope of human help or advice, tossed about by anxieties and temptations without end, I called in the deep of the night to God with unusual fervor; I jumped out of bed, grabbed my Bible and prayed [...] I opened randomly to the book of Isaiah, reading on and on with grief, and the moment I felt that my distress was dispelled I grabbed my pen and started to write—whether for my own future benefit if that terror should return again, or for others (Nováková, 1990, p. 157).

In *The Labyrinth* then we are not reading some figment of the author’s imagination (a “poem”), but a real episode that he experienced himself in “the few years of his life.” And (I remind the reader again), the reason for his narrative is to get everything “more clearly in front of his eyes,” in order to clarify things so he could better understand the world, the things that happened to him, and himself. Humans are beings who need to understand. One is, as Martin Heidegger put it—a being stricken with care about the meaning of his existence. Or in still other words—he is “a being that cares about his own existence” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 220).

Questions of meaning, however, never appear in a vacuum. They take place within the background of the specific cultural tradition into which the questioner was born and in which he/she was raised—and a fundamental part of every culture is again, story. It is a large and important meta-story, around which the community is united, and which is shared, guarded and bequeathed to the next generation. Milan Machovec notes that humanity always, one way or another, retains a vital relationship to something that is above the individual, which goes beyond it (Machovec, 1998, p. 10ff). This constitutes one of the fundamental needs of a human being—the need for transcendence. In narrative terminology, it’s a meaningful plot to one’s life that goes beyond the horizon of the individual. Great stories (with a wide repertoire of sub-stories) have always been the intermediary for meeting this need. Narrative serves as a means of moral and cultural identification. All of the elements, structures, concepts, values, and institutions (including pedagogy) find their legitimacy precisely in their relationship to these universally shared meta-narratives (more on this later). In ancient cultures it was usual to codify exemplary models of human behavior in myths. In later traditions we find pictures of reality in narrative

⁴ I am writing from my own teaching experience. University classes are almost exclusively “lectures.” Likewise, written addresses are exclusively scientific, never narrative.

form, providing people with the basic reference points, incentives and moral appeals for forming one's self-image (Hošek, 2010, p. 88).

Why stories? The story is the only kind of discourse which, in the way it selectively presents, arranges, develops, and connects individual events, gives them special importance and makes sense of them. Stories, with their structure and wholeness, most resemble real life. Unlike scientific protocol, factual records, and other exacting genres, a story is set in a specific situation and time, it is organized, it has the twists and turns and dynamics of a plot, a denouement—and most of all, a beginning and an end. In this context Jiří Trávníček notes that, in addition to the possibility of identifying with the hero, a story also offers the possibility of an even deeper identification “with the story itself and its time, which in the story has a beginning and end that are not only the two endpoints but in particular function as its completion” (Trávníček, 2007, p. 52).

All in all a story mirrors real life, and thus also even the life of the reader who can recognize himself in the story. This feature of story is, in terms of shaping the moral identity of the individual, irreplaceable. A story that is about me, in which I can see myself, interests me. I'm willing to listen to a story where I can play the central role. A story in which others listen to me through their imagination, calls forth that kind of empathy which is so desirable for gaining the reader's attention. In the story the characters through which we confront our own existence live, act, think, and are manifested with all their qualities and abilities. We compare and try to make sense of our lives. Thus engaged, the reader is prepared to allow his or her own life perspective to be changed by the perspective of the story, a key element in the process of moral self-understanding.

In addition to this empathetic function stories provide their readers with even more possibilities. Consider, for example, moral imitation. Stories contain models of behavior which present a real option to imitate. “Stories give us the option of entering within ourselves and seeing ourselves objectively” (Trávníček, 2007, p. 52). The reader is thus invited to examine the many modes of his/her own moral actions. Through the configuration of the quantity of variables in an individual narrative a story can become to the reader a vision or revelation which serves as an incentive to imitate and eventually reconfigure or re-tell his or her own story. Some authors even speak of the heuristic potential of story (Hošek, 2010, p. 89).

This is closely related to another function of stories—organizing. It is a very important yet not morally “innocent” function of every narrative, as Joseph H. Miller says (Miller, 2008, p. 34). The events in any story are usually not told as they actually happened. The narrative's organization of the events serves to “confirm or reinforce, or even to create the most basic cultural assumptions about human existence, time, fate, one's own being, where we come from, what we are here on this earth to do and where we are going—about the whole story of human life” (Miller, 2008, p. 34).

If someone asks me who I am, there arises in my mind a whole assortment of memories, moral values, passions, aspirations, beliefs, psychological states, and other particulars which have undergone significant changes over time. And because I don't have, in the words of David Novitz (2009), a “wide-screen” perspective of myself, it is very difficult to answer the question. A narrative, however, provides a unique organizational potential. If I am to understand who I really am, I have to organize the facts I know about myself into a meaningful storyline. “We understand events in terms of the events we already understand” (Schank, 2000, p. 15). A story organizes the unstructured material of life experience into understandable moral frameworks, components, and patterns, or it functions as an organizing grid of fragmented experiences in the same way grammar coordinates meaning. According to the narrative structures we can reorganize, and often even transform, our life experiences to make sense; to find what we consider to be their true meaning. We emphasize some, criticize others, and at the same time put it all together into a meaningful whole. The way we tell the stories of our lives uniquely

affects ourselves because there is a close connection between the way we view ourselves and how we will probably act.

There is another feature of the story, which we can call performative. The question is, how is the story that I read or tell related to reality? Does the story shape reality, or only reveal it? I believe that the two are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The uncovering of reality is based on the assumption that reality (the world) has a pre-existing order which the story (or art in general), in one way or another, follows, imitates, or represents. On the other hand the forming of reality presupposes that reality is open to further organization or even a further creating—that there exists a kind of “pre-arranged harmony”⁵ between reality and human imagination which enables the human mind to create. And the purpose of this creation is, to stress the point, understanding; as Katarína Mišíková notes, “art transforms reality to reveal its inner meaning” (Mišíková, 2009, p. 153). From the psychological perspective it is “performative”—as the theorists of speech acts say.⁶ In this sense a story is a way of changing or influencing reality through words. It makes something happen in the real world (Koten, 2013). Or in the words of Ingo Balderman, “the way a narrative presents the world determines its quality” (Balderman, 2004, p. 88).

Rami Shapiro expresses it concisely: “Attentive listening [...] to stories pulls us out of our own story and reveals an alternative drama that can offer us a greater understanding than any story we ourselves can tell. [...] And that is what makes great stories: they show us a different understanding of reality. Nothing has changed but our minds, and that of course changes everything” (Shapiro, 2003, p. 16–18).

Labyrinth’s plot in context of moral (trans)formation

Aristotle noted in his *Poetics* that one of the most important aspects of a good story is the plot. In his terminology *mythos*, which is translated variously—outline, structure of events, plot, *syžet* (Rus.)—together with *fabule*, create the core of every story.⁷ The beginning, development and climax are normal parts of every story. In other words, in order to be a “well-told” story it must contain: 1. an initial situation—Joseph K. awakes in his bed, Neo is awakened by his computer, a person is created by God, a pilgrim finds himself in a labyrinth; 2. some fundamental change (complication, twist, conflict)—Joseph K. is absurdly accused, Neo swallows the pill of truth, the created one revolts against his Creator, the pilgrim gets glasses of deception; 3. its resolution—Joseph K. insists on a fair trial, Neo wakes up in the “true” reality, the created one is saved, the pilgrim finds the paradise of the heart. Everything else, such as linguistic devices, timeframes, locations, characters etc., are, according to Aristotle, secondary and supplementary. The quality of *mythos* is crucial.

Comenius’ plot is, in this regard, impressively straightforward. As an early Renaissance text, *The Labyrinth* doesn’t have complex plot strategies, but follows a well-established framework: beginning, middle, end—entry, plot, climax. The reader is simply put into the situation:

Having reached the age when human intelligence begins to distinguish between good and evil [...] it seemed to me highly desirable to consider well which of these groups of folks I should join, and which profession I should choose for my life work. [...] Thereupon I set out by myself and began to consider where and how I should begin (chapter 1, 2).

⁵ This is a concept of C. S. Lewis (Lewis, 1969, p. 169).

⁶ See the classic works of Austin (*How to do things with words*, 2000), Searle (*Speech Acts*, 1969), and Alston (*Illocutionary Acts and Sentence Meaning*, 2000).

⁷ W. Schmid clarifies the terminology with his reference to B. Tomaševský, “the plot is what actually happened, the storyline is what tells the reader about it” (Schmid, 2004, p. 13).

Then comes the central plot, brought about by the fact, which the reader understands, that the allegorical guides of the hero/pilgrim are trying for the whole journey to deceive (and control) him, but “luckily” (his own word) he gets a secret chance to escape their snares. The “glasses of deception” that they forced him to wear did not fit him properly, so when the pilgrim “raised his head and lowered his eyes” (leaned back his head and looked out of the corner of his eye), he was able to see things “purely naturally,” that is, such as they truly are. The plot is then more or less rhythmically lengthened as the pilgrim goes through the town and has a look at his “labyrinth-world” in each of its spheres, until the denouement when he finds the way out, or rather, he is found and taken out, of the labyrinth. The resolution has its own rhythm and length because it is more or less a mirror image of all that went before.

Clearly this is not a very sophisticated storyline or suspenseful plot. Comenius doesn’t use all the opportunities the epic genre offers, or at least those which we know today are offered by this genre. The individual episodes are somewhat repetitive and follow a predictable framework. The pilgrim comes to one of the streets in the labyrinth, sees it the way his guides want, through the glasses of deception, and then again with his own eyes as it really is, and in the end leaves in disappointment to look further. It goes on like this throughout the first part, until he finds paradise. Moreover, the way the storyline led Comenius to the second part was turned into an almost monotonous monologue, only occasionally punctuated by entrances of the Savior—which greatly diminishes the epic nature and drama of the story, making it instead more like a descriptive-explanatory treatise.

Nevertheless, *The Labyrinth* still has basic plot contours, which enables the text to convey the intended moral content. The reader can participate in the structure of the narrative. From the psychological perspective it isn’t important whether the climax will be a surprise to the reader, but that he/she will participate in the storyline. Jiří Trávníček notes that this is one of the elementary ways in which a person (first in childhood) acquires stories. Before curiosity, the perception of causality, time, and other phenomenon of narratives can enter the game. “Participation in the structure” is crucial for the reader (and more originally the listener), as every parent who tells their child fairytales from their earliest childhood knows. Although they have heard the story (fairytale) many times, they want to hear it again and again, without any changes and exactly as it was before. But even adults tend to enjoy this. They return to their favorite book or film that they have already read or seen many times. The pleasure from joining in the storyline and final resolution is worth it. The Magnificent Seven finally disperse, Sherlock convicts the murderer, Harry overcomes Voldemort, the pilgrim finds the paradise of the heart. They are all variations of the same structure. It seems that Vladimir Propp, a classic writer of Russian formalism, had it right. In his particularly influential work *The Morphology of Fairytales* he demonstrates that the structure of the outline of this type of narrative is transferable from one story to another, even though the individual scenes in the stories might be different. Propp (1968) shows that Russian fairytales are all variations of the same structural form. Thus the reader’s motivation isn’t necessarily knowledge, the point isn’t to know how it will turn out—the reader already knows that—but to a far greater degree he/she yearns to be part of the story, to participate in it and to “be there.” So it becomes a kind of ritual, an almost sacred moment, when the reader (or listener), the storyteller, and the text “harmonize according to established rules” (Trávníček, 2007, pp. 13–14).

It is precisely this “storyness” that raises Comenius’ *Labyrinth* above the other moral literature of his time, which were mostly treatises, and, states Miller (2008, p. 30), brings about something “natural and universal,” which is typical of all stories—the plot “draws in” the reader. In educational terminology: it motivates, activates or engages. And therein lies the magic of moral transformation.

Conclusion

I have sketched a few functions of a narrative relevant to moral education discourse that came out of my reading of Comenius' work *The Labyrinth of the world and the paradise of the heart*—some literary strategies that have the power to so captivate the reader that he or she is morally drawn in, engaged, and motivated. It is clear that the uniqueness of *The Labyrinth* is not in its originality. In terms of genre, literary devices, and the central motif (a pilgrim's journey and search for the true and highest good), it is in keeping with the literary trends of his time. Suffice to say, it recalls the utopian allegories of Johan Valentin Andreae, Tommaso Campanella, Thomas More and, in the English speaking world, the famous *Pilgrim's progress* (Bunyan, 2016).⁸

However, whenever Comenius took the idea from an older or contemporary work he used his own creativity to transform it. There emerged a very simple story, historically contingent, perhaps too allegorical, too didactic, or too moralizing, but still a story that has its own importance and magic. I believe with this analysis I have only just begun the research into story. I'm sure that each future step along the narrative path will reveal new dimensions of its magic and give glimpses of new realities. The many dismantled layers of the story are preparatory to breaking down others for didactic purposes. If we ask what makes a good story effective in relation to shaping one's moral character, it isn't enough to analyze the stated storyline, composition, perspective, etc. We know that their effect is based on their interconnectivity, compactness, and harmony. The fine web of a good narrative into which the reader is "caught" is the result of the polyphonic harmony of all its parts. The "organic unity" of the narrative (Kubíček, 2007, p. 29), is thus difficult to understand and analyze, but that is precisely where its magic lies. When viewed from the didactic perspective, the morally activating power of the story does not lie only in the quality of its component layers, but is primarily in the quality of its interconnectivity as a harmonious whole. The specificity of the narrative genre thus corresponds to the specific nature of humanity. So just as a person isn't only a rational being but also moral, emotional, social, physical, etc., neither does a story work in isolation, only in the mind, or only in the emotions, etc. A person exposed to the power of story is a being who goes through a holistic experience in which he or she thinks, feels, believes, endures, identifies with, receives information, evaluates and – most importantly – makes moral judgements and decisions. A good story is a unique form of human art which can impact on a person in his/her entirety and change him/her – make him/her (morally) better. Not every form of narrative succeeds in this, but it works in *The Labyrinth*.

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⁸ From the literary-historical perspective it is an interesting fact that one copy of Andreae's work *Peregrini in patria errors*, stored in the Nuremberg Museum, is mistakenly attributed to Comenius (Novák, 1895).

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Hugolín Gavlovič on moral education: Enlightenment ideas in baroque literature?

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Abstract

The work of Hugolín Gavlovič belongs to part of the most influential literary and didactic heritage of 18th century literature in the region of contemporary Slovakia. Even though Gavlovič was not a systematic moral philosopher, the role and importance of ethics in his literary work is significant. He contributed greatly to the debate on moral education, which was (in the context of that time) linked to the fulfilment of God's will and to the accomplishment of a good life. In his extensive poetic work *Valaská škola mravův stodola* [*Shepherd's school of morals*], the author not only formulated moral norms but, inspired by classical Greek philosophy, he also defined them in the wider ethical context of virtue, morals, and human nature. In this study, the historical context of his work, marked by the literary and cultural transition to the Enlightenment era, will be presented, concepts related to the understanding of good life (as a goal of moral education) will be identified, and the possibility for further philosophical and ethical analysis of Gavlovič's work will be offered (through a reflexion of Aristotle's thoughts referred to in *Valaská škola*). Overall, the paper offers an original point of view on how to interpret the thoughts of Hugolín Gavlovič from the perspective of ethics. This has been, despite the impact of his work, rather omitted.

Keywords: Hugolín Gavlovič; ethics; virtue; morals; moral education

Introduction

No author can be read and fully understood outside of the historical, social, and political contexts of his/her time. These contexts directly influence (either in a critical or affirmative way) the author's thinking and perceiving the world. This can be also observed in the work of Hugolín Gavlovič, whose literary work reflected on the transition from the philosophical and cultural tradition of baroque to the Enlightenment period in Slovakia. In general, the transition of thinking in the work of Slovak authors of the 17th and 18th century has only recently become a focus of literary-historical analysis and research (Žemberová, 2017, p. 244) and it has become an inspirational source for further analysis and comparison. Especially interesting is to seek for original reflections of new philosophical and ethical thoughts in the literature of that time, which is also the main goal of the present study.

As mentioned above, an example of this cultural transition is Hugolín Gavlovič who, from the perspective of literary analysis, is a representative of religious and baroque literature, but in terms of wider cultural, philosophical-ethical, social, and aesthetic value, his work can be regarded as a form of pre-Enlightenment thinking (Kuchár, 1988; Habovštiaková, 1970). This is also a reason why, even in his own time, Hugolín Gavlovič was considered to be a “stranger” (Gáfriková, 2002, p. 55). It is difficult to read his literary pieces as typical representations of that era's literature, which might have been caused by his life as a monk outside of the literary circles of the cultural centers of Austria-Hungary. His thoughts need to be therefore analyzed in wider cultural and historical contexts

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Hungary, as a part of the Austria-Hungary monarchy, did not significantly contribute to the cultural, political, or philosophical-theological transformation of Western Europe.² Modern thoughts (such as the spread of rationalism or critical attitudes towards religious dogmatism) were adopted rather slowly in the region. Nevertheless, some reflections on Enlightenment ideas can be observed. The dynamic historical development of 18th century Hungary appeared at several levels of social and political life. For the purpose of an ethical analysis of Hugolin Gavlovič's work, attention will be drawn to three of its important aspects, which can also be recognized as important aspects of short-lasting Enlightenment period and philosophy in the region of Austria-Hungary.

Firstly, the feudal society still prevailed in the whole region of Central and Eastern Europe.³ Because of that, the social, economic, as well as moral authority of land-owners, the aristocracy, and/or representatives of the Church, could be perceived. Only rarely were there any confrontations or critical attitudes towards the existing status of the societal order or any requirement for equalization of the moral status of all members of the community. Even as late as the 1880s and despite increasing social criticism in the literature and culture of the region, the author Jozef Ignác Bajza, whose work is considered to be the peak of Enlightenment ideas in the region, still declared a great respect for authority. This respect was dedicated to the governmental and state authority, Joseph II., who he considered as the leader of Enlightenment absolutism in Austria-Hungary. Despite the desire for complete modernization of the state, its reformation and secularization (Kollárová, 2013), the Church was not excluded from the decisions made in implementing, or later reducing, these reforms and laws. In such cultural contexts, the influence of the Catholic Church and its ideology of natural order persisted. Men accepted their status and roles in the society as pre-determined and as the destiny of their everyday lives. Despite the tendency of the intellectual elite to support the idea of equality and freedom, peasants remained conservative and obedient to feudal land-owners and their oppression (Kollárová, 2013).

The second aspect to be emphasized is the idea of education and humanization. Literary works of the time started to be concerned not only with the enlightenment of scholars but with the education of the so-called plebeian community, too (Bilasová, 2010; Kalajtzidis, 2010; Šolcová, 2017). Education started to be seen as a general, universal need of all people, even common people (peasants, farmers, shepherds). A new form of education started to be promoted, especially through the system of compulsory schooling⁴ which, in some way, became secularized. In the middle of the 18th century, this had significantly influenced the number of educated members in society, for example writers, preachers, doctors, inventors, as well as folk healers, etc. (Bilasová, 2010). In literature, it led to the promotion of a secularized form of education, to declare necessary access to moral and practical education for the public, to open the monasteries, libraries, schools to everyone, to critically evaluate moral education based on the Catholic Church and its moralized norms. This was, for example, humorously, satirically, and socio-critically described and explained in the Jozef Ignác Bajza's works (Bajza, 2007, 2nd part; Števček, 1988).

² There were even significant cultural differences between the Austrian and the Hungarian part of the monarchy. The development of the Czech part of the monarchy was much more vivid in comparison to the region of Slovakia (Šolcová, 2018, pp. 33–40).

³ During the regime of Maria Theresia and, later on, of Joseph II., a slow liberation of feudal structures took place. The main goal was to abolish serfdom (Kalajtzidis, 2010). In Hungary, this happened in 1785. It was preceded by urban regulation (Theresian Urbarium, 1767) and the Patent of Toleration (1781). These economic, political and social changes were not primarily motivated by ideas of humanity and dignity. They were rather pre-conditioned by military and economic needs to revitalize the competitiveness and effectiveness of Hungary (Kalajtzidis, 2010, p. 13).

⁴ Legally introduced by Maria Theresia in 1774.

Thirdly, the overall interest in ethics as a philosophical discipline, which spread local as well as pan-European thinking during that period, had a direct historical impact on many authors, including Gavlovič. The vivid development of ethical thinking was especially significant in the 17th century and lasted through to the first half of the 18th century (Oravcová, 1989, p. 40). Many authors of that time followed similar paths (e.g. Jozef Ignác Bajza who literally implemented the thoughts of classical Greek philosophy and/or of French prosaic work (Žemberová, 2016, pp. 47–52).

To sum up, these three significant aspects of 18th century Hungarian cultural life were reflected in the promotion of Enlightenment thoughts through the literary work of several authors, such as Ján Baltazár Magin or Jozef Ignác Bajza. Despite the fact that the Enlightenment did not last in the region very long, there are authors who were significantly influenced by it. One of the first historical figures, whose work was marked by the above mentioned ideas, was Hugolín Gavlovič. He can be considered to be one of the pillars of the transition between baroque and Enlightenment thinking, in other words a pioneer of the Enlightenment in the then Slovak part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Moral education in the work of Hugolín Gavlovič

Hugolín Gavlovič responded to these impulses in full complexity, especially by dedicating his work to ordinary members of the Christian community (Gafríkova, 2004, p. 9). It is for them, without any unnecessary religious formalism or moralizations, he prepared simple “school exercises” of a good life. He was one of the most important authors of his time who focused on the issues of moral education and humanization in society. Distinctively, his effort was not to moralize, but rather to formulate the main goal of education in its connection to the moral development of man. He believed that a good life is to be lived in accordance with God’s commandments, but only personal moral development and responsibility can help people carry out their Christian faith in everyday life. As mentioned above, these efforts are clearly reflected in his most extensive and most important literary work, *Valaská škola mravúv stodola*.^{5,6} In it, he worked with two main motives. Firstly, there is his interest in ethics as one of the most dynamically evolving philosophical disciplines of that period (Gáfríková, 2002). Secondly, the humor and playfulness in presenting his moral thoughts created an original didactic style. It helped him overcome the limits of catechism in moral education and prepare simple guidelines for people to live moral lives (Kákošová, 2002; Šmatlák, 1997, p. 280).

The re-occurring theme in Gavlovič’s work is *man* as an object of education. This man is often presented as an ordinary, common person (usually a shepherd) who, despite a limited or even non-existent education, can become a moral person able to recognize his/her role in the world (both with regard to society and to God). A sort of liberation process of the *villeins* can be perceived in

⁵ The name of this book might be freely translated as *Shepherd’s School of Morals*, which might help us reflect not only on the pastoral setting, the main target of Gavlovič’s education (of ordinary, uneducated people), as well as the goal of this education (morals, virtues). Similarly to this book, didactic exercises for moral development and solving ethical questions are evident in all his works, e.g. *Škola kresťanská, s veršami zväzaná* [Christian school bound in verse] (1758) (recently reprinted: Gavlovič, 2012) or *500 naučení o dobrých mravoch* [500 lessons on good morals] (1782).

⁶ For the purpose of this article, I do not find it elementary to focus on the structure of the book (prelude, 22 notes, and epilogue). Still, it is of some interest to mention a specific genealogy depicted in all of the *notes*, which reflects on the biblical stories starting from the Old Testament leading to the New Testament. The baroque and Renaissance influences of authors’ literary form, *concepts*, depicts these stories in parallels and inner links with realities of his own time, which allows him to offer his readers his own didactic and reflexive messages in “various forms of bitter, spiritual and aphoristic declarations” (Gáfríková, 2002, p. 56). For more details, I recommend an article by Gizela Gáfríková, *Literárne dielo Hugolína Gavloviča* [Literary works of Hugolín Gavlovič] (2002).

these verses.⁷ Gavlovič claimed that every person has a value in himself; a value which should be fully respected. To guarantee this basic respect, Gavlovič formulated in his stories moral obligations of all members of the community to behave morally and virtuously towards others (Lalíková, 1990), including the aristocracy and feudal lords towards their *villeins*. For example, verses such as “Useless is he who feasts so often that his villeins struggle to provide for his nourishments” (Gavlovič, note 1, verse 32)⁸ or “If you have a servant or a vassal, never distance your gracious heart from him” (Gavlovič, note 3, verse 46)^{9,10} express the reciprocal and morally obligatory relationship among different social groups.

Another significant motive of Gavlovič’s work is his understanding of education. He rejected a narrow definition of school as a means of formal education and knowledge. He declared that pure facts would never allow a man to fully comprehend the world. Only a man with God and goodness in his/her heart can find a place in this world and can fulfil his/her life goals. “Useless is a school, where there is nothing but disputes, as educated is the one, who has god-like love in his heart” and “If a man disputes in all his power, he will not recognize what was at the beginning and what will be at the end” (Gavlovič, note 7, verse 1).¹¹ Despite many practical guidelines offered in his work, his primary focus in education is paid to the development of virtues and morals, and to the understanding of God’s commandments in one’s life. Therefore, Gavlovič’s primary attention is dedicated to questions of moral education. For him, more important than moralization and formulation of individual norms of ethics, was the delimitation of the main goals of education and how they are linked to morals, virtues, and *policia* (rules, external norms). Inspired by classical Greek philosophy, Gavlovič understood morals and morality as arising from virtues of men. Morality of the person is not something that is in one’s nature, but something s/he has to build and develop throughout life. It is a significant shift from the Mediaeval formalistic understanding of ethics based on the acceptance of dogmas and Christian ideology. In the prelude to *Valaská škola*, entitled *O dobrých mravoch* [On good morals], he carefully presented his ideas. Good life (as a goal of moral education) is based on two pillars: morals and virtues. “Good morals are always close to virtues, if they are distant from virtues, they are usually not stable” and “The first pillar is good morals, the second pillar is virtues; God’s Commandments stand between them as in a fortress”.¹² These are interlinked and mutually influence each other. “If good morals fail, and virtues, too, then slowly God’s Commandments will fall apart, too”.¹³ Besides helping man to lead a good life, they also promote God’s Commandments.

If we talk about these two pillars of good life, virtues are the initiators. This is not due to any chronology or hierarchy, as virtues and morals are, in the end, of the same importance for leading a good life. What is significantly different is that virtues are something internal and hidden from the external world. Rather, they take the form of man’s inner willingness to do good; a form of

⁷ This process can be considered more like a moral liberation of man, not a legal one. During the time when Gavlovič wrote his works, the legal abolition of serfdom was not yet a political question. But from the perspective of ethics and morality, we can perceive the focus on individualistic morality and ethos in his verses.

⁸ „Marný je ten, ktorý často privykel hodovať, na stúl jeho I poddaní nestača pracovať” (Gavlovič, note 1, verse 32).

⁹ „Jak máš tvého služebníka, aneb poddaného, nikdy srdca láskavého nevzdaluj od neho” (Gavlovič, note 3, verse 46).

¹⁰ Another, and maybe even more complex, formulation of moral obligation of feudals and the aristocracy towards their vassals is presented in Gavlovič’s note 5, verse 27. He encouraged feudals not only to be generous, but also to be patient and paternalistic, as fathers towards their children, acting always with grace (Gavlovič, note 5, verse 27).

¹¹ “Marná škola, kde nic jiné krem dišputování, ten učený, kdo má v srdci boské milování” and “Nech se člověk dišputuje ze všej svoje moci, nezví, čo bylo spočátku, čo bude pri konci” (Gavlovič, note 7, verse 1).

¹² „Dobré mravy vždy s cnosťami susedstvo mívajú, jak sú od cností vzdálené, stále nebývajú” a “První múr sú dobré mravy, druhý múr sú cnosti, príkaz boží medzi nimi stojí jak v pevnosti” (Gavlovič, O dobrých mravoch).

¹³ “Jestli spadnú dobré mravy, a i cnosti spolu, potom pomaly i príkaz boží jide dolu” (Gavlovič, O dobrých mravoch).

consciousness. The most important virtues praising God's will are justice, moderation, strength in faith, hope, and love.¹⁴ The other virtues linked to life in society are virtues of bravery, respect, and solidarity.^{15,16}

Virtues, because of their inner character, are not enough to reach the moral goal of man's life. Gavlovič explained that it is not enough to think about good, but also to focus on acting accordingly: "It is a good thing to recognize good things, but better is if you can fulfill it in action" (Gavlovič, Pripomínání o trojnásobnej policii...).¹⁷ Virtuous people should not focus only on their inner, spiritual life, but they have to learn how to act morally, too. This is what Gavlovič understood to be morals: the external outcomes of one's virtues. Morals can be supported in life by education, habits, and conventions.

Good morals are adornments of one's life; the external beauty that can be observed by others. But virtues are perceived more as scents accompanying the good action, odours which are often hidden to others; others except God. Because of this, virtues and morals have to be closely interlinked and support each other. If one pillar fails, the other fails soon after and God's will cannot be promoted in a person's life (Gavlovič, O dobrých mravoch). If God's Commandments are to be protected purely by virtues, without their embodiments in the form of morals (as external manifestations of goodness and God's Commandments), man and the whole society will not live good lives. Both these pillars of life have to be in harmony.¹⁸

A person has to have both good consciousness and good morals because only if the goodness spreads from one's character can it be performed and manifested in everyday actions and in society.¹⁹ "What can be of benefit to the neighbor or to himself, he aspires to act on in a good manner. What is safe, praiseworthy, and free to do, to this he inclines; the lust for bad there is none in his heart. What he judges to be good according to his consciousness, he conducts" (Gavlovič, Katoliko-politik má dobré svedomí i dobré mravy).^{20,21}

To develop and support the strength of both pillars of good life, education is necessary. Gavlovič avoided the dogmatism of Christianity and its moralizations. It is more important, as pronounced in his work, to focus on consciousness and virtues in education, which can help people follow God's will and his grace. This is a much better means of leading a good life, as *policia* formulated by the society might mislead us, might be egoistic and of interest to others but God's.

¹⁴ *Policia kresťanská, táto cíli k chvále boskej* [Christian policia aiming to God's glory].

¹⁵ *Policia mestská, neb civilis. Tá cíli k pokoju, i k užitku bližního* [Citizen policia, or civilis. Which aims to the peace and benefit of others].

¹⁶ Surprisingly, Gavlovič does not consider freedom to be a virtue as it can lead man to situations when he consciously harms, by act or by word, other members of society (Gavlovič, Ego sum Pastor bonus).

¹⁷ "Dobrá vec jest dobré veci vedieť i mlúviti, ale lepšia, když i skutkem múžeš jich plniť" (Gavlovič, Pripomínání o trojnásobnej policii...).

¹⁸ Otherwise, a person can easily incline to become a person stoico-politic or a person sofistico-politic. In such lives, the person either follows strictly policia (norms) without their critical reevaluation by the consciousness or virtues (Lalíková, 1990, p. 372) or too self-centred and egoistic, with poor consciousness and weak policia in the social morality.

¹⁹ A member of which is the person, too, and therefore has his/her role and moral and social obligation.

²⁰ Čo múže byť užitečné bližnímu neb sobe, to se činiť usiluje pri dobrém spôsobe. Co bezpečné, chválitebné, slobodné k činení, k tomu má chuť; chuti k zlému v srdci jeho není. Co soudí podle svedomí dobrého, to činí" (Gavlovič, Katoliko-politik má dobré svedomí i dobré mravy).

²¹ Catholica-politic has good consciousness and good morals.

The philosophical and ethical foundation of Hugolín Gavlovič

Despite Gavlovič's interest in ethical issues, he was never a systematic philosopher who wanted to offer his readers a deeper, ethical and philosophical conceptualization of moral education and good life. His work was rather didactic. The philosophical and ethical aspects of his thoughts are rather indirectly implied with references to "moral teachers" introduced by their quotations in the prelude to his *Valaská skola mravúv stodola*, entitled *Zmysly učiteľúv o dobrých mravoch* [Teachers' thoughts on good morals]. In the prelude, Gavlovič quotes Seneca, Plato, Socrates, Ovidius, Cicero, Pythagoras, Erasmus of Rotterdam, Aurelius Augustine, Aristotle, and many others.²² Following the ideas of these teachers, his work emphasized virtues and the moral development of one's character.²³

To analyze deeper the ethical basis of moral education in Hugolín Gavlovič's thoughts, let us try to interpret his literary work by complementing it with the ethical concept of good life and virtue in the work of Aristotle.²⁴ According to Aristotle, man's life mission is happiness. *Eudemonia* is the highest goal as man tries to reach it for itself and not for anything else (Aristotle, EN 1095a). Aristotle also explained that man can fulfil such a mission only in actions. Those must be based on rational choices (the activity of the soul) using man's rational part of the soul (reason). "Now if the function of man is the activity of the soul which follows or implies reason [...] human good turns out to be an activity of the soul exhibiting virtue" (Aristotle, EN 1098a). This ability of man is then called moral virtue (*éthiké*). Consequently, only the implementation of virtue allows the person become a good person who leads a good life. In Gavlovič, the two pillars of good life (virtues and morals) reflect on the same connection between virtues and actions, between the soul's activity and real, external activity.

Aristotle did not ignore the fact that external factors have impact on the ability of man to reach happiness. He understood that the motives and moral actions of man do not have to be enough to lead a good life. "[I]t needs external goods as well; for it is impossible, or not easy, to do noble acts without the proper equipment. In many actions we use friends and riches and political power as instruments; and there are some things the lack of which takes the luster from happiness – good birth, goodly children, beauty; for the man who is very ugly in appearance or ill-born or solitary and childless is not very likely to be happy and perhaps a man would be still less likely if he had thoroughly bad children or friends or had lost good children or friends by death. As we said, then, happiness seems to need this sort of prosperity in addition; for which reason some identify happiness with good fortune, though others identify it with virtue" (Aristotle, EN 1099a; 1099b).

In accordance with this, it can be assumed that Hugolín Gavlovič also reflected on the issue of external factors, external goods while debating on the social status and role of man and the moral obligations of those happier in this matter to be just and virtuous to those less lucky in economic and social status. As depicted in the above mentioned verses (Gavlovič, note 1, verse 31; note 3, verse 46; note 5, verse 27), the aspect of social system built around God's commandments was a dominant issue in his work. This confirms what Gáfriková named as an idea for the overall formation of Christian society (Gáfriková, 2004, p. 9). Another example is note 17, verse 27, in which Gavlovič not only depicted common injustice and inequity in social and the economic

²² Later works of Hugolín Gavlovič are dedicated to deeper ethical analysis of interpersonal relationships and to cultivation of man (e.g. *Škola kresťanská, s veršami zväzaná* [Christian school, bound in verse] (1758) with its more precise analysis of the school of virtues) or to an inclination to the Erasmus tradition in his later work *500 naučení o dobrých mravoch* [500 lessons on good morals] (1782) (Gáfriková, 2004, p. 24).

²³ More on the philosophical scope of Hugolín Gavlovič in Oravcová (1989) and Šmatlák (1997, pp. 274–280).

²⁴ A similar inspiration by Aristotle can be perceived in the works of J. A. Comenius and his interpretation of moral virtues (Šolcová, 2017; Misseri, 2017).

situations of persons to which they are born to, but, similarly to Aristotle, he also emphasized the link between external factors and social status and situation in life as such. Seeking for parallels between Gavlovič's understanding of social order and the relationship between ethics and politics in Aristotle's work,²⁵ becomes a relevant topic for further analysis. A good person is not only a good, virtuous person, but also a virtuous member of the society, a good citizen (Leško, 2004, pp. 118–122). Virtues help people live among other people and in relationships with others (Volek, 2011, p. 13).²⁶

Another visible Aristotelian influence on Hugolín Gavlovič can be perceived in the above mentioned prelude to *Valaská škola*, where he directly referred to Aristotle by quoting that virtues do not spread from one's nature but from habits (*ethos*) and that if man gets used to good morals, you will appreciate and grace them. In Aristotle, further insight can be found: "moral virtues come about as a result of habit [...] from this it is also plain that none of the moral virtues arises in us by nature; for nothing that exists by nature can form a habit contrary to its nature" (Aristotle, EN 1103a). For Gavlovič, the appeal for education for good morals and recognizing God's commandments becomes elementary to acquire and develop one's virtue of character.²⁷ In other words, on one hand, man's virtues would never develop without good actions and morals, but, on the other hand, good morals must be supported by one's natural ability to act. Gavlovič agreed with Aristotle that there is some predisposition and ability in man to incline to good life, to eudemonia, but it must be promoted by habits and morals, otherwise it will be stunted. Although he understands the necessity for continuous development of the conscience, virtues and morals of man, in his work (dedicated to laic Christians) he emphasized mostly the development of morals obtained by habits and repetition in his goals of moral education. This does not go in opposition to Aristotle's conclusions, it simply refers to the specific aim and target of his literary and didactic work.

Conclusion

Hugolín Gavlovič emphasized education as a means for every person to lead a good life. Therefore, he linked education to moral education, more concretely to the gradual development of virtues and morals in an individual person. Several cultural, historical, and philosophical influences can be detected in his work. Firstly, the influence of a strong Christian tradition in which good life is understood as life that follows and fulfils God's will. Secondly, the influence of Enlightenment thinking, for example, his understanding of the value of human life as something that needs to be fully and unconditionally respected and recognized. Gavlovič claimed that every person has their value and role in the world. Also, he rejected the dogmatism of the Christian Church and emphasized the role of consciousness of the person and his/her virtues. Only through them, he concluded, can man follow God's wishes. Virtues are therefore a more important tool for the process of moral decision making and actions than *policies* formulated by society. Last but not least, there are strong influences of classical philosophers and ethicists, to whom Hugolín Gavlovič directly referred in his work, e.g. Erasmus of Rotterdam, Seneca, Cicero, and many others. He was widely interested in ethical discourse, which not only formed his thematic interest, but also the

²⁵ Aristotle delimitates that the goal of political and social community must be the good life of its members (Šuvalíková, 2008, p. 336).

²⁶ For such interpersonal cooperation, the virtue of justice is also important; the virtue necessary for social and political cooperation and cohabitation. More on the analysis of justice as an ethical virtue in the article by Ján Kalajtšidis (2017).

²⁷ The link between both of these pillars of good life is reflected in several notes in Gavlovič's work, for example *Telu mravy, cnosti duši zhromáždzovať vždycky sluší* [Body for morals, virtues for the soul, gathering them always satisfies a man] (Gavlovič, note 5, verse 12) or *Nadobudeš pekné mravy, jestli budeš v cnostech zdravý* [You obtain fair morals if your virtues are healthy] (Gavlovič, note 6, verse 21).

form and structure of his arguments. In the final part of the present study, several examples from Aristotle's work were shown as referential points for further philosophical and ethical analysis of Gavlovič's moral philosophy and thinking.

Despite his undebatable literary talent and importance (both aesthetic and linguistic) and wide interest in the thoughts of humanization, education, and moral development, his heritage as an Enlightenment thinker can be considered as a rather sporadic and rare input into this cultural transition. Working in the rather isolated condition of monasteries, surrounded by other members of the Church, and dedicating his sermons and literary work to ordinary people, he did not directly influence the culture and literature of that time and the literary elite of Hungarian society. He stayed focused on his own mission; to create a better, more moral and enlightened world and society – and therefore, we should read his work as such.

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Kafka: Crime and punishment

Timo Airaksinen¹

Abstract

When we read *The Trial* and *In the Penal Colony* together, we read about the logic of law, crime, punishment, and guilt. Of course, we cannot know the law, or, as Kafka writes, we cannot enter the law. I interpret the idea in this way: the law opens a gate to the truth. Alas, no one can enter the law, or come to know the truth, as Kafka says. The consequences are devastating: one cannot know the name of one's own crime, which is to say guilt is eternal and permanent; nothing can absolve us. Only one solution exists. Josef K. in *The Trial* should have committed suicide like the Officer in "Penal Colony." That is to say, perhaps, that you always are your own judge and executioner. Guilt cannot be doubted and thus, you are doomed. Both narratives are cruel and ruthless in their own way in their moral pessimism.

Keywords: guilt, shame, law, knowledge, truth, redemption

At the gates of Law

In *The Trial* and *In the Penal Colony* Franz Kafka discusses something he calls the Law and he does it in terms of guilt, crime, and redemption. Of course, he deals with the Law elsewhere as well, but these two literary masterpieces form a pair in the sense that the logic of one complements and comments on the logic of the other. We should read them together if we are interested in their interpretation and philosophical import. Excepting the purists who enjoy the story as such on aesthetic grounds, the reader is bound to ask questions like, what is the Law, what is Josef K.'s crime, and who are the high judges who are supposed to sentence him, when a sentence is needed. An unequivocal fact is the punishment is death in the hands of an executioner. However, the reader should not expect any theory or philosophy of ethics, law, and justice. Ethics of literature is a different language game.² *The Trial* is a fertile source of moral questions but all of them defy plausible answers. The result is an intriguing mystery play and a play of mysteries that challenge the reader without giving him/her an obvious clue of how to solve them. It all ends in an old quarry but before that we visit, with Josef K., a large, dark cathedral and listen to a priest's mock sermon from the pulpit when he talks about the Peasant at the Gates of Law. Here we find a riddle within a riddle, another narrative whose interpretation threatens to remain an enigma. No one is supposed to enter the Law, even if the gate is always open – as the Guard says (Kafka, 2009, "In the Cathedral"). And every person has his or her own gate, and consequently a personal guard. Perhaps this parable contains traces of Plato's Cave: that gate leads out of the cave allowing ideas to shine clear and distinct to the illuminated person. Plato allows this, Kafka does not. Plato says his dialectical method of inquiry leads to illumination; Kafka does not agree. He closes the gate. He has no access to such dialectic.

The story of the "Penal Colony" (Kafka, 1988) is a straightforward narrative bereft of metaphorical or metaphysical terms. Its narrative is factual and mainly employs metonymic tropes. If *The Trial* is a dark comedy or tragic farce where the hapless Josef K. marches towards

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² About the relationship between ethics and literature: "Instead of the text telling readers to perform certain acts, it now considers whether it has the right to tell the reader to do anything at all. Hillis Miller's ethical move is, by his own admission, a Kantian one. Now the text is conceived according to its legislative moment, whose claim to truth is such that it cannot but be obeyed, for the reader cannot but firmly adhere to its principles" (Poiana, 1995, p. 49). This seems to be true of Kafka's texts, too.

his doom in a social environment whose inner logic has suddenly turned into something he no longer recognizes, the "Penal Colony" is, on the contrary, a horror story complete with images of madness, torture, gore, and blood. Its cruelty is shocking but cleverly mitigated by the fact that the reader cannot positively identify with any of the major players: the Traveller or Explorer, the Officer, and the sentenced Soldier. Its underlying logic plays with some deep ironies that constantly and consistently threaten to turn into cynicism (Airaksinen, 2019b). The source of irony is the fact that horrible things are recommended and celebrated by the Officer as if they were expressions of good logic, true values, and requirements of the law, all based on some traditions of the most exalted kind. The sacred creator of all this is the Old Commandant whose power is now trusted to the present Commandant, that troubled and shadowy figure represented by the Officer; this lineage gives the narrative a deeper pseudo-historical meaning (Kafka, 1988, p. 153).

Irony entails that what is bad is called or seen as good, in this case torture entails justice, although the dramatis personae may not see it that way – not even the Explorer who watches and listens without comment.³ In the end he frantically escapes as if he were threatened by the cruelty of the Colony – the rope trope has become a modern classic (Kafka, 1988, p. 167). The story is readable, straightforward, and exciting, but as I aim to show that its apparent simplicity allows us to utilize the narrative when we read *The Trial*.⁴ What is simple may reproduce and thus explain what is more complicated – this is mimesis as simulation. Or perhaps *The Trial* emulates the "Penal Colony," that is, its very complexity derives from what happens in the "Penal Colony" and can be understood on that basis.⁵

Law and truth

Josef K. wants to know the name of his crime. The arresting bailiff ridicules him: How could you know it when you do not know the law: "Look, Willem, he admits he doesn't know the law and at the same time claims he's innocent" (Kafka, 2008, p. 9). In the penal colony, the punishment teaches the sentenced person the name of the crime, or actually, the name of the norm he has violated: he reads it from his own skin and flesh.⁶ Now, truth can be understood in two ways, either analytically in its minimal sense or essentially in its maximal sense. Analytically, we ask how a sentence and facts are related: if and only if the sentence corresponds to facts is it true. In this way, truth is the property of the sentence. Essentially, I can ask what the truth about this or that matter is, for instance, the truth about the rule of law. I am then asking about the essence of it, or what it is all about. Someone may be a false prophet in the sense that he is not a true prophet. A man may be a true man. These two versions of truth are different but equally valid, or we need both the "true sentence" and "the truth about something", when we read Kafka. Also, "truth" means the particular instance of the Truth, which is a Platonist construal. The Truth means a high value and the relevant Platonic idea or form; the Law and other capitalized general terms in this essay should be understood in the same way. The Law is the idea behind laws. The name of one's crime is an instance of the Truth.

Kafka's attitude to the truth: the truth about facts looks trivial. How many prostitutes worked in Prague in 1900 can be calculated, if not exactly then at least approximately. A fact like this does not interest an existentialist and expressionistic author like Kafka, as for instance the

³ This has been called irony *oratio obliqua*, or unintentional irony.

⁴ As Reiner Stach says, the "Penal Colony" was "an offshoot of *The Trial*" (Stach, 2013, p. 481).

⁵ When a simple structure represents a more complex one, we have simulation; emulation is the opposite case (Airaksinen, 2019d).

⁶ According to Jeremy Bentham, common law fails to inform the accused person of his crime, unlike codified law. It all depends on precedents and the judges' interpretation. This makes it impossible to know beforehand what is criminal and what is not (Bentham, 1780/2019).

various factual mistakes in *Amerika* show: the Statue of Liberty wielding a sword, no harbour piers in New York, a bridge between New York City and Boston, high hills around New York, and mountains like the Rockies between New York and Oklahoma.⁷ But think of something we may call the truth about a life lived well, including moral questions like homosexual, paedophilic, and incestuous desire, the reasons to marry, honesty and deceit, and the ultimate value of one's artistic work. Truth is like meaning: we ask, what is the meaning of suffering or the truth of it. It is undeniable that we can say something meaningful of these things, perhaps something that is so deep and revealing that it indeed is worth saying. Ask what to think of marriage blanc, or marriage without sex. This is to play with guilt and anxiety, as Kafka knew so well. In *The Trial*, a trivial piece of truth becomes crucially important: the name of your crime, or what you have done to deserve all the pain. Or perhaps this singular truth is irrelevant: it does not concern my deeds, it may be about the life I live, or the truth about my whole existence – I mean the guilt.

The “Penal Colony” plays with the simple and *The Trial* with the essential idea of truth *de dicto* (definition). But what is the truth *de re* (what is the case) and how to find it? This is my key thesis: we want to know the truth and we find it in the Law, that is, why is it that “‘Everyone seeks the Law’, the man says”, and he is right (Kafka, 2008, p. 155).⁸ As Kafka might put it: To know the truth, or the name of the crime, you must enter the Law through an ever-open gate. Next, let us ask, why does the Law represent what is true, or the Law signifies the Truth? However, this only holds in terms of metonymies: to enter the Law is to enter the Truth, and to know the Truth is to know the Law.⁹ We may say something like, “The Law is like the Truth” or “The Truth is embedded in the Law”, if this helps us make sense of K.'s – and Kafka's – relentless quests for knowledge. Now, who is going to say what those key truths are? Art can approach the Truth in an indirect and tentative manner, but that is all. Truth is a hallowed thing, or an ideal case, that one approaches with fear and trembling knowing full well that it hides behind questions that allow nothing but trivial, confused, and misleading answers.

However, the Peasant must stop at the front of the Gate – the Guard is unyielding and always there. This is the Gate of Law, but why “Law”? Why not say, it is the gate of Truth? The answer is simple: The Truth is unknowable in its proudly essentialist garb. Is the Law different, that is, knowable? Josef K. did not know the law, as the bailiff says. The Peasant cannot enter the Law. The answer must be, one cannot know the Law although the Law is a gate to the Truth: if we knew the Truth that would only be because of the Law. Of course, the conditional proposition here must be understood in the counterfactual sense, which is to say that its antecedent term is false. Therefore, the Law does not provide us with the Truth; it only shows the way through the Gate. It is like saying, here is the road home over an impossibly high and rough mountain – you need to fly, but the route is here. This information has no practical consequences because you cannot fly, but it still is valuable.¹⁰

Let me illustrate. Suppose you deliberate about some ethical problems *de se*, or as they concern you personally here and now; hence, they are unavoidable and pressing. How are you supposed to know the Truth about them, say, in Kafka's case, his true attitude towards his father Hermann? Could Franz ask his friends? What does it matter what they say? Would it douse or flame the anxieties in him that this all-important question causes? He insists on a valid answer, one of authority and abidingness, or something one cannot ever argue against. Then and only

⁷ See about the meaningfulness of such errors (Airaksinen, 2019c, p. 146).

⁸ To say one seeks the law is not idiomatic; one seeks the truth. This hints at Kafka's strategy of meaning. Another strange idea is to “enter the Law,” as if the Law is the same as the Law Court

⁹ About such master tropes (see Burke, 1969, p. 509).

¹⁰ Cf. *The Castle* (Kafka, 2008) where K. knows the way to the Castle but cannot use it. The road leads to the Castle and does not lead to the Castle (Airaksinen, 2019c, p. 134f.).

then can he justifiably hope for relief. He needs the Truth to absolve or punish himself. But we already know where the Truth lies: the Law is the key. When the Law says the case right or wrong, good or bad, laudable or sinful, that is it. You cannot argue against the Law because it is the sacred norm and the categorical rule that is created to provide you the answer, or the truth of the matter.¹¹ But Josef K. never finds a law court that would pass the verdict. His search is unremitting.

Mimicking Pontius Pilate, Kafka asks, “What is the truth?” – but without drawing an explicit distinction between the *de re* and *de dicto* interpretations of the question. In fact, Kafka pretends that he, and Josef K., are interested in the *de re* case (Am I in fact guilty of something, and what is the name of my crime?), when in fact he first discusses the case *de dicto* (What is the meaning of truth?). The reader expects to find a simple answer *de re*, which will remain hidden. Hence, Kafka flirts with Josef K.’s guilt without telling the reader that this is not the point of the narrative. The basic issue is the Law and its relation to the Truth, which creates a metaphysical problem worthy of attention and devotion. Josef K. first wants to know the truth, or what he has done wrong, but soon he starts searching for the Truth, or what the Law is all about. Ultimately, he wants to know where the Law is and who embody the Law, or who are the highest judges. He wants to meet and see them. He wants to talk to them. He must think, if I knew the Law, I also would know the Truth, or what lies on the other side of the Gate of Law, and *a fortiori* the source of my guilt. Anyway, the quest for the Truth is, so to speak, a legal problem – because it all depends on the Law.

The Proof, or the “Penal Colony” and The Trial compared

The “Penal Colony” is, as I have already stated, a straightforward horror story that focuses on a terrible machine worthy of the Marquis de Sade’s machinery designed for the tortures in the section of the final and decisive “Hell Passion” at the end of *The 120 Days of Sodom*:¹²

Everything is ready, all the tortures are in motion, and they proceed simultaneously, amidst much noise. The first torture engine is a wheel upon which the girl is strapped and which, rotating interruptedly, bears against an outer circle studded with razors which everywhere scratch and tear and slice the unfortunate victim, but as the blades do not bite deep, only superficially, she turns for at least two hours before dying (Sade, 1969, p. 667).¹³

I need not elaborate on this sick example. Kafka’s machine works like this: moving needles dig in and cut like blades into the skin and flesh of the condemned person for twelve hours writing the name of the crime on it (Kafka, 1988, pp. 147ff.). After six hours, the victim will start making sense of the script on his skin. At the last moment just when the victim dies, he successfully reads the name of his crime, and this illuminates his face one last time: “Enlightenment comes to the most dull-witted. It begins around the eyes. From there it radiates” (Kafka, 1988, p. 150). It is as if the knowledge made him free, in the sense cultivated by Sigmund Freud: knowledge of the aetiology of anxiety relieves the victim from its clutches. Freud was serious about it, but Kafka creates a parody of the magic of self-knowledge – and what a horrible parody it is. “Knowledge makes you free” sounds like a parody of “Arbeit macht frei”. In the end, the criminal knows the name of his crime, this is why he is tortured, or alternately, not tortured but informed about the law according to the idea of the Law: it is all

¹¹ This may be called Kantian intuition (Kant, 1797/2017).

¹² I do not want to compare, like D. Vardoulakis, Kafka’s fictional torture fantasy with the true historical case in the opening pages of M. Foucault’s *Surveiller et punir* (1975), especially if you hope to find some humor in it. And, of course, in Kafka’s tale no one is tortured (Vardoulakis, 2016, Ch. 5).

¹³ Fifteen different machines are working in the dungeon. Kafka might have read the book because it was published in German in 1904.

about truth and knowledge. The victim has reached fulfilment and redemption through a kind of insane illumination, when it is all over. He is free, as free as a person ever can be. Then he dies. This is how the process should go, but this is an empty *should*, as we will see. Anyway, the rule is, according to the Law, you are guilty but you do not know it: you cannot know the name of the crime. But the law is written so that you in the end should know. This follows the Platonic rule to the effect that the Law serves the Truth, however painful this may be. However, as the reader of the “Penal Colony” knows, this is an illusion. The name of the crime exists; it is, so to say, obtainable but never obtained. When the Officer shows the script containing the name of the Soldier’s crime to the Explorer, he cannot make sense of it. The Officer deciphers it: it reads, “Honour Thy Superiors”. What is this? The machine was supposed to write this text on the skin of the Soldier, and in fact, the text logically entails the name of the crime: he has not been obedient. In case of the Officer, the scrip reads, “Be Just”. Again, this is not the name of a crime; it is what the Officer should represent in his role and life. But in what way has he been unjust? What is the exact name of his crime, nobody can tell. However, whatever it says, the script is both unreadable and uninformative. The Officer claims it is readable – it is after all a script, a primitive kind of program that guides the machine when it ever so slowly massages the message on the flesh of the convict.

The Officer cannot secure the acceptance of the Traveller and in his deep desperation ties himself down to the machine platform, as if to learn about his own crime. The Officer behaves as if he did not know. He does not know even if the script is in his pocket among other scripts: by selecting it he sentences himself as if he were a judge. Then the machine breaks down and the scene deteriorates into social, moral, and technical chaos and ultimately disaster. In his atavistic mind, the Officer cannot control his desire to die and learn, although he should now know it is impossible in these modern times. Indeed, he is denied the name of his crime: the machine punctures him killing him instantly; he is left dangling from the spikes in thin air splattering his blood all over. No illumination accompanies punishment in these days. The face of the Officer stays blank when, ideally, it should express deep relief (Kafka, 1988, p. 166). At this point, an attentive reader realizes the true point of “Be just”. It was meant that Officer himself reads it, it was already in his pocket during the conversation with the Explorer, but the only way he can read it is from the machine when it tortures him. The Explorer could not read it because the name of the crime cannot be read without the machine, and thus it follows that the Officer could not read it either. He guesses what is written, and so we have an explanation why the Officer enters the machine: he wants to read the name of his own crime. Certainly, we do not know what the machine would have written, if it did not malfunction. It may have been something other than “Be Just”. Of course, this is too late; the script is already indecipherable in any form. It cannot be read, and the machine collapses. In these days, punishment is simpler and quicker.

As we learn, the torture was invented by the Old Commandant some time ago; actually, one can think of a long time span, or even say the practice is ancient and belongs to another era. Now its time is already past; hence, the machine does not work. It is a mere relic of the past, or a mere moral remnant. Nevertheless, the Officer hopes to bring back the old, better era: “And our prophesy has come true; the new Commandant has to acknowledge its truth”. The text quite amusingly mocks the Bible and the Christian concept of Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection: the Officer must sacrifice himself so that the followers of the Old Commandant can come and flourish again. Here rests the old Commandant. His adherents, who now must be nameless, have dug this grave and set up this stone. There is a prophesy that after a certain number of years the Commandant will rise again and lead his adherents from this house to recover the colony. Have faith and wait!

The text skilfully creates an archaic sense of time as if the Old Commandant were a magical and sacred figure. Such a feeling is fortified by our knowledge that a local priest once denied

him burial in holy ground, and his ruling stays. The man was a monstrous tyrant but, anyway, he still has his dedicated followers who wait for his second coming. Then all will be good, as if the New Jerusalem had descended amongst them. The new era will once again allow the criminal to know the name of his/her crime, however terrifying the method. The times of enlightenment and illumination will be back. Should they welcome it is another matter. Notice, incidentally, how closely parallel the deaths of the Officer and Josef K. are: In both cases their body is punctured by a sharp object, needles and a knife. Both cases hint at suicide, and this is no Socratic case: Josef K. realizes he should have done it himself and feels bad about it: “K. knew very well that it would have been his duty to grasp the knife himself as, going from hand to hand, it hung in the air above him, and plunge it into his own body. But he didn’t do that”. Therefore, “‘Like a dog!’ he said. It seemed as if his shame would live on after him” (Kafka, 2008, pp. 165–166). Socrates did it himself, he emptied the cup of hemlock as required, and thus he avoided the shame of his execution. He refused to be at the mercy of the executioner. But K. has failed the last test. Dogs do not commit suicide when the time is right, unlike men. The Officer in the “Penal Colony” deliberately kills himself by tying himself to the machine. In Josef K.’s case, his long road to knowledge is now denied by the knife and, in the same way, the spikes refuse to inform the Officer. Both men know, or at least should know, that this is the case. They have no hope. They will never know. All this supports the idea that we should read the “Penal Colony” and *The Trial* together. Both texts tell the reader that in these days crime is a secret that cannot be known. Its name does not reveal itself, yet both men are guilty. The hand that appeared from nowhere to write King Belshazzar’s destiny on a white wall, will not return. Daniel deciphered the unreadable text for the King who came to know his crime and sentence, but this was a long time ago (*Daniel* 5–6).

What is, then, Josef K.’s crime?

The reader of the “Penal Colony” learns the name of the Soldier’s crime from a reliable source: it is disobedience. The soldier behaves like a complete idiot, as if he did not care or understand what is going on and what will happen. He behaves as if it were obvious that the machine will not work, or everything is just a silly game. Josef K.’s case is different. In the morning, two bailiffs enter his lodgings to tell him he is arrested. This is strange because they do not take him along with them; so, in what sense is Josef K. actually arrested? They deliver no subpoena; the Inspector in the other room only tells him that he is arrested, but he does not know whether he is suspected of some crime or not: “I cannot even confirm that you are charged with an offence” (Kafka, 2008, p. 12). Josef K. has done nothing wrong, as the reader learns immediately from the omniscience narrator. But this is not the point. The point is, Josef K.’s crime is and stays unknown. Perhaps he has committed a crime, perhaps not. If he has, no one knows anything of it. Perhaps it is unknowable, perhaps it is unknowable to the judges as well – the name of the crime is secondary because punishment is all that matters. Guilt is undeniable, one cannot deny one’s guilt, and the punishment will follow when the stars are right. As the Officer says: “My guiding principle is this: Guilt is never to be doubted” (Kafka, 1988, p. 135).¹⁴ This is something Josef K. never understands and, in this sense, he does not know the Law.

Of course, the reader may speculate at this point. Think of the bailiffs and their fate: Josef K. finds them in a side-room where a whipper is mercilessly lashing them. The reason is that they have not performed their duties correctly when they met Josef K. for the first time. Perhaps Josef K. was the wrong person and then it is true that he is innocent. He is the wrong man. It is a mistake, Josef K. repeats, it must be a mistake. But this does not matter because his crime has

¹⁴ About Kafka’s ideas of law and guilt (see Kafka, 1988, pp. 12, 145 Cf.; Airaksinen, 2019a, pp. 13–14). Notice: legal guilt can be doubted, unlike the feeling of guilt. Kafka intentionally confuses jurisprudence and psychology here.

no name anyway. Any crime is a perfectly nebulous and undefinable entity, yet Josef K. is guilty – guilt is beyond suspicion. This is part of its essence: if you are accused and found guilty, you are guilty of being accused; if you feel guilty, this proves your guilt because otherwise you would not feel what you feel. This is how I read Kafka.

Next, Josef K. learns that the Law is everywhere and that everyone he meets belongs to the Law, for example everyone in the abysmal darkness of the cathedral. The Offices of the Law fill all the attics in town, but the high judges remain absent. The case becomes first panicky and then paranoid. Perhaps Josef K. is or is becoming a paranoid megalomaniac. Perhaps the Officer was in peril, too. I am not pushing a psychological or psychoanalytic interpretation here; I am only referring to some structural features of such cases. As Elias Canetti writes referring to Sigmund Freud's case studies, Daniel Paul Schreber:

At this point one should perhaps stress the importance which plots and conspiracies have for the paranoiac. They are continually with him and anything even remotely resembling one is immediately seized. The paranoiac feels *surrounded*; his chief enemy is never content to attack him single-handed, but always tries to rouse a spiteful *pack* to set on him at the suitable moment. At first the members of this pack keep hidden and may be anywhere and everywhere; or else they pretend to be innocent and harmless, as if they were not lying in wait for anything. [...] They wanted to turn him into an imbecil to push the illness of his nerves to the point where he would appear permanently incurable. Could there be any prospect more terrible for a human being as gifted as he thought himself? (Canetti, 1984, pp. 436–437).

Megalomania and paranoia belong together because a paranoid person thinks that everyone is after him, that their evil eye is constantly following him and only him. Now, to say everyone is interested in me and willing to do anything to hurt me entails I, myself, being both unique and all-important as a person and social agent; this is megalomania. Others are, all of them, after me and ready to do anything to hurt me, which entails my perceived value being infinitely high. My resources are limited and thus I am doomed. But of course, they do not act immediately. Instead, they observe and follow me to the end of the world because they know this entails my boundless suffering and panicky life. They want to hurt me, and their strategy plays with my vulnerabilities in the cruellest possible manner.¹⁵ The following explicates this:

“To the cathedral?” Leni asked. “Er, yes, to the cathedral.” “Why ever to the cathedral?” Leni asked. K. tried to explain briefly, but hardly had he started than Leni suddenly said, “They’re hunting you down.” K. had no time for pity that he had neither invited nor expected, and simply said goodbye, nothing more, but as he replaced the receiver he said, half to himself, half to the far-off young woman he could no longer hear, “Yes, they’re hunting me down” (Kafka, 2009, p. 146).

But the Priest's final comment does not support such a paranoid idea, though:

“I belong to the court,” said the priest, “so why should I want anything from you? The court does not want anything from you. It receives you when you come and dismisses you when you go” (Kafka, 2009, p. 160).

This exchange resembles the initial arrest scene in *The Trial*: the Inspector does not want anything from him. On the contrary, he dismisses Josef K., whose fear of “them” and their modest aims do not seem to fit together. Nevertheless, when he develops the idea of “them”, he already flirts with paranoia. The Priest is nonchalant in his final comments in the Cathedral as

¹⁵ Such a simple interpretation is dangerous, though (Airaksinen, 2017).

if to show that Josef K. is totally and ultimately in the hands of the Law. Josef K. has no control over his fate, in this sense he is doomed. The lenience of the Law is deceptive. Now Josef K.'s only hope is to enter the Law. In this sense, he is similar to the Peasant who sits and waits at the Gates of Law and is constantly watched by the Guard, who never grows old unlike the Peasant, and who then shuts the gates that remain open. If he could enter the Law, he would know the name of his crime and they could no longer harass him, he would be free again. This is not going to happen. Hence, let me suggest what Josef K.'s crime is, it is his paranoid megalomania. If this is so, the punishment is, "Kill yourself", and the only reason for it, "Be just". This is what the Officer did while Josef K. failed.

They can wait until you do it, and they trust that you behave accordingly. As the Priest says, everything is up to you; but this applies only to the death penalty, which means suicide. When a person is ready for it, the Law, so to speak, receives him. He offers his own death to the Law that only requires justice, but of course, justice is something the Law cannot receive from the guilty person. And the Law lets you go through dying and death when you move away from this life, to heaven or hell, who knows? The point is, the Law allows you to punish yourself, first by guilty feelings and anxiety, and then by the deadly blade. And it allows you to die and go away. It is all about your own megalomaniac paranoia, which is a crime, but only in the sense that it punishes you by means of your own intolerable anxiety, for example by means of the anxious desire to come to know and see the faces of the high judges. Kafka seems to say: your guilt comes first and as such it justifies punishment. Crime does not deserve punishment, only guilt and anxiety do. Crime is nothing but guilt is everything. Normally we think that crime entails guilt; for Kafka, guilt entails crime – but guilt does not name a crime.

They are all after you, they are everywhere, and all the power over you belongs to them. What can you do but to kill yourself, you are indeed doomed, like any criminal waiting for his executioner locked up in his cell? Josef K. and the Officer are both guilty in the same way and thus they deserve the same fate, or punishment. This is an instance of "Be just". Both of them are also paranoid megalomaniacs: Josef K. believes everyone is against him and only him whereas the Officer, a makeshift Christ figure, assumes the full responsibility of the failure of the past legal world, as if it depended on him. Finally, we also notice that the machine breaks down and fails to read the script the Officer feeds to its reader. The machine as if goes crazy when it misses the name of the crime of the Officer. This is its own particular crime that entails suicide. Of course, the crime of the machine remains a secret, like all other names of crimes, and this brings about the third suicide in these two tales. Notice also that Josef K. had done nothing; the Officer did nothing although he tried; and the machine also failed to execute. The failure to act, or one's impotence, is the very cause of guilt, and thus it approximates the name of the crime. In other words, their crime is their very innocence, and its proper consequence is the anxiety that culminates in suicide. But innocence is no reason for leaving you alone, as any paranoid person knows. On the contrary, it is *sine qua non* of their attitude towards you. The causal chain may well be like this: the agent is innocent, and that is why "they" harass him/her, this makes him/her feel guilty, which drives him/her towards suicide, assisted by "them". And of course, guilt alone implies crime. It cannot be doubted.

Conclusion: Methodological and tropological themes

I have read the "Penal Colony" and *The Trial* as if they were narrative accounts of some fictional events, that is, as if their sentences carried a truth-value. We know that the name of Superman is Clark Kent who is vulnerable to Kryptonite. One cannot deny these facts. To say that Clark Kent is not the name of Superman is a mistake and to say that Superman can handle Kryptonite is also wrong. Such facts are easy to verify and document. We can then wonder how Mr. Kent does it, how can anyone be so strong and virtuous? Of course, it is all fictional, but we can presume that fictional characters and events might be in contact with the world as we know it,

as if a fictional narrative referred to an alternate possible world so that a path leads from our world to that new world. We may be able to imagine that path – in the case of Superman we fail, in the case of Josef K. we may succeed.

The idea of the path between two possible worlds is this: we do not know how to modify our world so that it becomes the world of Superman. In this sense, Superman stories do not represent the realistic genre of fiction. His powers are such that we cannot imagine how to explain them. We simply have no idea how to modify our world accordingly. To mention a well-known example, we are invited to imagine a world where kangaroos have no tails. We know how to enter such a world, and then we can say, “If kangaroos had no tails, they would topple over”, which looks like a true sentence.

Are the “Penal Colony” and *The Trial* realistic stories in this sense? I have treated them as if they were. The “Penal Colony” tells a story that (almost) could be true.¹⁶ Think of the machine that tortures the victim for twelve full hours. The Chinese method was to feed massive amounts of opium to the victim so that he would stay alive for the required time. Perhaps the “Penal Colony” is a parody but it still can be read in the realistic mode. *The Trial* is a more problematic case, and one may argue that for two different reasons the narrative fails to be realistic: First, we do not quite know what such terms as the Law and ideas like entering the Law and Truth mean, I mean in empirical terms. Second, the omnipresence of the Law and the idea of supreme judges are constructions that may not be mimicked by means of some modifications made to our world. In this second case, the overall image of the Law is so fantastic that we do not know how to handle its empirical version. Kafka may have wanted this: it all looks *prima facie* realistic, except when you think of it in a holistic manner, then it looks like a veritable nightmare. My solution to this issue was psychological: I argued that Josef K. suffers from megalomaniac paranoia, which allows me to tell the story in a realistic way and compare it with the “Penal Colony”.

My point is that the “Penal Colony” and *The Trial* belong together, and their key ideas form *prima facie* a coherent whole. This also allows philosophical speculations and lends them some plausibility. The point is Kafka handles both the “Penal Colony” and *The Trial* as if they belonged to the realistic genre, but then this is an illusion; it is all about *als ob* realism. I agree that this is a problematic methodological move. Of course, the reader may take the story as it is and read it as an expressionist sketch of a nightmare world without paying attention to its possible realism. The story is illuminating in its own unique manner. In principle, my type of realistic reading requires a semantic interpretation, or an attempt to say what the text means or wants to say. This can be done but it is too difficult to support such an interpretation and hence it stays at the level of a game or play that gives the crypto-narcissistic reader a chance to show how clever he/she is. Therefore, my ideas of Josef K.’s psychological constitution create a methodological move that allows us to stay at a realistic level that is parallel with the “Penal Colony”.

What about tropological themes? In *The Trial*, the Law may look like the law when it is understood realistically. But, ultimately, the episode with the Priest in the dark cathedral and especially the allegory of the Peasant at the Gates of the Law confuse the picture by introducing terms and themes that defy any realistic reading. Their meaning is and remains a mystery. I offered my own solution above. What does it mean to enter the Law? Nevertheless, we may treat these issues tropologically, that is, ask about their metaphoric nature.

¹⁶ Somehow this resembles Thomas Hobbes’s idea of the commonwealth under a sovereign power. Whatever the law is like and however cruelly it treated the citizen, he/she cannot complain. Hobbes does not want to draw any limits to sovereign power; see his political writings, for instance *De cive* (Hobbes, 1647/1997). George Berkeley reluctantly admits that we need not obey and serve a mad prince, although a bad prince is a different matter; see his *Passive Obedience* (Berkeley, 1712/1948). In this work, Berkeley refuses to see the difference of the punishment as a cost factor vs. its shame and guilt. According to Kafka, the latter aspect is all that matters.

What are the key metaphors in *The Trial*? I already rejected the idea of the Law as a metaphor and treated all terms like the Truth, Law, and the Court as metonyms. This is the basic idea behind my reading of *The Trial*. Let me only pick one obvious example of metaphors: the Gate and entering through it into the Law, the Gate that is for you and only for you, always open but also watched by a Guard who never grows old. Notice that many levels of the law exist, many gates and many more guards appear until one reaches the inner circles and the Law itself. Are these Dante's circles of hell or the Gnostic seven circles of the heavens that an evil Archon guards, whom one must pass in order to enter the Plenum? (Copenhaver, 1995, pp. 5, 105, 120). Is the Guard at the gate of the Law an Archon? He says that there are many others on the other side of his Gate, perhaps seven, and each is more terrifying. This is a Gnostic idea: the Law is the Plenum. "And I am only the lowest doorkeeper. Outside each room you will pass through there is a doorkeeper, each one more powerful than the last. The sight of just the third is too much even for me" (Kafka, 2008, p. 154). If you think in these terms, you miss the gate as a metaphor because, for Gnostics, all this is true. You are back in the realm of metonyms.

What is the Gate a metaphor of, then? We speak about the gates of heaven and hell. We speak of death as a gate to paradise. In fact, "gate" is a common and rather tired metaphor. This is how a door making company advertises its products:

Doors and gates have often symbolized meanings beyond their everyday use. A person can be referred to having a "closed door" mind, indicating that they are stubborn and not willing to accept or listen to new views. The famous phrase "kicking down the door" means that someone pushes forward bravely into or past a difficult situation. Literature, poetry, and proverbs often use doors and gates metaphorically to indicate the passing into a new stage of life. In particular, the genres of science fiction and fantasy heavily utilize the use of doors and gates. These have always been more than they seem in these genres. For example, doors and gates [. . .] have the powerful ability to transport those characters who pass through them to other locations. Sometimes these locations hold foreboding, dangerous situations for the characters, and other times they are warm, safe places that the characters are overjoyed to arrive at (A Look at Doors and Gate Metaphors from DCS Industries).

Clearly, in *The Trial* the final extended allegory is crucial for understanding the novel. The Priest had invited Josef K. to listen to his sentencing: the Gate closes he says. He is not a judge, as the killers of Josef K. are not legal executioners. Once again, the Law remains hidden although it is everywhere. And he tells Josef K. about the Gates of the Law that at this point look like a promise that cannot be fulfilled. If he could enter, if he dared, if he was allowed, Josef K. would see what his life and destiny was all about – the Truth. The end of *The Trial* is, therefore, not only metaphorical but also deeply ironic: the Gate is a metaphor for entering a new place and realm, but one cannot enter through this one, or a gate that does not function like a gate. It leads somewhere but at the same time it does not. A gate is, metaphorically, a promise but now it becomes a promise that cannot be kept, which is ever so cynical an idea. Thus, the ultimate meaning of the allegory is, you will never know the Truth, or the promise will not be kept. The Promised Land, the Plenum, is not there for you – only the Gate is. This is so cruel it makes *The Trial* hard to read. The torture machine in the "Penal Colony" is a gate as well, an opening to the Truth, and the cruellest of them all.

The visualization of the Gate – which materializes both in the old quarry and in the torture machine – invites a surreal image: imagine a blank canvas, draw a picture of a gate and its door, the Peasant sitting in front of it, and the Guard standing beside it. The Gate has no context, no house nor any other building, it is just a gate in the middle of infinite nothingness, and light emanates from it illuminating the two dramatis personae. The vision is static until the gate closes. At this moment, Josef K. was knifed to death, like a dog, by a nonchalant killer whose

shamelessness transfers all the shame to the victim – a shame that lingers on (McClelland, 2019, pp. 59–92; Williams, 1993, p. 78).

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Kafka's animals between mimicry and assimilation

Barbara Di Noi¹

Abstract

In Kafka's literary world, several animals emerge; they belong to an odd and enigmatic fauna, on the edge between violence and artistry but also between stillness and music; according to the writer, scripture represents both the fault and the punishment waiting for the solitary artist. Animals, especially depicted as hordes of small mice or other rodents, also hint to the heterogeneous structure of the Self, who doesn't manage to keep under control all the divisions in his ambiguous identity. Through opposition between the point of view of the subject, who considers his own isolation as indispensable to carry on writing, and the multitude of escaping small animals, Kafka also expresses and experiences his own impossibility of "description" (*Beschreibung*). In the meantime, Kafka's animals embody the creatural and unconscious sources of imagination the writer draws from that constantly escape his own control and willingness, pushing forwards into an unknown and inhospitable region, towards the wasteland, the eternal winter that can be identified with scripture. In writing, a deep metamorphosis of the Self takes place. Kafka shares this belief with one of the writers he most admired and considered his master, Gustave Flaubert, who firmly thought that, while writing, one loses his previous identity, becoming someone else, even assuming the appearance of the "otherness". We can state that Kafka's imagery of animals takes to the extreme the paradox and ambiguity the idea of writing relies on, also reproducing, especially, in his hybrid creatures, the feeling of uncertainty and lack of safety of the assimilated Jewish artist.

Keywords: animals, faune, imagery, violence, artistry, metamorphosis, identity, description, fault, punishment, anthropocentrism, ambiguity, otherness, hybride, music, stillness.

Consolidation

Animals spring out at almost each page, each line of Kafka's texts: they colonise his short stories and sketches and play an important role in the novels as well (Ortlieb, 2007, p. 339); as Cornelia Ortlieb remarks, there are so many different animals dwelling in Kafka's texts: they literally pop up and spring out from every page, creeping out from slots and holes. You can find magical and realistic animals, one of them even hangs from the gate of the Synagoge, but there are also hybrids, like the half-cat, half-lamb of *Crossbreed* that the first person narrator feeds with milk. There are animals which stay still, lurking ("auf der Lauer"), like the cat in *Home Coming*, while others are characterized by restless motion. They are all incomprehensible, so that we can state with Ortlieb, that Kafka's animals embody the nature of the *Gleichnisse* (*Parable or Simile*): "all these Similes [sic] simply mean, [sic] that the inexplicable is inexplicable, but the things we deal with every day, are different" (Ortlieb, 2007, p. 339)

There are also some weird creatures that can be classified neither as human beings nor as animals; it's even difficult to state if they belong to the organic world, or if they are artificial things, products of oneiric imagination; in fact, not only the boundary between man and animal can be crossed, also the border line between living beings and dead objects (*Dingwelt*) seems to be uncertain: this is the case of the strange object called Odradek in *The Cares of a family man*, which looks like the result of the mounting of disparate parts; one could think that the "creature" had an intelligible shape once, "and is now a broken-down remnant"; but although senseless, the "whole thing" is "in its own way perfectly finished." What makes Odradek unintelligible is the circumstance that it doesn't resemble anything: like some hybrids and like the Author himself, Odradek is a *Zwitterding*, a crossbreed, sharing the strange and enigmatic nature of the assimilated Jews Kafka wrote about in a famous letter to Max Brod of June 1921, with the aim of describing the frightening situation of the present generation ("schreckliche

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innere Lage dieser letzten Generationen”) of the assimilated Jews in Prague. This last generation of Jewish writers, who wrote in German, wanted to run away from their fathers’ religion, but with their hind legs they still stuck to their fathers’ Judaism, with their front legs, instead, they weren’t able to find new ground (“mit den Vorderbeinchen fanden sie keinen neuen Boden”) (Kafka, 1989, p. 359). In the same letter Kafka states that, to write in German, these authors had to face three impossibilities: the impossibility not to write, to write in German, the impossibility to write in another way; and in the end he adds a fourth impossibility, to remark on the paradox of this condition: the impossibility to write at all, because this kind of literature is an enemy to life.

Kafka’s animals faithfully reflect the self-destroying attitude that the writer unceasingly assigns to writing and literature: His digging animals (like the protagonist of *The burrow*) build their burrow, which turns out to be a prison where in the end they will be buried, and they are even pleased to think that the ground of the building will collect their blood. Stillness and emptiness are the characteristics that the animal loves in his labyrinthic “castle”, and yet a mortal enemy could be inside his burrow, which seems so safe to him:

When I stand in the Castle Keep surrounded by my piled-up stores, surveying the ten passages which begin there, raised and sunken passages, vertical and rounded passages [...] and all alike still and empty, ready by their various routes to conduct me to all other rooms, which are also still and empty [...] I know that here is my castle, which I have wrested from the refractory soil with tooth and claw [...] my castle which can never belong to anyone else, and is so essentially mine that I can calmly accept in it even my enemy’s mortal stroke at the final hour, for my blood will ebb away here in my own soil and not be lost (Kafka, 1990, p. 368).

The blood which will ebb away in the soil and not be lost represents the ink and is also related to the process of writing, which will survive the animal’s death. A similar metaphor is to be found in the fragmentary complex of the *Hunter Gracchus*, referring to the retrospective account Gracchus himself makes of his death. Both figures – the digging animal and Gracchus – are related to hunting, which by Kafka frequently turns out to be a metaphor for the artistic. Gracchus’ name, besides, hints to “Dohle”, *kavka*, also referring to the writer himself. The hunter Gracchus shares the floating state of other hybrids, being neither dead nor alive: as the eternal Jew, Ashverus, or like Heine’s Flying Hollander, he is condemned to sail on dead terrestrial waters. This never ending wandering arises from the small distraction of the pilot, who missed the entry to the “other” world.

The meaning of Kafka’s animal figures cannot be discussed without considering the most important question the writer was concerned with throughout his whole literary work: the possibility, or rather the impossibility to reach the Truth and the knowledge of Law; many of his animals are directly linked to these themes, which are obviously related to religion or Judaism. In Kafka’s sketches can also be found a strange animal that lives in the Synagoge, and that constantly escapes any attempts of the observing narrator to define or describe it. Other animals, like the snake, are strictly linked to original sin and consequently with the loss of paradise. According to Kafka, conscience is both the source of sin and the way to become aware of it. Nevertheless, the snake is also linked to the writing process and such a relationship is certainly due to its shape, which looks like a line of scripture through a long tradition traces back the idea of the arabesque or line of beauty, also called “serpentine.” We can also say that animals in Kafka’s text are strongly related to the three major themes of his work, i.e. Judaism and ambiguous Jewish identity, the idea of writing, and finally the search for an indirect and higher kind of description, that can be identified with a particular use of the metaphor and the narrative pattern of parable. These three elements, usually occurring in his stories of animals, cannot be considered isolated from each other, as they are different aspects of the unique

problem which really empassioned Kafka his life long: the idea of language, and how language could represent “his own dreaming inner life.” Kafka, in fact, is longing for an antipsychological kind of representation, which can grant him impersonality of the highest degree, and precisely the reaching of such a high degree of impersonality is the aim he pursues in his parables and “Fables” based on animals. These Fables without Moral often describe an inversion, the attempt of changing direction, like in the very short sketch *A Little Fable*, in which the mouse complains that “the world is growing smaller every day”. The walls he could see far away to the right and left have narrowed so quickly “that I’m in the last chamber already, and there in the corner stands the trap that I must run into.” The cat’s suggestion that he should change direction only confirms the correctness of the statement of the mouse: “You only need to change your direction”, said the cat and ate it up (Kafka, 1971, p. 492).

Running away from the I’s perspective

Kafka’s animal stories very often imply the idea of violence and death, describing the tyrannical oppression by man of animals; this oppression often resembles the relationship between servant and master in Hegel’s philosophy or between “Es” and “Super-Ego” in Freud’s psychoanalytical theory; animals and human beings sometimes fight against each other, as in the short story contained in the Diaries, *Memories of Kalda railway*, where the first person narrator fights with a long knife against rats, which, during the long winter, attack his provisions. But a lot of feral beings are also to be found in other stories or novels where the author deals with the violent suppression of all creatural and instinctive life inside the human being (Norris, 1985, pp. 102–117). In Kafka, animals often stand for two major semantic intentions: on the one hand, they are a symbol of the creatural still surviving in man, although this creatural has almost disappeared, as a result of the violent process of civilization; in the meanwhile, though, animals hint to the unknown, unconscious energy the writer must draw from for his writing. In the Diary, the writer describes his own attitude as follows: “I am not sitting at my desk, I’m fluttering around it” (Kafka, 1990, p. 573) to express the peculiar inconsistency of his own body, which makes him even unable to sit down. The fluttering movement of animals like the doves in the Gracchus-fragment, hint to the lack of *ubi consistam*, to the restlessness of the writer who cannot find neither balance nor quiet, but who is condemned to move in circles around an empty middle point.

According to Benjamin, Kafka’s animals express the shame of being human (Benjamin, 2000, p. 113). Animals and human beings can’t be considered separately in Kafka’s fictional stories, as animals may be the result of a process of dehumanization (Haacke, 2013, p. 143), like in *Metamorphosis* or, conversely, are portrayed in their grotesque attempt to make themselves as equal as possible to human beings, thus denying or completely forgetting their animality and physical substance, like the ape of *A Report to an Academy*. In the latter example, we can also assume that physical pain clearly symbolizes the denial of the ape’s previous condition as an attempt by the animal to become as alike as possible to his human oppressors, against whom the ape doesn’t want to rise at all. The *Report* is actually the story of how Rotpeter has become what he or it is: it is a story of violence as a means and way to socialization. Socialization, which is social acceptance, is the ape’s goal. We can define the story as an allegorical, very concise “Bildungsroman” (Neumann & Vinken, 2007, pp. 138–140) unmasking the way the creature strains to become like his own oppressors, appropriating of their own weapons: in this case the tools of culture; or, better put, of what Rotpeter thinks *Bildung* consists of. Adopting the ape’s point of view, Kafka actually conveys a parodic image of erudition and academic rituals. To Rotpeter, “Bildung” represents the only way to run away from the cage. But Rotpeter’s aim doesn’t consist in gaining freedom again, although according to Deleuze he runs away along the line of flight of *detritorialization* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, pp. 34–36).

Even if the story is told in the first person, the reader clearly understands that the writer doesn't share his creature's illusion. This is one of the many examples in Kafka's works, of discrepancy between narrative perspective and voice: the voice in fact is always somewhere else or it arrives later than the pretending Self (Vogl, 1994). So we hear Rotpeter telling the story of his own capture. During a hunting expedition he was shot in two places: the first shot caused him a slight wound in the cheek; this wound left the red scar which earned him "the name *Red Peter*, a horrible name." But the second, and most important one, was also more severe and hit him "below the hip." This second wound is also the "cause of his limping a little to this day" (Kafka, 1971, p. 283). These two wounds mark the difference between the humanized ape, Rotpeter, and "the performing ape Peter, who died not so long ago and had some small local reputation." We can draw the conclusion that Rotpeter's assimilation very closely resembles the metaphorical suicide of the writing subject, in which the biographical "I" dies and another, different, subject takes his place: entering the world of scripture, Kafka becomes something else: to him writing means also a metamorphosis, a dismissing of the human identity to assume another one (Kremer, 1989, p. 553).

Kafka's literary animals

The act of writing represents to Kafka an attempt at *detritorialization* in order to escape from any pre-fixed meaning. Thanks to their strong mimetism, his animal stories allow him to forget and leave behind the human point of view and such anti-anthropological perspective may be pushed so far, that writing succeeds in conveying the idea of a complete extinguishing of conscience; to Kafka in fact the true substance of writing consists in forgetting, not in memory. What actually emerges from his animal stories is a new idea of "mimesis", that Sokel subsumes under the category of "fantastic mimesis" (Sokel, 2002, pp. 9–10). Darwin had discovered that, in nature, plants and animals actually practice "mimicry", using it as a tool of survival. Also Nietzsche speaks of the mimetic aptitude as a "camouflage" in his reflection about the comedian and the Jews; weak and odd creatures and human beings are endowed with high mimetic capability, and they use camouflage and mimicry in order to be accepted by the rest of society. Besides, Kafka's conception of mimesis marks a radical change compared to the realistic tradition of the bourgeois novel: his magic and grotesque mimesis puts even in question the central categories of the human rationality and makes it appear by no means certain that something like Gregor Samsa's monstrous metamorphosis could not happen to the reader. Kafka's mimicry doesn't only aim at the identification of the writer with the animal, but also forces the reader to change his own identity and point of view, to imagine that something impossible and grotesque could come true. Kafka's grotesque makes every certainty waver and even clears the boundary line between human being and animal (Powell, 2008, pp. 131–132).

In his fictional stories Kafka seems to combine the Darwinistic theory with Nietzsche's *Genealogy of morals*. His writing runs along the narrow line which separates the loss of self-evidence – which all kind of writing implies – from the dangerous abuse of psychology: The animal precisely allows a different kind of self description, which does without the self-mirroring psychological process. Maybe the only fictional story of animals, in which men are unseen, is *Researches of a dog*, where a dog carries out a philosophical inquiry about the very "essence of caninity." But we could as well consider *Researches* as a metaphor which does still hint to the human sphere. We realize that animals, although they seem to have an existence on their own, still embody in their own language, an indirect the way to speak of something else, something Kafka always leaves unsaid, even if his fictional world can't do without it: that's why many animal stories have often been read as an allegory for the Jewish community. The presence of the animal also continuously shifts between the "own" and the "stranger", between *dem Eigenen* and *dem Fremden*, reminding us the precariousness of each form of identity.

The images of animals are a kind of self description, which allows the subject to escape anthropocentrism. They allow that “jump out of the butchers’ rank” mentioned in the diaries of January 1922 (Kafka, 1990, p. 694); thanks to this jump the writer can escape from the suffocating obligation of “deed-description” (*Tat-Betrachtung*), so that a superior kind of description can be reached. On the other hand, animal and human subjects embody two different and opposite instances, both coexisting inside the human being, as they are both symbols of the subject’s inner ambivalence. This inner ambivalence is clearly reflected in Rotpeter’s behaviour, which makes the ape a paradigmatic example of assimilation. The memories of the wood, where the ape spent the first part of his life, have been almost completely erased from his mind. Rotpeter doesn’t want to come back to his natural condition, he has completely given up his nature of “ape”, and his refusal of the previous life could hardly be more radical. He firmly believes that he came to himself thanks to the two shots: “After these two shots I came to myself – and this is where my own memories gradually begin —” (Kafka, 1971, p. 283). We could read this passage as a metaphorical birth of the civilized subject. Like Kafka’s other plots, this starts with an awakening and will end up with the protagonist’s death: Rotpeter clearly stands for the rise of conscience that gradually destroys the natural substrate of the living organism. Through the story of an animal, which one could define as a “Fable without moral” (Kremer, 1998, p. 57), Kafka expresses the divorce between consciousness and life, the destruction of physical integrity and the self-denying process, which aims to acceptance inside a community of oppressors. The ape, like other subjects of other forms of assimilation, doesn’t have any other possibility; he doesn’t long for freedom, but only for a way out:

No, freedom was not what I wanted. Only a way out; right or left, or in any direction; I made no other demand; even should the way out prove to be an illusion; the demand was a small one, the disappointment could be no bigger. To get out somewhere, to get out! Only not to stay motionless with raised arms, crushed against a wooden wall (Kafka, 1971, p. 285).

This passage can be also read as the perfect allegory of what the writer longs for: Kafka isn’t looking for freedom and what he actually wants is to carry on moving inside the narrow boundaries of his own writing, as he explains in a crucial passage of his Diary, on the date August 20th, 1914:

Cold and empty. I perceive too much the boundaries of my capability that, when I’m completely seized [ergriffen] are too narrow. And even in this being seized, I believe that I am drawn inside these narrow boundaries, which however I don’t feel, precisely because I’m seized inside them. Nevertheless there is space enough to live inside these narrow boundaries [...] (Kafka 1990, p. 521).

Animals are very closely linked to the issue of how description is possible (Powell, 2008, pp. 129–130). Kafka’s first literary work, of which only some selected parts were published during his life, is *Description of a struggle*, where “struggle” suggests the idea of a fight (“Kampf”) between the many different subjects who alternate in the course of this atypical fictional text, and the world surrounding them. In Kafka’s *Description of a struggle*, animals don’t play a very important role and don’t even seem to exist on their own. Their function rather consists in hinting at the inner condition of the Self and above all to the multitude of components making up the human subject. The little cat which runs away, when the I falls down on the frozen ground, for instance, embodies the unconscious wish of this I of running away from his beloved-hated acquaintance; the first narrator suffers because of the indifference of this acquaintance, who appears to him as the supreme instance. In his attempt to get acknowledgement, the subject tries again and again to please him. He even wants to make his own body shorter, so that he can

look like him. But he is annihilated by the annoyed reaction of the other. Like in the animal stories, the attempt of making oneself similar to the otherness expresses a feeling of inferiority in front of the higher instance that should be imitated. But in *Description of a struggle* the relationship between I and his acquaintance suddenly undergoes a reversal: at the beginning of the next paragraph, whose title is *Diversions or proof that it's impossible to live*, the I manages to leap onto his acquaintance's shoulders and starts to exploit his physical energy to go forward, as if the other were a horse:

And now – with a flourish, as though it were not the first time – I leapt onto the shoulders of my acquaintance, and by digging my fists into his back I urged him into a trot. But since he stumped forward tather reluctantly and sometimes even stopped, I kicked him in the belly several times with my boots, to make him more lively [...] (Kafka, 1971, p. 39)

The previous masochism of the I is here clearly turned into sadism towards the acquaintance which is now reduced to a horse (Borghese, 2009, pp. 271–276). The outcome of this reversal is a hybrid, a *Zwitterding*, maybe the first centaur in Kafka's literary world.

There is a deliberate “vagueness” in the way in which Kafka's animals are presented. This *Unbestimmtheit* characterizes both the animals which tell the story in the first person, as for instance the protagonist of *The Burrow* (*Der Bau*), and the ones which the narration assumed as the object of description, like the strange and uncanny animal of *In unserer Synagoge*, which looks like a marten. For some of Kafka's animals it is easier to say what they are not, or what they don't look like, than what they actually are or what they look like (Driscoll, 2015, p. 37). They represent a challenge for the traditional art of description, or they even subvert the traditional idea of it, which is always description from a human point of view. Kafka's animals draw the observer in their own “otherness”: they force him to get rid of his usual human prejudices and categories. There is a text, which is scarcely considered by scholars, the *Erinnerungen an Kaldabahn* (*Memories of Kalda railway*): the text goes back to a period of absolute loneliness after Kafka left his fiancée, Felice Bauer. Instead of publishing it with the other short stories, Max Brod decided to publish it separately in 1951. The text deals with a human narrator, who decides to live in a wild, hostile environment somewhere in Russia. At night he is disturbed by huge rats against which he fights. But in the end he gives up his place at the “Kaldabahn” and returns to civilization. While he was writing down this fictional text, Kafka wrote in the Diary that he had reached the “ultimate boundary”:

I cannot carry on writing. I arrived at the ultimate boundary, maybe I will stay here for years, and afterwards maybe I will start another unfinished story again. This destiny is hunting me. I am cold and futile, too [...] And like some animal, completely separated from man, I swing my neck again and I would like to try to get F. again [...] (Kafka, 1990, p. 543).

This is one of the first examples for the theme of the “hunted hunter”: the narrator of *Kaldabahn* turns out to be a hunter too, and like Gracchus he wants to hunt the wolves of this desolate region; in the meantime, he is hunted by his own destiny. In a later passage of his Diary, Kafka will say that hunting is only an image to express the lack of synchronisation between the inner and outer world: while the inner world of imagination runs at an incredible speed, the “external clock” proceeds slowly, according to the usual, indifferent rhythm. As a result, the subject is torn between the two opposite dimensions.

Erinnerungen an Kaldabahn has been regarded as a self-reflexive text on Kafka's solitary existence as a writer (Driscoll, 2015, p. 43). The idea of writing is strictly linked to the detail of the “claws.” The motive of the *Krallen* is clearly emphasized in Kafka's zoopoetics, as well

as in his idea of writing in general. In their deep ambivalence *Krallen* hint to the idea of writing (the writer's hand holding the pen turns into the crawl of an animal, because to Kafka in his longing for loneliness the writer isn't able of human feelings and he isn't human at all): but claws refer as well to the attempt of the otherness to prevent the writer from running away, to stop him in his metaphorical running or sailing away, like the sirens do in *The Silence of the sirens*, who stretch their claws on the rocks: "But they – lovelier than ever – stretched their necks and turned, let their awesome hair flutter free in the wind, and freely stretched their claws on the rocks" (Kafka, 1971, p. 474). The claws of the Sirens can stretch "freely" because they have renounced to keep back Ulysses, and they only want "to hold as long as they could the radiance that fell down" from his great eyes. In the very moment Ulysses is nearest to them, "he knew of them no longer." In this not-knowing of each other, in this instant of complete oblivion, a perfect identification between the Sirens and Ulysses is accomplished: they slip into each other in a process of mutual mirroring.

Also in *Erinnerung an Kaldabahn* a kind of mutual metamorphosis takes place, culminating with the tendency to erase the boundaries between man and animal: the goal of this double metamorphosis is very often death, which also marks the point of the biggest resemblance between the subject and the rats:

I spitted one of these rats on the point of my knife and held it before me at eye level against the wall. You can see small animals clearly only if you hold them before you at eye level; if you stoop down to them on the ground and look at them there, you acquire a false, imperfect notion of them (Kafka, 1949, pp. 86–87).

Kafka's parodic mimicry of scientific discourse clearly unmasks the cruelty underlying the relationship between man and animal: to observe the huge rats means killing them, splitting them with a knife; but in the very moment of the rat's agony the relationship between man and animal switches from the appearance of superiority of the human being over the animal, to a weird similarity: in the very moment of death, the animal becomes man-like. The part of the body which is "well suited to dig with", the claws looks "like small hands":

The most striking feature of these rats was their claws. Large, somewhat hollow, and yet pointed at the ends, they were well suited to dig with. Hanging against the wall in front of me in its final agony, it rigidly stretched out its claws in what seemed to be an unnatural way; they were like small hands reaching out to you (Kafka, 1949, p. 87).

The animal dies eliciting a sympathetic reaction from the one who is killing it: the human hunter turns out to be the prey on his turn, like in the *Hunter Gracchus* or in the *Burrow*. There are also other texts pointing out the similarity between claws/claws and human hands. The recourse to the plastic images of animals enables Kafka to evoke a struggle, which takes place inside the human mind. The animals' attempt to avoid the human grasp also refers to the effort of the subject to run away from a static description. The description of animals is a way of portraying himself indirectly, projecting the own feelings and moods in the plastic image of the "otherness"; this is what he claims in his refusal of psychology:

For the last time psychology!
Two tasks before starting to live: To narrow his own circle and check if you don't keep yourself hidden anywhere out of the circle (Kafka, 1993, p. 81).

Animals, music and nothingness

In the last part of *Metamorphosis*, which could be considered as the most important among Kafka's animal stories, Gregor is lured out of his room by music: Greta, his sister, is playing

the violin, and Gregor cannot resist the fascinating, almost magical attraction of the sounds. It is extremely important for the way Kafka considers music, that the protagonist first becomes aware of his new condition, in the precise point in which he undergoes this fatal attraction of music:

And yet Gregor's sister was playing so beautifully: Her face leaned sideways, intently and sadly her eyes followed the notes of music. Gregor crawled a little farther forwards and lowered his head to the ground so that it might be possible for his eyes to meet hers. Was he an animal, that music had such an effect upon him? (Kafka, 1971, p. 155).

The thematic constellation resembles the one of *Researches of a dog*: in both texts Music is closely related to the longing for a particular, unknown, nourishment, which doesn't seem to be terrestrial. Like the dog that follows the seven musician dogs in the *Researches*, Gregor believes that he could find the unknown food: "He felt that the way was opened before him to the unknown nourishment he craved" (Kafka, 1971, p. 155).

Kafka's texts dealing with music and animals usually turn around an emptiness, or rather deal with a kind of absolute music, which could be identified with the very essence of nothingness or even with silence; in a famous passage of the Diary, which goes back to the time in which Kafka started working on *The Castle*, he describes his previous literary work as an "assault to the ultimate border line", while in another passage he portrays himself as a hungry animal that must go forwards in search of a region where he could find nourishment and better air, even if this place lies maybe behind life. From this unknown, mysterious region also the odd creatures come, that inhabit Kafka's text. The music coming from this country expresses the longing for the wasteland they come from, and to which they want to come back. Kafka claimed in different occasions his own lack of musicality. On the other hand, his texts yet put in place a kind of musical motion, in which nothing stays still, everything is kept in the stream of a restless, constantly varied motion, which very closely resembles music. But Kafka's idea of music has very little to do with culture or with a precise musical style; it could rather be related to the central idea of a "negative capability" as the most difficult task of writing and art in general:

Art flies around Truth, but with the precise intention not to burn itself. Its capability consists in finding in the dark emptiness a place, in which the ray of light could be energetically seized, without that one knew this in advance (Kafka, 1993, pp. 75–76).

The intense dynamism underlying Kafka's idea of writing is therefore in a certain way opposite to the traditional idea of metaphor. And Kafka indeed rejected the "use of abstract metaphors", considering them as empty conventions, unable to grasp the immediacy of his visionary world. His animals are the answer to the fault of abstract metaphors. They are images that resemble life thanks to their restless, unpredictable, dynamism. But not a single animal on his own can reach the Truth they all are longing for: only the multitude of them, and the stream of writing which continuously flows through them, passing from one image to the next, still has the capability to suggest the "dark emptiness" in which Truth seems to dwell.

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Bioethical motifs in the literary work of Karel Čapek

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Abstract

This text presents an assessment of the literary work of Karel Čapek from a perspective that has not yet been discussed. It focuses on analysing Čapek's works from the viewpoint of their possible inspiration by bioethical issues. Čapek's philosophy and the powerful ethical charge of his texts tend to be associated with his interest in pragmatism, a subject to which he, however, took an individual and critical approach. One of the most important categories of his way of thinking is *life*. In his prose works and plays we therefore see motifs that may be associated with the thematic definition of bioethics. These are questions concerning the value and quality of human life, issues concerning the dehumanizing impact of science and technology, as well as reflections upon the moral dimension of man's relationship to nature and also to the relationship between people and animals. Čapek's work may therefore provide inspiration from the perspective of the history of the gradual formation of the bioethical point of view.

Keywords: bioethics, literature, life, humanity, science

Introduction

The literary work of Karel Čapek (or both Čapek brothers) is undoubtedly of lasting value, in many ways extending beyond the framework of our national spiritual culture. Another highly apt characteristic is the title of the film version of the end of Čapek's life – *Člověk proti zkáze* [*Man versus Ruin*].² By this we mean that Čapek's setting in the period situation of interwar Czechoslovakia and Europe and his awareness of the gradually intensifying crisis and the threat of a breakdown in values, enabled the creation of literary works that embody a timeless humanism. Their artistic value is a lasting cultural mainstay supported by a remarkable philosophical base and moral appeal.

These aspects have of course already been the focus of interest and research. Even so, in this article we want to justify the view that even today there are sides of Čapek's literary legacy that have not yet been the focus of adequate attention. Specifically, this study will attempt to answer the question of whether we are right in also considering Čapek's texts as an interesting incentive to reflect upon the development of bioethically motivated thinking. It seems that this point is still hampered by a certain simplifying schematic interpretation, one that merely evaluates potential "biologizing" motifs as allegories (particularly the impending rise of totalitarian regimes at the time) without exploring the matter any more deeply. We are therefore faced with the question of whether we can reveal Čapek's more specific interest in working with themes that entail scientific and technological development in the category of *life* in its deepest meaning. Incidentally, Čapek came from a doctor's family. However, let us also bear in mind that "... the philosophical interpretations of fiction should always take account of Mukařovský's words that the search for the philosophy of a certain work of art is actually the conversion of a work of art into conceptual language, which entails the risk of a subjective interpretation" (Zouhar, 2008, p. 194).

Philosophy, ethics and fiction

We could base our considerations on an evaluation of the potential offered to philosophy (and ethics) from an area of non-theoretical work – fiction. Here we realise that philosophy should

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² 1989, directed by Štěpán Skalský.

not limit itself to a certain interpretation of the world, but that its true purpose is to strive to understand the relationship between the world and man. Therefore, it should not only say “this is how it is,” but should also be able to explain how it came to this conclusion and also show what that means for us. How we should deal with the world and ourselves, what to do and why, and, on the other hand, what to avoid – which is now axiology and ethics: “... philosophy has resolved and continues to resolve a more or less constant set of questions that keep returning – the problem of existence, space and time, movement and development, truth and truthfulness, values and evaluation. On the other hand, philosophy is bound to a certain era, expresses its questions and responds to them in a manner conditioned by the time ... it reflects and also helps to shape the spiritual atmosphere of the age” (Zouhar, 2008, p. 192).

It is here that we find points of contact between science, philosophy and the artistic message of literature. Incidentally, we know from history that many philosophers opted to express their ideas in an artistic form (Nietzsche, Sartre, etc.). If we consider the Czech author at this point, we can also fully concur with the following statement: “For Czech thinking it is then even more true that particular thought tendencies are not necessarily expressed in philosophy, but, in certain contexts, may be updated in art ... And thus it is incontestable that certain leading figures in the history of Czech literature and art have at the same time played a major role in shaping the thought atmosphere of Czech society. Their works of art, and also their essays and theoretical works, deal with serious philosophical questions aimed at understanding and grasping the subjectivity in modern society, at reflecting upon period social and political problems, at discussing the philosophy of Czech history and seeking a relationship with religion” (Zouhar, 2008, p. 191).

Basically, it may be said that the literary form is one important way of preserving that human dimension of the philosophical message. That is what it is all about; we can concur with the now unjustly forgotten philosopher V. Gardavský, whose philosophical, religionist and artistic texts³ reflect the spiritual atmosphere of another key era in our history – the atmosphere of the nineteen sixties.

Brief note on the philosophy of Karel Čapek

Karel Čapek is not considered merely as an artist and publicist; frequent reference is also made to his long-standing interest in philosophy (which, incidentally, he had a university degree in). In this context it is also usual to draw attention to Čapek’s tendency towards pragmatism. This is derived from Čapek’s professional study on this topic, which was later reflected in his literary work (the one that particularly tends to be mentioned is the “Noetic” trilogy – *Hordubal*, *Povětroň* [*Meteor*] and *Obyčejný život* [*Ordinary life*]).

On the margins of this interpretative tradition, however, a more specific note should be made. That study on pragmatism was originally just Čapek’s student seminar work in 1914. It came out as a book entitled *Pragmatismus čili Filosofie praktického života* [*Pragmatism, or The philosophy of the practical life*] in 1918, followed by an extended edition in 1925 (Čapek, 1918). Čapek completed his studies in 1915, with his doctoral dissertation focused on the methodology of visual art aesthetics. (Zouhar, 1998, pp. 79–81) Čapek’s study of philosophy was definitely strongly influenced by the positivist atmosphere that was prevalent in this country at the time (incidentally, he presented his work on pragmatism at František Krejčí’s seminar). However, during his time spent studying in Berlin and Paris, he also came across other stimuli (Bergson’s vitalism, the civilizational scepticism of O. y Gasset). Pragmatism itself (as pointed out by Karel Vorovka in his *Americká filosofie* [*American Philosophy*] (Vorovka, 1929) was, for Europe, a surprising manifestation of new philosophical possibilities. All of this combined to shape Čapek’s path to his highly specific critical adoption of

³ E.g. *Naděje ze skepse* [*Hope from Skepticism*], *Bůh není zcela mrtev* [*God Is Not Yet Dead*], *Já, Jákob* [*I Jacob*], *Anděl na hrotu meče* [*Angel on the Tip of a Sword*], etc.

pragmatism. After all, Čapek did not become a mere epigon. He did not stop at pragmatic noetics, but constantly called for compliance with the criterion of rationality in the field of knowledge. What he mainly drew from pragmatism were its moral dimension and the refocusing of attention from abstract topics to everyday life. Incidentally, Čapek's distaste for the subordination of the value of authentic human life to the abstract values of so-called ideology can be seen very early, before he began to take an active interest in pragmatism. Back in 1910 he wrote the following on the unfortunate patriotic idealization of national history and particularly figures in that history: "There exists something like a Czech demon or some sort of curse. Imagine a very strange cruelty here: removing man from our history and stuffing him with ideas, ideology, moralism, virtue and politics; but alas! That man was alive until then, and died only when he was stuffed. But that is not cruelty; is it not perhaps a lack of feel for life, for temperature, for uncooled organisms? It is a kind of Czech demon (and now there may follow a series of translations from yesterday and today). It is strange what is being done with history in this country: it is like a revaccination of national ideas; and as a result of this vaccination some sort of sacrificial, altar animals generally come..." (Čapek, 1910, p. 75).

For Karel Čapek the most valuable thing about pragmatism was that it aspired to be a philosophy in the service of *life*: "For Čapek, 'his' pragmatism was one way to express his affinity with life and people, an affinity that was certainly benevolent and kind, but also responsible, and thus, if necessary, also critical and implacable" (Gabriel, 2002, p. 33).

And so, in *Krakatit* for instance, we first find this appreciation of the simple life, when Prokop wants to give up reason: "But here, here I started to be happy. Here I found that perhaps ... there is nothing better than to think. Here one just lives ... and sees that it is something tremendous ... simply to live ... Every animal has the ability ... and it seems to me so tremendous, as if I had never lived before now" (Čapek, 1989, p. 69). However, at the close of this novel he is corrected by Grandfather,⁴ warning of the importance of reason for life, for human action:

"Grandfather," wailed Prokop, squinting his eyes in pain, "have I done wrong?"
 "What is right and wrong?" said the old man after some thought. "You have hurt people. With reason you would not have done it, there must be reason; and a man must think what each thing is for ..."
 "Have I done wrong?"
 "What?"
 "Have I been bad?"
 "... You were not clean inside. A man ... should think more than feel. And you hurled yourself headlong into everything like a madman" (Čapek, 1989, p. 303).

And from that life-targeting aspect of pragmatism, emphasised even further by Čapek, we can derive a certain argument to support our exploration of the bioethical dimension of Čapek's work. Incidentally, at roughly the same time the topic of the *value of* (not only human) *life* becomes the focus of attention for other authors. For instance, Albert Schweitzer's ethics of respect for life appeared, while in the thoughts of the German pastor F. Jahr we find the term *bioethics*; Aldo Leopold comes up with a new categorical imperative in his *Land Ethic*. Not even vitalism (neovitalism) had said its last word – in fact, (in Lessing's work) it found a new motif criticising civilisation. František Mareš shaped his philosophy of respect from a vitalistic perspective. In fact, we could even consider the praise for the traditional peaceful peasant life in rural form⁵ and similar motifs expressed by Heidegger (and also, however, in the terrible mysticism of *Blut und Boden* [*Blood and Soil*] ideology).

⁴ This character is a certain personification of God.

⁵ See e.g. Čep's *Dvoji domov* [*Double being*].

Broader period philosophical contexts point to another remark regarding Čapek's international recognition and foreign reflections on his works. The serious nature of the questions Čapek posed are a source of lasting interest in his work (not only within the Czech Republic). The view presented in this paper will take neither historiographical (or biographical) works by foreign authors nor their papers in literary science into consideration.⁶ What it wants to offer is a concise insight into the efforts of foreign theoreticians to grasp the philosophical dimension of Čapek's work. One might like to note that it is Čapek's play *R.U.R* that is of special interest. This is likely caused by people's awareness of the word 'robot' and the general attractiveness of how Čapek treated the topic. William E. Harkins' 1960 paper tracing the parallels between Čapek's and Tolstoy's play could be included in this incomplete selection. The origination and originality of Tolstoy's play could be considered rather problematic: "Thus Tolstoy suggested that the idea of *R.U.R.* was in effect common property, an international literary theme" (Harkins, 1960, p. 312). According to the same author (Harkins, 1960, p. 314), the comparison of both works can, therefore, result in interesting findings regarding the worldviews, or the philosophical view, of both authors. While Tolstoy represents Marxism, in Čapek's case it is vitalism (Harkins, 1960, p. 316).

A paper comparing Čapek's work with *Vita Activa* [The Human condition] by H. Arendt provides another interesting view on *R.U.R.* Matthew Dinan studies, in both the above texts, the motifs of human labour, technological progress and their impact on human life (including alienation). What Čapek and Arendt share is their critical view of German idealism (Dinan, 2017, pp. 108, 116).

This brings us to another paper inspired by Čapek's *R.U.R* (Kinyon, 2014). This text directly focuses on the philosophical aspects of the play, including pointing to the problem with the translation: "Unfortunately, many of the philosophical implications of Čapek's play have become lost in English translation" (Kinyon, 2014, p. 243). The author has found out that the text bears deeper traces of Čapek's philosophical education: "Čapek was a philosopher before becoming a writer of fiction, and as I will argue, his play contains an implicit criticism of Hegel's master-slave dialectic and of Kant's categorical imperative" (Kinyon, 2014, p. 240).

Apart from the above partial monothematic analyses, let us now mention those works by an author who had dealt with the philosophical dimension of Čapek's work in a long-term and systematic way – William E. Harkins. The life of this author is, in a remarkably broad range, linked with the field of Slavic studies (starting with folklore and finishing with translation). He was one of the first American theoreticians to deal with modern Czech literature. At this point, one could mention his inspirational conference paper (Harkins, 1958), providing a critical view of Karel Čapek being traditionally and unambiguously classified under the umbrella of pragmatism. The author claims that this link can only be applied to his early work⁷ (which is true of both Čapek brothers). In their stories (later issued in the 1916 collection *Zářivé hlubiny* [*The Luminous Depths*]), the Čapek brothers expressed a positive and joyful view of life, which they themselves labelled as *pragmatic*. However, William E. Harkins adds: "In these stories the Čapeks show a certain ethical simplification of Bergsonian vitalism or pragmatism as systematic philosophies. But the influence of Karel's philosophical studies on these tales can hardly be doubted. In the final story of the collection, '*Zářivé hlubiny*' (*The Luminous depths*), the positive vision is suddenly lost. To human progress is opposed the concept of chance, and the two are found to be irreconcilable... The next collections ... are deeply pessimistic" (Harkins 1958, p. 11). Consequently, the author points to the, somewhat complex, situation around

⁶ That is why the paper on Čapek's relationship to, the otherwise philosophically interesting, Chesterton is only mentioned very briefly (Bradbrook, 1961). The author only focuses on the level of literary analysis; numerous parallels can be found when the works by both authors are compared, which even made her call Gilbert K. Chesterton Čapek's teacher (Bradbrook, 1961, p. 337).

⁷ The author revisited this topic in his much later paper (Harkins, 1992).

Čapek's alleged permanent relativism: "Though for a time Čapek sought to make relativism a positive element in his philosophy, he failed in this: in the end his pluralist vision of life took over the positive role in his thought, and relativism was abandoned completely. In his trilogy of three novels (*Hordubal*, *Povětroň*, *Obyčejný život* [*Hordubal*, *Meteor*, *Ordinary life*], 1933–1934), he gave up relativism for a new, more completely absolutist faith in mankind as a uniform and stable essence: all men are akin since they share this essence" (Harkins, 1958, p. 18). This paper also reflects on other Czech authors (Miroslav Rutte and František Langer) and is, thus, an interesting contribution in broader discourse regarding the situation in Czech interwar literature.

William E. Harkins is also the author of a completely unique monograph, presenting a summary of his systematic interest in Čapek's work (Harkins, 1962). Although not too voluminous, the work, unlike the partial efforts reflected upon above, provides a systematic analytical view of a great deal of Čapek's literary work. Moreover, when studying the philosophical nature of Čapek's work, the changes and the development of his life philosophy form a significant part of this complex view on Čapek's person and work by a foreign scholar, that has not been outdone until the present day. In Harkins' words: "Čapek was a philosophical writer *par excellence*. Perhaps no one of his generation tried so systematically and consciously to express philosophical ideas through literature" (Harkins, 1962, p. 168). This work by Harkins as such then comes to the general conclusion that, when interpreting the philosophical aspects of Čapek's work, a simple schematism is definitely not enough: "[A] paradox of philosophical ideas is an important trait in Čapek's writing.... Čapek's favorite philosophical theme was, of course, relativism. But great literature must impart a sense of wonder and mystery to life, not deprive life of richness of meaning" (Harkins, 1962, p. 170). That is why the whole of Čapek's work is varied and offers, in individual texts, in different creative stages, diverse approaches and perspectives. Thus, Harkins' work is, until the present day, a significant inspirational source for contemplations on the role and importance of Karel Čapek in the Czech, as well as world, spiritual culture and, at the same time, the philosophy of Čapek's work.

Modern science and technological development

In Harkins' work, one could also find a mention of Čapek being one of the few authors of his period who included modern science and technology in their work (Harkins, 1962, p. 168). It is true Čapek paid close attention to the conquests of interwar national and foreign science and was sensitive to the key topics and issues many theoretical and technological fields dealt with. It was biology-related fields of study that expanded remarkably in this period of time. In addition to this, Čapek also evidently followed developments in interwar science, both Czech and foreign. Biological disciplines were a remarkably expanding component in science during this time. Efforts to penetrate through to the essence of life (physiology, genetics) also led to the emergence of so-called marginal scientific disciplines (biophysics, biochemistry) – and we may then see *R.U.R.*, for example, as one outcome of this interest of Čapek's, as "biochemical theatre". In the inanimate nature sciences, the inspiration for this lay in the completely new results of quantum and relativistic physics; *Krakatit* is entirely based on the notion of the amazing and terrifying potential of nuclear fission. In this, Čapek even soon (*Krakatit* is from 1924, *Továrna na Absolutno* [*The Absolute at Large*] is two years later) showed a greater degree of clairvoyance than our positivists, who generally rejected modern tendencies in physical theory as mere speculation.

However, Čapek did not view the development of science and subsequent new technological possibilities with naive optimism.⁸ His works warn against unleashing the dehumanized destructive forces of technology and science, and the terrors of this new power. This, for

⁸ In the period between the wars, for instance, Husserl brought to philosophy a sceptical view of the problems of science and its influence on man and his world.

example, is the (Nietzschean) argument put forward by Daimon Prokop in *Krakatit*: “Do not count lives; work on a large scale, and the whole world has billions of lives... You are the first man in the world who may consider the whole world his laboratory... a creator who is not a supreme lord and ruler, but is merely a fool” (Čapek, 1989, pp. 267–268)

Through his work Čapek was thus anchored firmly in the growing problems of his age. However, in those problems he found not only partial questions that varied over time, but above all painfully perceived a threat that would affect the very value of humanity and life. This is another reason why we make so bold to find themes in his works that rightfully belong to bioethics.

Utopia and ethics

Despite recognising the importance of Čapek’s literary legacy, certain doubts may still arise – whether it is truly appropriate to seek such serious motifs in a literary genre that is considered by many to be marginal literature, if not pulp fiction.⁹ Such a view could raise the question of whether the moral importance of many of Čapek’s utopian works may truly be compared with the moral charge of the novels of Balzac, Dickens or Kundera.

A positive answer may be given to this question in at least two ways. Firstly, we may argue generally in favour of the sci-fi genre in the sense that it cannot be reduced to mere shallow entertainment. After all, this genre also reflects serious themes that are so new and surprising that “more serious literature” has not yet managed to take over, as, for example, they are linked to specific and highly specialised information on developments in research and technology. Incidentally, back in 1962 the value and importance of sci-fi literature for ethics was acknowledged by Jiřina Popelová, even though she did take a somewhat biased and ideologically-based view in comparing the literary works of Western authors and authors from the Eastern Bloc. According to her, some form a pessimistic anti-Utopia, while others offer optimistic and inspiring ideas of a bright future (Popelová, 1962, pp. 225–227).

The second means of defending the deep moral importance of Čapek’s work could start with the following question – what does the Utopian nature of Čapek’s works actually involve? And here we find that in each case these are texts with a powerful and exciting story, sometimes action-packed, sometimes set in exotic locations. So far, marginal literature. *Válka s mloky* [*War with the newts*] may thus be reminiscent of the adventures of Biggles. One remarkable match in the case of *Válka s mloky* [*War with the Newts*] is that the same year (1936) saw the publication of H. P. Lovecraft’s famous horror novella *The Shadow over Innsmouth*, which is also about an invasion of aquatic monsters. However, there is one significant difference. Lovecraft’s text is nothing more than an undoubtedly good, suggestively written and well-structured horror. In contrast, Čapek’s tale takes the form of an adventure story to reflect on the real rise of a totalitarian regime, and is thus a kind of easily understandable allegory or parable.

In the more general sense, we can say that the Utopian nature of Čapek’s works stems from his use of a common imagination that extends beyond inspiration drawn from science and technology. However, Čapek did not abandon his imagination for vague and expansive excursions, but is always well grounded in the real form and direction of research and technical development. He thus elaborates on questions already raised by science. Yet he does not stop there; his works are not engaging for their futuristic view in the style of Jules Verne. Čapek’s (not only) Utopian work presents significant, primarily moral, questions – human values, the possibilities and limitations of freedom and decision-making and always the eternal cost of life. “In all works a Utopian (fantasy) object – subject becomes a principle that unveils reality, revealing its contradictions, differentiating human characters, unmasking all spheres of human activity” (Hodrová, 1987, p. 86). Those fantasy motifs and backdrops are thus primarily means

⁹ The Czech literary Karel Čapek Prize for sci-fi works is a statue of a black newt.

of obtaining readable forms and particularly surprising perspectives, which explore moral issues that are both traditional and may be expected to arise in the future. A gripping and readable powerful story with a humanistic message – that is what cannot simply be dismissed by a contemptuous reference to mere Utopianism: “In the works of Karel Čapek Utopia gradually ceased to be ... something separated from fact by a Utopian distance as in the classic Utopia, and became ever more markedly the thing through which fact passes, which is a hidden reality” (Hodrová, 1987, p. 103).

The three pillars of bioethics in Čapek’s texts

Let’s now attempt to take a more specific and summary look at the individual aspects that make up bioethics as a whole (human life and health, environmental ethics and issues of so-called animal ethics) in Čapek’s work. His anti-Utopia¹⁰ and other formats of his literary work reflect all these three areas of bioethics in a certain manner. We are not interested in providing an exhaustive list of all such texts and seeking out all the slightest allusions they contain. Instead, we will try to offer a selection of texts in which bioethical motifs feature most distinctly.

Even so, let us start our selection with texts whose true meaning, although evidently inspired by biology, lies in another of the author’s motivations. So, we may say that the play *Ze života hmyzu* [*The Insect play*], as well as his later novel *Válka s mloky* [*War with the newts*] use animals in a surrogate sense. The aforementioned play is a genre fable (or band of fables) that highlights morally problematic forms of human behaviour. Although *Válka s mloky* [*War with the newts*] works with the idea of the environment having been extensively devastated by an invasion of an aggressive species of animal, its message is allegorical. It is a warning against the threat of the expansion of a specific totalitarian regime, which soon proved to be particularly topical and tragic. It is thus a warning against defeatist inaction or, on the other hand, against the active support of evil. “Čapek clearly sees this ‘other’ being as the result of human activity, as something that has unleashed itself from man or which, through man’s actions, has developed into an independent existence, on that it dangerous to man” (Hodrová, 1987, p. 91). The novel also has a very valuable dimension – humour.¹¹ By this means Čapek (like Jaroslav Hašek before him) faces the brutal threat of violence and war: “Chief Salamander is a man. His name is Andreas Schultze and during the world war he was a Master-Sergeant somewhere” (Čapek, 1953, p. 268). And another more general ironic barb: “Have you ever come across anything so terrible and murderous that an intellectual wants to use it to revive the world?” (Čapek, 1953, p. 266).

Motivated in a similar manner was Čapek’s older *Krakatit*, which mostly warns against the abuse of science for the purposes of war. Here we can draw analogies with Utopias presented along similar lines by Troska. However, those are considerably naive in their means, optimistic in their consequences and problematic in their overall tone. Nemo’s realm watches out for world peace, which it can also bring about by force. However, this is simply another form of society-wide totalitarian control. Troska’s ambitions as an author never went beyond the bounds of adventure literature for youngsters.

However, the situation is entirely different in the case of Čapek’s *Bílá nemoc* [*The White plague*]. Once again, the main motif there is the threat of another world war. In the foreword to this play Čapek wrote: “One of the characteristics of post-war humanity is its retreat from what is sometimes, almost with contempt, called humanity” (Čapek, 1956, p. 265). Čapek associates this departure from the traditional value of human life and human rights with the rise of

¹⁰ Čapek was sceptical in his portrayal of ideas concerning the possible conquests of human science and technology. In the context of the growing crisis in interwar society his view explores the problematic consequences and impending risks and so here it is entirely appropriate to refer to the genre as being anti-Utopian.

¹¹ Rather surprisingly, Čapek also described some of his plays as comedies: “I stand up for everyone; perhaps that is why I write comedies instead of dramas. That is the insatiable emotion in my life...” (Čapek, 1968, p. 298)

totalitarian ideologies. In the name of class, the state, the nation or race, these ideologies strive to establish an autocratic regime, in which man is wholly and violently subordinate to those so-called higher units: "... this is a conflict between the ideals of democracy and the ideals of unrestricted and ambitious dictatorships" (Čapek, 1956, p. 266).

In this play the reversal in values is symbolised by a pandemic of an incurable disease, the symptoms of which resemble leprosy. With this theme Čapek again stressed the threat of a crisis to humanity, as "... a sick and wretched person is compulsively and typically a subject of humanity" (Čapek, 1956, p. 266). Here, drawing on a bioethical problem (medical ethics), Čapek escalated an entire conflict between a fierce "craving for power" and the humanitarian ideal. Doctor Galén has discovered an effective drug to treat the white plague. As an idealist, he wants to use his discovery to force the preservation of peace. In the name of humanity and as a token of respect for human life he therefore "... refuses to help the suffering, as he himself fatally accepts the inexorable morality of the struggle" (Čapek, 1956, p. 267). He is consciously compromising the original mission of a doctor – in his hope of saving world peace. However, he meets with a tragic end (he is trampled by a crowd), thus bringing an end to hope. Čapek adds: "However the war ends, a war whose tumult is brought to a close by the white plague, what is certain is that in his suffering Man has remained unsaved" (Čapek, 1956, p. 267). Čapek points out that this tragic conclusion is no solution. He did not want to offer any false hope of a miracle in a situation of real escalating threat. Ending like this, the play is supposed to be a call to fight a real battle, one which affects everyone not as members of the theatre audience, but as those who really will have to go through that battle, "... those who must know on which side of the global dramatic conflict lies the whole right and the whole life of a small nation" (Čapek, 1956, p. 268).

Human life and its value and quality also form part of another of Čapek's well-known plays – *Věc Makropulos* [*The Makropulos affair*].¹² However, it was written a long time before *Bílá nemoc* [*The White plague*] (in 1922), specifically inspired by science, and Čapek described it as a comedy. One again, the central motif is a bioethical matter – the possibility of prolonging human life. After drinking a certain alchemical potion, the main character lives for more than three hundred years, during which time she has to change her identity. She is worn out and sick of living so long and eventually decides to forego the elixir. Eventually, the final conflict shows that a long life in itself is not necessarily attractive or happy, and so the formula for the potion is destroyed.

Čapek offered a remarkable reason to justify such an ending (which is otherwise typical for a great deal of fantasy prose). The author compares his allegedly pessimistic stance with the opinions of G. B. Shaw, who saw the potential for prolonging human life as offering a very valuable objective, i.e. the establishment of a kind of future paradise. In his play, however, Čapek "... depicts longevity in a very different light, as something far from ideal and even very undesirable. It is hard to say what is right; unfortunately, there is a lack of experience on both sides" (Čapek, 1956, p. 185). He therefore defends himself against accusations of pessimism: "I don't know if it is optimistic to claim that living for sixty years is bad, yet living for three hundred years is good; I just think that declaring an (average) sixty-year life as reasonable and pretty good is hardly criminal pessimism" (Čapek, 1956, p. 186). After all, it is not merely the length of one's life that is important, but the quality of that life: "If we say that one day in the future there will be no illness, poverty or dirty toil, that is pure optimism: yet to say that our life

¹² This play also served as the basis for a musical work – Leoš Janáček is the composer of an opera of the same name (he also wrote the libretto to it, with Čapek's permission). Given our topic, for the sake of interest we should add that Janáček's work also contains other bioethical motifs – see another of his operas, *Její pastorkyňa* [*Her Stepdaughter*] (the murder of a newborn child), *Káťa Kabanová* [*Katya Kabanova*] (suicide) and *Příhody lišky Bystroušky* [*The Cunning Little Vixen*] (man's relationship towards animals, and also age); of his piano works, see *Sýček neodletěl* [*The Barn Owl Has Not Flown Away*] (illness and death).

today, rife as it is with illness, poverty and toil is not so bad or damned and possesses something incredibly valuable, that is – what exactly? Pessimism? I don't think so. Perhaps it is double optimism: one that turns away from bad things to something better, perhaps even a dream; the other, which seeks at least something a little better in every bad thing ... The first is seeking nothing short of paradise: there is no more beautiful aim for the human soul. The second is seeking here and there for at least morsels of relative good" (Čapek, 1956, p. 186). In the spirit of Šrámek "life of misery, yet how I love you" Čapek is expressing his pure love for life – no matter how difficult or painful it can be. One has to live. This is not resignation, Čapek rejects that: "Believe me, there is one true pessimism, and that is the one that folds its arms; I'd say, ethic defeatism." (Čapek, 1956, p. 186). He also rejects this defeatism in his *Kalendář* [*Calendar*], in the part entitled Solace: "Whatever we say, we're heading for foul weather; but hey, we are already ready to grow and get stronger ... something might freeze and dry out, but no loss can thwart our grand and carefully prepared programme: to be even stronger and more alive" (Čapek, 1983, p. 362).

The play *R.U.R.* occupies a wholly specific place in our evaluation of Čapek's work. It is forever ingrained in the world's spiritual culture for first using the word *robot* (which, however, came from the writer's brother Josef). It is also an important contribution to world science fiction, which took a major change in direction and the form of human ideas about the future a hundred years ago.

This play tends to be interpreted not only as a warning against the discharge of technology turning upon its creators. It also tends to be seen as symbolising the threat of the massification of human civilization, the tyranny of the crowd and also a warning reflection on the Russian Bolshevik Revolution.¹³ We will deliberately set aside these ideological interpretations, in order to emphasise that bioethical aspect. Once again, it is the importance of the category of life¹⁴ in Čapek's overall concept of this play. Although it is anti-utopian in the true sense of the word, ending with the destruction of mankind, Čapek again associated it with the comedy genre. The close of the play bears a message of hope that life similar to human life will continue. Čapek did not want to write a play about robots, but primarily about people, about the lasting value of humanity, which can also achieve miracles – the humanization of those new beings originally created by humans (Čapek, 1968, p. 302).

Also associated with this is the author's remarkable initial concept of artificial beings. In Čapek's work, robots are the product of scientific research, not technical development. To be specific, this means that they are not mechanical structures, but are essentially biochemical. Incidentally, Čapek was very unhappy about how other authors usurped his thoughts when they offer the idea of robots as mechanical constructs (Čapek, 1968, p. 304). In the general framework of Čapek's view of the phenomenon of life this means that the author is basing his work on our persistent ignorance of the secrets of the nature and origin of life – which would not be possible in the case of mechanical constructs. And a magical solution (Golem) is also unacceptable for a modern audience. In this way Čapek bows before the mysteries of life, when he writes the following about himself (as an author) and about the scientific basis for his thoughts: "Perhaps as a scientific layman he would be tempted to impute this patient and ingenious scientific task, that one day he makes an artificial living cell in a test tube; but for many reasons, including respect for life, he could not bring myself to treat this mystery so lightly" (Čapek, 1968, p. 304).

Čapek's robots did not originate in a complete revelation of the essence of life. They originated from artificially synthesized organic matter, which is not the same as the substances on which terrestrial life is based, but even though, it does behave as though it were alive. "... it

¹³ In his review, J. Fischer pointed out that *R.U.R.* it is not a response to the current political situation, but rather deals with social rebellion in a general sense (Fischer, 1921, p. 74).

¹⁴ The biologist B. Němec therefore writes about Čapek's vitalist tendency (Němec, 1921, p. 42).

is something like a different alternative to life, a material substrate in which life could develop, if another way had not been taken from the beginning... a new substrate was created, which could become a vehicle for life – but life which remains an inexorable and incomprehensible secret” (Čapek, 1968, p. 304).

Here praise is due for Čapek’s inventiveness as an author, which rejected a simple and superficial literary solution (either a machine or a crucial – although unexplained – breakthrough in our understanding of the essence of life). This rejection stemmed from the author’s desire to warn against the reckless use of incomplete fragments of knowledge.¹⁵ In this context, it can be noted that *R.U.R.* does not yet reflect environmental risks. Nevertheless, Čapek’s concept implicitly solves a serious ecological problem – the introduction of a synthetic species into natural ecosystems and the evolutionary impacts. The robots do not reproduce.

In 1935 Čapek returned to his critical view of the further fate of robots. This time, however, he set that rejected shift towards a mechanical concept of robots within a civilization framework and the value transformations it produced: “However, it proved that the modern world is not interested in his scientific Robots and it replaced them with technical Robots. The world ... believes in machines more than in life; it is more fascinated by technical wonders than by the miracle of life. So the author, who wanted to use his rebellious soul-seeking robots to protest against the mechanical superstition of our time, eventually claims something that no one can deny him: the honour of being defeated” (Čapek, 1968, p. 305).

Čapek’s literally initiatory play may thus be interpreted as a remarkable attempt at a warning that is seriously linked to the problem of the value of life, questions concerning the essence of humanity and responsibility for the consequences and products of scientific advancement.¹⁶

Conclusion

To conclude this study we will now focus briefly on another aspect of bioethics that can also be traced in Čapek’s work. These are environmental matters and so-called animal ethics. “In fact, his Utopias are an indirect means of defending nature against industrialisation ad absurdum” (Bartůšková, 1990, p. 127).

In his famous texts *Zahradníkův rok* [*The gardener's year*] and *Kalendář* [*Calendar*] (a summary edition of Čapek’s newspaper columns) we see the author as an avid gardener, who loved the beauty of nature (and was directly involved in helping to protect it). Although Čapek was not a fervid environmentalist, we do find this comment on how people behave in the countryside: “Don’t we know everything about the mysterious symbiosis of the forest, don’t we know how the lives of fungi and the lives of trees are connected? And even if they were not: it is a sin to strip the forest of its gnomish fungal life, and to rob the meadows and the elves of the life of flowers; and people who do not leave a piece of untouched natural poetry behind them wherever they go do not belong in the woods and deserve to be chased by the gamekeeper, with tongues of flame and a knotty stick. Some preaching in school could help here; and mainly – it is, I’d say, a matter of democratic sentiment: to avoid as much as possible denying things outside us the right to life, even if such things are merely forest gnomes” (Čapek, 1983, p. 317). Čapek holds nature in high regard, appreciates its beauty and from it draws relaxation and inspiration for his thoughts, which occasionally extend as far as philosophical and ethical questions. And regarding man’s relationship with the world he notes: “We imbued with value

¹⁵ In real life this hasty applied optimism can be found in the theory and horrific practice of eugenics (Nazi Germany and other countries).

¹⁶ In this respect this play is an unquestionable source of inspiration not only for sci-fi itself, but also for philosophically and ethically formulated questions. Subsequent development also led to deeper thinking in sci-fi – e.g. in Asimov’s formulation of the laws of robotics, in the themes of the determination of humanity and responsibility in B. Aldiss’s story *Super Toys Last All Summer Long* (the basis for Spielberg’s film *A.I.*) or in Egon Bondy’s *Nepovídka*.

the snow and water, the sun and the air and movement; we have made the world more beautiful and more precious. Mastering the forces of nature is a great gain; yet the same great gain lies in the appreciation of natural forces” (Čapek, 1983, p. 253).

Living with animals also became a source of inspiration for Čapek – in his work for children (*Dášeňka*), as well as that for adults (*Měl jsem psa a kočku* [*I Had a Dog and a Cat*]). His affinity with animals is imbued with a loving understanding and a gentle humour, with which he describes the experiences of dog and cat owners and the characteristics of the nature and behaviour of those animals: “There is much truth in the saying that people get a dog so as not to be alone. A dog really does not want to be alone” (Čapek, 1983, p. 127). A dog and man basically belong together: “A dog alone is as serious as a lion, a snake or an office manager; his humour and playfulness only emerge when in company with a person, knowledge of which fact belongs to the natural history of the dog and to the natural history of humour” (Čapek, 1983, p. 147).

This is pleasant reading, very adroitly portraying a situation anyone who has ever owned a pet will be familiar with. Čapek has respect for living things, holds their lives in esteem and is able to write about them very convincingly. This is obviously not theoretical animal ethics, but more of an applied philosophy of practical life.¹⁷

Čapek is convinced that our animal companions play an important cultivating role in our lives. Through our love for animals, we also become better people. And, what is more, that love is lavishly reciprocated: “However, there is one unwritten dog commandment that says: You will love your master. – Some serious people, such as Otokar Březina, see a dog’s devotion as a sign of a low and slave-like nature. I object to this too, as from the term slave-like nature we can hardly imagine something as bursting with life and enthusiastic as the nature of a dog ... More than all animals and people the dog is gifted with a special power of joy and grief” (Čapek, 1983, pp. 133–134). And we should not forget that – Čapek’s apocryphal *Bratr František* [*Brother František*] (Čapek, 2016, pp. 134–138) is therefore a call to empathise with the suffering of the dog’s soul. What a difference this is compared to another text from the same time – Sandor Márai’s novel *Čutora – pes s charakterem* [*Čutora – a dog with character*] (Márai, 2005) by. The failure to understand the dog’s nature and especially the incredible brutality at the end is entirely opposite to Čapek’s loving view of the co-existence of man and animal, and even of some of their similarities: “The cat is mysterious as an animal; the dog is naive and simple as a man. The cat is something of an aesthete. The dog is like an ordinary person. Or like a creative person. It has something that turns to someone else, to everyone else; it does not live solely for itself” (Čapek, 1983, p. 213). Although with Čapek this is relaxing reading, it in no way reduces the quality or thoughtfulness of the positive effect it has on whole generations of readers.

In this study we have attempted to present a hitherto unseen perspective on the literary legacy of Karel Čapek. We trust that we have managed to convincingly show that this work is relatively rife with questions that we consider to be legitimate bioethical issues. The themes of human life and health, man’s relationship to the environment and animals – these are all (obviously to a varying degree) featured in Čapek’s work. The central concept of Čapek’s philosophy and his entire literary work is, after all, *life*. Karel Čapek took up a task for himself – to serve life throughout all his work. And as he writes in his *Kritika slov* [*Critique of words*]: “However, I am approached by the spirit of the tempter, who asks: Do you consider life to be something perfect, or imperfect? – Very imperfect. – Do you acknowledge and believe that there is something more perfect and higher than life, something above life, or not? – Yes, I do; I acknowledge and believe this. – So why do you not want to use this reason of yours to serve

¹⁷ From our modern-day perspective we might find certain problematic moments in Čapek’s texts (e.g. taking rare species of plants from the countryside and replanting them in a garden, or the killing of unwanted puppies). However, this was normal practice for the time.

this perfect and higher calling? – Because I would like to serve life in some way. – And why do you want to serve life in some way? – Because it is very imperfect. – The spirit of the tempter laughed at this and said: This shows you are going round in vicious circles. – Yes, mischievous spirit, but noli tangere circulos meos. Touch not my vicious circles” (Čapek, 1969, p. 117).

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¹⁸ Not all of Čapek's works used in this text are available in English translation.

On the testimony of the Holocaust in literature and ethics

Stefan Konstańczak¹

Abstract

In the article, the author analyses the impact of the tragic experiences during the Holocaust on contemporary ethics and literature. Such considerations coincide with yet another anniversary – the liberation of the Auschwitz concentration camp, celebrated globally as Holocaust Memorial Day. The article also considers the reasons why testimonies from Holocaust survivors have not had an adequate impact on society. The author argues that trivialisation of the Holocaust tragedy occurred in modern science and it is related to the fact that traditional ethics has not been able to convincingly explain why the Holocaust occurred in the most civilised nations. Thus, Holocaust testimonies should be constantly popularised in society for the good of all mankind. Literature seems to be the best form of mass media for this task and it is also a recorder of human emotions. According to the author, it is essential that humanity is protected this way against the possibility of a similar tragedy occurring in the future.

Keywords: Holocaust, ethics, literature, Itzhak Katzenelson, Holocaust Memorial Day

Introduction

The Holocaust can hardly be analysed scientifically, because this greatest tragedy in the history of humanity took place in agreement with law. Paradoxically it was sanctioned by the entire machine of the German state, existing legally and widely accepted in the world. No one expected then, that a civilised state and its society could lose its humanity. In political reality based on mathematics and economy there was no room for ordinary human empathy and support for the weak which is referred to in all ethics. Moreover, it is clear that the science of Nazi Germany was also harnessed to implement and justify this criminal idea. Earlier Germany had set an example to other nations in the rule of law. The existing positive stereotype of exemplary German order may have been the reason why the victims could have been perceived by some as themselves being guilty of their fate. This perception of the fate of the Jews may have been strengthened by some religions and treated as a punishment for real or imaginary sins. Unfortunately, it is obvious that ethics was a failure while the mad plan to annihilate the entire Jewish nation was being implemented. Not only could ethics stop the tormentors, but using pseudo-scientific arguments it even offered the executioners a kind of self-justification.

The history of humanity is written according to events that affect its course. It is no accident that most of these events are associated with human weaknesses or aggression. The history of humanity is a history of wars, atrocities and the fall of human great ideals. Until World War II, people were convinced that history involved the progress of humanity measured by subsequent civilisational advances facilitating life. The idea of humanism seemed indisputable and it appeared to validate faith in this progress. However, the Holocaust is a breach in history understood in this light. It is an event which cannot only be explained, but can even be understood. Today, 75 years after the liberation of the Auschwitz camp, which was a real factory of death, it is worth reflecting on the conclusions which can be drawn by humanity from this tragedy. A question arises as to what extent we have protected ourselves against similar events reoccurring in the future. This is a task for scholars, especially for historians and philosophers. Historians search for genesis, they describe facts related to specific events. Philosophers must explain why their postulates have been ignored or distorted, violating the idea of progress. Each ethicist must also face the problem of the incompatibility of the

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traditional principles in ethics and the brutal realities of life. Such an analysis must be made but when ethicists cannot cope with this task the problem is even more pronounced. Then someone else has to look for explanations needed by humanity. In the case of the Holocaust, the representatives of art, especially literature seem to have replaced ethicists with various degrees of success.

What is the value today of the memory of the Holocaust for human culture? What should be passed on to future generations? One could assume that descriptions of killing techniques or the Nazi Extermination Plan may be very important based on many studies on this topic. However, what humanity really needs is a symbol which is a warning and which would survive forever. The burnt offering of *Shoah* became such a symbol confirming that a sacrifice was made of people themselves and its meaning cannot be diminished by anyone or anything. In this case, it is not even about whether the sacrifice was accepted, it was more important that the sacrifice was made in the first place. However, no one will render the tragedy of the Holocaust more adequately than the artists who themselves became part of this sacrifice. They were aware that this was going to happen, and yet they did not complain, they did not pity themselves but pitied all the others who the Holocaust had not yet destroyed.

On the Holocaust testimonies

The crucial thing about the Holocaust now is that the memory of the genocide, as seen by direct witnesses, is constantly present in our culture. Therefore, it is worth considering why this task was not fulfilled by the direct witnesses of the Holocaust; instead historians researching the Holocaust have often interpreted the accounts of bystanders or from the perpetrators themselves, i.e. the executioners. So, where does the silence of the direct witnesses come from? It seems that the answer to this question can be found in the comment of the former Auschwitz prisoner Stanisław Kłodziński, who divided the survivors into three groups (Kłodziński, 1984, p. 20):

- The first group included those who became hyperactive after the war and devoted themselves completely to work and social activities. Their hyperactivity can be perceived as a form of repayment of the metaphysical guilt that they managed to survive, while such a chance was not given to their relatives and acquaintances.
- The second group is those who absorbed themselves in work alone, as if they wanted to fill every moment with their commitment, so as not to have time to ponder the past. Their work was not creative, it did not give them any satisfaction, but it was basically a desperate attempt to escape from inhuman times which were haunting them from the past.
- The third group is made up of maladjusted and permanently injured people, and their common feature is that they could not form social relations or were unable to live independently.

However, the hell of the Holocaust was usually survived by the strongest mentally and physically. This is why this division can by no means relate to all people who have had very traumatic experiences in the past. Survivors generally did not want to talk about their traumas, and if they mentioned anything it was mainly the facts related to others. Therefore, the description of the hell of the Holocaust has to be narrowed, and lacks a psychological background. Trying to learn about the experience from indirect sources, such as medical reports is limited as well. Moreover, such reports are written by people relating to their own personal experience. So, how can a person faithfully recreate the hell of the Holocaust if they have not experienced it? It is not surprising then that in medicine, while dealing with the recognition and recovery of the mental condition of patients, it has long been understood that a dry scientific

description is not enough to learn the etiology of such disorders, and moreover to predict the course of the disorders. Antoni Kępiński, an eminent Polish psychiatrist, wrote: "... not only doctors, but also thinkers and artists contributed to the recognition and judgment of mental diseases and the mentally ill..." (Kępiński, 1979, p. 281). According to this doctor, in psychiatry, the usefulness of artistic description and other forms of expression of one's own psychological experiences was due to the greater sensitivity of artists, among whom such disorders occur more often than in other people. Moreover, artists express their experiences in individual, unique ways, which is definitely different from a scientist who uses repetitive research methods. The artist expresses himself by ignoring the standard rules in accordance with scientific knowledge. The artist's statement is authentic, which unlike a scientific description, can also be false.

Therefore, one cannot agree with Alain Badiou who is known for his unconventional attempt to maintain the scientific status of ethics. The introduction of set theory ideas ('ideas of the multiple') to explain axiological problems has its limitations. According to Badiou, there are apparent events that at first glance seem to possess features of events, because being based on ontologically impossible categories (destruction, death or nothingness) cannot be included in the form of philosophical reflection. That is why, for example the Holocaust is not an event, which means that philosophy is not able to put it in the form of an orderly reflection. Thus, it cannot be described in terms of scientific truth, because even the concept of 'a Jew' in the Holocaust does not mean a specific person, but only an image of someone who may have nothing to do with the nation; "... the name 'Jew' was a political creation of the Nazis, without any pre-existing referent. It is a name whose meaning no one can share with the Nazis, a meaning that presumes the simulacrum and fidelity to the simulacrum – and hence the absolute singularity of Nazism as a political sequence" (Badiou, 2001, p. 75). Thus, neither contemporary literature nor philosophy can today adequately comment on the Holocaust. Such a justification for the silence of ethics on the greatest crime in the history of humanity clearly does not correspond to its thesis about individual crimes, such as the murder of Caesar by Brutus. Badiou's reasoning therefore contains the idea of mathematised or maybe physiced ethics. He is closer to analytical philosophy than to the ordinary man troubled with doubts. Since the understanding of concepts is blurred, the fact to which they relate also becomes unrealistic.

Hannah Arendt tackled this problem in her famous work *Eichman in Jerusalem. A Report of the Banality of Evil*, where she stated that the testimony of Holocaust executioners had all the features of a theatre play. The main character is the torturer, and the victims are basically just the background in this performance. This theatre had a specific purpose, which Arendt quoted after the organisers of the Eichmann trial: "it is necessary that our youth remember what happened to the Jewish people. We want them to know the most tragic facts in our history", because "the generation of Israelis who have grown up since the "holocaust" were in danger of losing their ties with the Jewish people" (Arendt, 1977, p. 10). Thus, the theatre was to become a history lesson, which, could cause the tragedy of the Holocaust to seem unreal. The truth should not be told by torturers, i.e. by those who have not experienced the Holocaust atrocities as victims even if they repented and apologised for their crimes. It was all an immanent part of the play played in this theatre. In general, it was only a history lesson for Jews living in Israel. For other countries the meaning of the Eichmann trial was insignificant. Due to such theatrical political performances, the Holocaust could become a local rather than a global event. Without an ethical message that is clear to all the inhabitants of our planet, this niche of the Holocaust would increase. It is quite possible that were it not for the anti-Semitic finale of student unrest in March 1968, in Poland, as well as similar events in other European countries, the memory of the Holocaust would only be preserved today in Israel and in Jewish diasporas scattered around the world. After all, these events resulted in dire consequences. In the case of Poland, it was a

wave of forced emigration of people of Jewish descent. The threat of anti-Jewish speeches in civilised Europe has become real again and the hatred once ignited by the Nazis still smoulders. The horrors from the past that everyone would like to forget still glow.

The powerlessness of ethics against total evil

For scientific reasons to be effective they must be presented and published in a way accessible to the recipient of the message. Ethics is not practiced only for its own sake, but has a specific task to shape people's attitudes in such a way that they do as little evil as possible in the world. Therefore, such a corrective function of ethics means that every new event not based on legal or moral regulations should be taken into ethical consideration in such a way that the evil will not occur again. Here, the question arises why post-war ethics did not fulfill this task. A possible answer is that scientific ethics has its roots in German philosophy which enabled it to legitimise the Holocaust. An attempt to fulfill the corrective function would have to involve a review of the foundations of the whole of ethics, but none of the contemporary ethics seemed to be able or willing to fulfill this task. The only thing that contemporary ethics managed to do was to shift the focus of ethical considerations from German philosophy to analytical philosophy, which focused the theory on metaethical considerations safe for ethicists themselves because they did not require any revisions or resolutions. The failure of contemporary ethics to hold humanity responsible for the tragedy of the Holocaust means that this task must be fulfilled by art, and specifically by literature which seems to be the most accessible to everyone.

Historical and literary accounts record the words and emotions of those who survived. However, in science, the problem is generally described based on what others have experienced. Thus, crimes tend to be described by the perpetrators themselves, because their victims are usually dead. Demonstrating the victim's point of view requires empathy from the scientist and artist or alternatively writing a terse description of what happened which can be read in the available records. Little could be learnt from the so-called survivors of the Holocaust. Memory discontinuity in people who have experienced traumatic experiences is well known in psychiatry. The survivors had lost everything, not only their relatives, but also their own homes, sentimental items and everything associated with their previous lives. They struggled to express what they had experienced because they were short for adequate words. It was much easier for them to express their emotions in the form of artistic expression that was not restricted to scientific rules. The literary work of Tadeusz Borowski is a good example where the writer managed to boldly express in his works his own feelings in a naturalistic manner. How shocking his description of the feeling of hunger in the concentration camp when he wrote that the hunger was so great that one looked at another other prisoner, not as a second human being, but as something which could be eaten. We also owe Borowski the most accurate specification of the reason for the passivity of people destined for extermination: "Never before in the history of mankind has hope been stronger than man, but never also has it done so much harm as it has in the war, in this concentration camp. We were never taught how to give up hope, and this is why today we perish in gas chambers" (Borowski, 1987, pp. 121–122). Hope is a feeling that never leaves a man who has kept his sense of identity. It cannot be reproduced scientifically. It is the foundation of the existence of religions.

However, there is no rational explanation of the Holocaust. There are only weak attempts to transfer theological considerations into the foundations of humanities and social sciences. Perhaps the distinguished position of the Jewish people in some areas of social life encourages attempts to dispose of them by those who feel undervalued. Thus, competition for dominance, including the physical elimination of competitors would have been considered the basic principle of interpersonal relations. However, this could not have been a mere struggle for existence, because having exterminated the Jewish population, nobody increased their chances of survival, and the torturers themselves had all the means to survive. The lack of a rational

explanation for the Holocaust has been compensated in a limited way by literary descriptions. A special place in literature is certainly reserved for subjects directly related to Jewish culture and religion. It is interesting that the Jews are portrayed in an extremely specific way, because even if they are positive heroes, they are usually portrayed in a negative context. Curiously, mainly people outside the circle of Jewish culture, i.e. those who risked their lives to save the Jews and deserve the diploma and medal of “Righteous Among the Nations” are depicted positively. Such literary one-sidedness means that the Jews have a problem with referring to their own heroes, whose memory they could popularise among other cultures. It is very unfair that people all over the world know the names of the torturers, but only a few know the victims by their names. Thus, the memory of the Holocaust did not become a monument commemorating Jewish achievements but according to some people it can be considered to be a monument commemorating the efficiency of the Nazi executioners.

People who are endangered firstly try to find rescue for themselves. The efficient machine of the Holocaust deprived them of any hope of survival very quickly. Next, the matter of preserving the memory of what is left after those who have died will be on the agenda. The mechanism introduced by Nazis recorded history using statistics, terse date entries or cruel commands. The victims themselves had to write their own testament different from the German one. Yitskhak Schipper told Alexander Donat: “Everything depends on who transmits our testament to future generations, on who writes the history of this period. History is usually written by the victor. What we know about murdered peoples is only what their murderers vaingloriously cared to say about them. Should our murderers be victorious, should they write the history of this war, our destruction will be presented as one of the most beautiful pages of world history, and future generations will pay tribute to them as dauntless crusaders. Their every word will be taken as gospel. Or they may wipe out our memory altogether, as if we had never existed, as if there had never been a Polish Jewry, a ghetto in Warsaw, a Majdanek” (Kassow, 2014, p. 173). Since Yitskhak Schipper was a historian, he was able to organise facts and connect them together coherently. The same work was carried out by Emanuel Ringelblum, who in these dark times, carried out his mission defiantly to document the life and struggle of Polish Jews against the German aggressor. Ringelblum’s Archive contains material meticulously collected by many witnesses of the Holocaust. It is an accusation and warning for future generations, not only for intellectuals but also for ordinary people, even those just waiting for death, that they be aware that the post-war future will decide whether there is a place on Earth for the Jews at all, Alexander Donat’s report confirms this: “Those who worked with Schipper in the kitchen at Majdanek recognized what was at stake in transmitting their history and did everything they could to save him from the gas chamber” (Kugelmass & Boyarin, 1983, p. 17). Yet it was not physical resistance which ultimately decided the failure of the great extermination plan. Eventually it was the memory of the victims and not the torturers which survived. If the fate of the war had been different, the Holocaust would have been celebrated by the Nazis as a great victory, after which the memory of the defeated would have been blurred on the pages of history. It is quite possible that for the Nazi architects of the Holocaust this was even more important than the physical elimination of the Jewish people.

On the other hand, ethics as a science, must generalise all individual descriptions and find the common factor. That is why Berel Lang writes: “The history of philosophical ethics is a history of the will for generalisation. Even to recognize individual judgments or acts as ethical requires a move to abstraction in order to catch sight of the principles that give them this character...” (Lang, 2003, p. 62). For this reason, the scientific description of the Holocaust is perceived in some sense as incomprehensible. To explain that something occurred that transcends human understanding may be not be possible. Reflecting more deeply on the impossibility of a scientific interpretation of the Holocaust, a statement can be ventured that the contemporary division of ethics into practical (applied) and theoretical, is the aftermath of this

impossibility. Practical ethics deals only with what is happening currently, i.e. modern dilemmas. According to it, the Holocaust is a historical fact not to be interpreted. If there are any associations, they may be quite grotesque, as for example, equating abortion with the Holocaust. This only trivialises the act of the Nazi genocide, enabling it to be considered in terms of good and evil and thus containing the theoretical possibility of being justified. Berel Lang postulates the theoretical possibility of avoiding a repetition of the Holocaust by formulating an introduction of one universal prohibition based on the model of a categorical imperative. However, a way can be found to circumvent any prohibition and to reinterpret it with the mechanisms the Nazis used to justify their right to exterminate the Jewish people.

The principle of moral progress in traditional ethics had suddenly been destroyed because ethics had not been able to explain the causes of such a sudden moral decline. Berel Lang commented on the present situation in this respect: “the act of genocide was a moral phenomenon, the enormity of which continues to challenge the reasoned and balanced voice in which ethics has traditionally spoken” (Lang, 2003, p. 64).

Literary expression of the impossible

Writing about the Holocaust from the victims’ point of view forces you to reach for explanations that have so far worked well for individual incidents. An explanation of the silence of those who survived the Holocaust can be found in psychoanalysis. Sigmund Freud, describing the situation of a man in trauma after losing loved ones wrote: “Profound mourning, the reaction to the loss of someone who is loved, contains the same painful frame of mind, the same loss of interest in the outside world – in so far as it does not recall him – the same loss of capacity to adopt any new object of love (which would mean replacing him) and the same turning away from any activity that is not connected with thoughts of him” (Freud, 1917, p. 243). Therefore, literary works are created not in a state of mourning but melancholy, which does not deprive man of his creative abilities, but only weakens his activity outside.

However, mourning lasts for a relatively short time since by absorbing a person’s total energy it could prevent a normal life. However, the state of melancholia, similar to mourning, has no time limits. Overcoming mourning also requires a fight in which a calculation takes place and ultimately one’s own interest prevails over the loss suffered. Melancholia is about constantly complementing the value of what has been lost. Thus, it involves the continuous expenditure of energy and the constant evaluation of what may have been. Freud also predicted that overcoming melancholy might result in a narcissistic turn for the person. In other words, a person can become introvert and even obsessed because of the loss. And those who survived *Shoah* often experienced that.

This melancholic streak was already observed during the war, and is conveyed in the final fragment of Icchok Kacenelson’s poem “The Song of the Murdered Jewish People”. It was written in 1942 in Warsaw. The author seems to be affected by the soulless extermination of Jews, which was beyond human understanding, in addition to the lack of means which the victims possessed in order to defend themselves as exhibited especially during the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. A fight is always about something: for territory, for resources, or to save someone or something. But what could the Jewish insurgents save? They could only delay what seemed inevitable, their mission was suicidal, but their death was not pointless. It was not foreseen in the ‘Final Solution’ It was the first problem in what seemed to be a well-oiled extermination machine. As a result, they became public victims and the memory of them survived because all except those involved in the Final Solution experienced their mourning. This uprising was the essence of Jewish mysticism. Now nobody could tell the Jews that they were not actively trying to influence their fate. However, passive surrender to their fate proved to be just as ineffective as an attempt to influence it actively which in itself could have become a disaster for Jewish culture. After the war, the culture recognised from Singer’s novels or from

the musical *Fiddler on the roof* did not disintegrate but was transformed into an active approach to life typical of Europeans. The history of the state of Israel is the best proof of this.

During World War II no masterpieces were written which could render the tragedy of those times. In addition, this problem could only be tackled by world literature some time after the war ended. The poem entitled “The song of the murdered Jewish people” was written by Izaak Katzenelson (1886–1944) – a witness of Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and an Auschwitz prisoner. [It] “is one of the most powerful diaries to be retrieved from the ashes of the Holocaust. The manuscripts [...] are extant thanks to the efforts of a member of the French underground named Miriam Novitch, who was a prisoner in Vittel at the time when Katzenelson was there in 1943” (Patterson, Berger & Cargas, 2002, p. 87). The background to the poem and how it survived to the present day shows the importance of such memories which can be passed on to future generations. This is also an example of literature being able to render the atmosphere of the times in which it was written.

“The Song of the Murdered Jewish People” is in itself a preview of the new ethics and perception of the world in Jewish culture. Obvious connections with “Jeremiah’s Lament” relate more to the poetic form rather than to the message contained in them. Thus, in poem not only do we have lament over the tragedy which affects innocent people, but we also have a mournful reflection on everything that was lost in the Holocaust. Everything Katzenelson identified with seemed to have been lost. Melancholy is like the voice of an alienated person who is deprived of heritage and hope for the future. This melancholy is necessary to shape the image of a new world in which it will no longer be possible for such a situation to happen again. Its starting point is the warning for the Nazis that they would be punished and would answer for their crimes.

Woe to you, who have entirely exterminated my peaceful people,
burned down my houses of worship,
all my shuls together with the Jews in them,
and my holy Jewish cities (Katzenelson, 1982, p. 67).

This is the moment when Katzenelson gives up a lament which results in irrational attempts at blaming God for everything that happened during World War II. He abandons Jeremiah’s lament and tries to outline some optimistic vision of the future. This conviction was related to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, which could not be won, but as remorse it showed the whole world the hidden truth about a dying Jewish nation. One can wonder if in this way Katzenelson wanted to mobilise the global community to take some action. He himself could not do more than to write a literary appeal to all people. His own survival did not matter to him because it was the memory of the Holocaust which was to survive and this aim was achieved. The memory of the Holocaust became a world heritage, so what the Nazi tormentors hoped for, could not come true.

Conclusion

Generally, literature has the same task in society as ethics. It is to improve all people intellectually and morally. Therefore, it is not significant whether someone reads literary or scientific works because their influence begins on finding the first reader. The slogans “art for art’s sake” or “science about science” seem to be against the task writers or ethicists voluntarily devoted themselves to when they started their career. Therefore, the fact that the tragedy of the Holocaust can be ignored by science shows that the most enlightened representatives of society have not understood the importance of this event for human culture, and thus they cannot write anything meaningful about it. Instead they deal with safe metaethical issues related to how ethical concepts changed their meaning gradually when mass propaganda was being popularised by the German government. Undoubtedly, literature and all the art of the Third

Reich were harnessed to work for the sole purpose of depriving the right to be a human being of a significant part of humanity. It must be admitted that this task has been accomplished at a high level, – especially by Nazi literature and philosophy. Thus, it is incomprehensible that today the same branches of science and art cannot satisfactorily perform a task directed in the opposite direction.

The Holocaust remains a huge challenge for both science and art which has changed the history of humankind for ever. Such a tragic story about the extermination of a whole nation could be a trigger for great literary masterpieces and scientific treaties analysing its causes. However, ethics could not deal with the issue adequately, because even if it did undertake such issues, it hardly ever went beyond numerical data, as if the victims became dehumanised and turned into collective fractions of people murdered. Some ethical works on the moral dimension of the Holocaust seem to have been mainly inspired by literature.. It was because writers could somehow render the immense tragedy and endeavoured to register their impressions and pass them down to survivors. Fortunately for all of us living today they succeeded even if they themselves died. “Holocaust literature arises in response to an event that would render the capacity both for response and for literary expression impossible. And yet it is there. It is there because the soul is there, if only as a remnant. Holocaust literature transcends the particulars of the event defined by death to affirm a movement of return to life” (Patterson, Berger & Cargas, 2002, p. xiii). One can only wonder why so much time was needed for scientific treaties to be written about the Holocaust. At present there seem to be many of them but they all concentrate on similar aspects. With literary works it is different because “the Jew remembers and thus refuses to remain silent – despite himself” (Patterson, Berger & Cargas, 2002, p. xv).

In conclusion, it is also worth emphasising that the Holocaust may be beyond some people’s comprehension. It was a collective experience and probably no one is able to express its horror. Even the most sensitive artists managed to express it only through the language of metaphors and symbols. This raises the question of how recipients manage to read such an indirect message. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson are probably right in saying, “It seems that the ability to understand experiences through a metaphor is another sense, such as sight, touch or hearing, and the metaphor provides the only way to perceive and experience a “significant portion of the real world” (Lakoff & Johnson, 2010, p. 305). The flood of information reaching everyone every day, develops a specific sense to create a coherent and clear picture of events out of a large amount of news. A permanent presence in the society of the truth about the Holocaust expressed by artists, complemented with science, is essential in creating such a picture. It is no wonder then that Berel Lang noticed that writers writing about the Holocaust are aware of this fact and the titles of their novels express that e.g. “Speaking the Unspeakable” or “Voicing the Void”. But such depiction of the Holocaust also unexpectedly reveals the biblical (theological) roots of what happened, which Berel Lang highlighted in one of his works: “The Holocaust, viewed in these terms, seems to carry the biblical commandment against making graven images to a still more radical extreme: of it, we hear, no one can create images, even if they wish” (Lang, 2005, p. 73). Therefore, the Holocaust cannot be read only from today’s perspective, because then we get a temporary, ephemeral image, out of the context of what actually happened. It is the task of art to express the inexpressible in natural language.

It must also not be forgotten that “The awareness that there will be only a legend after the Holocaust is another element of the survivors’ moral suffering” (Engelking, 1994, p. 3012). They are afraid that the tragedy of the Holocaust may not contribute to the moral correction of humanity. In this sense, it could be considered an event that has not been accounted for, has not been accepted, though it may be repeated in the future. The Holocaust may be a one-off event that will not happen but it may also happen again in every subsequent supra-local war. We cannot accept the pessimistic thesis of Zygmunt Bauman that the Holocaust, “has most certainly changed little, if anything, in the course of the subsequent history of our collective

consciousness and self-understanding” (Bauman, 1989, p. 5). It is from this that the eternal task of art is to maintain the sensitive memory of events from years ago, in order to fulfill the poet’s will at any time:

Arise from every grain of sand and stone
Scream, let dust, flame and smoke shout with you –
It is your blood and juices, it is the core of your bones,
Body and life! Louder! Let us hear it (Katzenelson, 1980)

Has this work been completed? This is doubtful, because the preserved materials are not facts. They are a testimony of their times and the state of mind of the people who wrote them. Therefore, modern scholars analysing the extraordinary evidence of the dark era of World War II could already say: “We may now die in peace. We fulfilled our mission. May history attest for us” (Kassow 2007, p. 3).

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A bitter diagnostic of the ultra-liberal human: Michel Houellebecq on some ethical issues

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Abstract

The paper examines the ethical dimensions of Michel Houellebecq's works of fiction. On the basis of keen diagnostics of contemporary Western culture, this world-renowned French writer predicts the destructive social consequences of ultra-liberalism and enters into an argument with transhumanist theories. His writings, depicting the misery of contemporary man and imagining a new human species enhanced by technologies, show that neither the so-called neo-humans nor the "last man" of liberal democracies can reach happiness. The latter can only be achieved if humanist values, shared by previous generations and promoted by the great 19th-century authors (Balzac, Flaubert), are reinvented.

Keywords: contemporary French literature, ultra-liberalism, humanism, transhumanism, end of man

Introduction

Since the time of Aristotle, the axiom of ontological inseparability and mutual compatibility of aesthetics and ethics within a literary work has been widely accepted by literary theorists. Even the (apparent) absence of ethics espoused by some adherents of extreme formalist experiments around the middle and in the second half of the 20th century (e.g. the 'Tel Quel' group) presupposes an ethical positioning. In France, forms of literary expression which accord high priority to ethical/moral questioning have a significant tradition. The so-called "ethical generation", writing mainly in the 1930s (Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, Georges Bernanos, André Malraux, etc.), is clear evidence of this. At present, the French author whose ethical as well as aesthetic positions generate probably the most controversy is Michel Houellebecq (Clément & Wesemael, 2007). Born in 1956, he has gained worldwide recognition and has been studied by numerous scholars (e.g. Murielle Lucie Clément, Sabine van Wesemael, Raphaël Baroni, Michel David, Éric Naulleau, Dominique Noguez, Bruno Viard, etc.). In his seven novels published so far, he shows a systematic interest in a number of highly topical and divisive issues such as religious fanaticism, separation of sex and love/passion, genetic manipulation, social exclusion of the old and physically unattractive, etc. The present paper aims to inspect and review the ethical scope of Houellebecq's thought, with special emphasis on his views on transhumanism and the social consequences of Western ultra-liberalism.

Two questions mark the starting point of our reflection. Both draw on the story and the assertions of Daniel 1. This protagonist of Houellebecq's 2005 novel *La Possibilité d'une île* [*The Possibility of an island*] is a jester (a profession that may refer to the policies of liberal democracies which are nothing more than big shows disguising big business, see Harari, 2016).³ He earns his living in provocative and politically incorrect shows, one of which is entitled "We prefer Palestinian sex workers" (*On préfère les partouzeuses palestiniennes*, see Houellebecq, 2005, pp. 47, 49, 160 ff.).

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³ See also Houellebecq, 2001, p. 319, where Michel, the protagonist of *Plateforme* [*Platform*], another of Houellebecq's novel, considers elections as "excellent TV shows" (*d'excellents shows télévisés*). Since the paper draws on the original versions of Houellebecq's texts, all quotations are given in our own translation with original French in footnotes and in italics. For information on existing English translations of the author's novels, please consult the final list of references.

(1) Daniel 1 presents himself as a “bitter humanist” (*humaniste grinçant*, Houellebecq, 2005, p. 22). Can the same attribute be used to characterize the ethical positions of Daniel 1’s “creator”? Certainly, Michel Houellebecq, known for his provocations, likes to scramble the lines,⁴ but the outlined parallel, if legitimate, might shed new light on the interweaving of ethics and aesthetics in his works.

(2) Daniel 1 is not the only narrator of his life story. He is assisted by his clones Daniel 24 and Daniel 25. Can the author’s narrative strategy be interpreted as an aesthetic foreshadowing of the long-announced *end of man*, discussed by philosophers (see, for example, Fukuyama, 1992; Foucault, 1970)? And can an ethically acceptable vision of the future, as seen by the author, reside in the arrival of the so-called neo-humans, post-biological creatures genetically derived from their human predecessors?

The most comprehensive answer to these questions lies in the moral and sociological profile of contemporary ultra-liberal man whose image is transposed into Houellebecq’s fictional characters. But before moving on to the analyses, it should be pointed out that we adhere to the part of academic community that considers Michel Houellebecq to be a worthy writer (Viard, 2013). Although some scholars give him unflattering reviews (Baroni & Estier, 2016; Manilève, 2015), he is, in our opinion, an excellent observer; a kind of Balzac of the 21st century,⁵ who gives a precise diagnosis of the man of liberal democracies. It is not by chance that his writings keep arousing the interest of philosophers, ethicists, sociologists, politicians and linguists.

A determinist vision of the last man

Since the publication of the author’s first novel *Extension du domaine de la lutte* [*Whatever*] in 1994, Houellebecqian heroes demonstrate pretty much the same traits. The protagonists-narrators – Michel in *Les Particules élémentaires* [*The elementary particles*] and *Plateforme*, Daniel 1 in *La Possibilité d’une île*, Jed in *La Carte et le territoire* [*The map and the territory*] or François in *Soumission* [*Submission*] – can all be seen as variants of a representative member⁶ of contemporary Western society: a young single man, solitary and depressed, fed by mass culture and leading a flat life filled with futile distractions.⁷ Thanks to a well-paid job (analyst programmer, official, artist, scholar etc.) he is quite immune to material and financial problems in a brutal world driven by money.⁸ He enjoys the benefits of permissive society, but suffers from emotional misery and proves to be unfit for friendship and love. To bear this existence, “that painful and definitive disaster” (Houellebecq, 1994, p. 13),⁹ he resorts to excessive consumption and sexual adventures with no real desire or pleasure. Often patterned as a self-projection of the writer, he adopts the role of an impassive observer¹⁰ astonished by the spectacle of the world. Just as his “creator” – whom we might call the *entomologist of the last man* (an allusion to Zola and Nietzsche) – this (anti-)hero watches his fellows “walk on each other like lobsters in a jar” (Houellebecq, 1994, p. 16).¹¹

⁴ François, the protagonist-narrator of *Soumission* and a possible self-projection of the author, declares that “the mere mention of the word ‘humanism’ made [him] feel slightly like vomiting” (*rien que le mot d’humanisme [lui] donnai[t] légèrement envie de vomir*) (Houellebecq, 2015a, p. 250).

⁵ We are thinking in particular of his ambition to produce the effect of reality (a term from Roland Barthes) and to show money as the driving force of society.

⁶ Houellebecq’s creation of character types that are representative of their environment can be read as a nod to Honoré de Balzac, directly evoked in the author’s texts (Houellebecq, 2005, p. 151). The quotation from Balzac serves as a motto for *Plateforme*.

⁷ He reads very little or not at all, watches TV series, attends social events with no real desire to do so, etc.

⁸ A Balzacian motif *par excellence*.

⁹ *ce désastre douloureux et définitif*.

¹⁰ This concern for impassivity is emphasized by a detached, cold narration.

¹¹ *tels les homards qui se marchent dessus dans un bocal*.

Michel Houellebecq's man – like that of the French novelists of the 19th century – is determined. Biologically – by the instinct for survival and the sexual instinct – and socially – by the “*milieu* and the moment”.¹² Each protagonist is subject to a double pressure with great impact on his moral compass and personal happiness (whatever it means). His daily life is marked by the diktat of ultra-liberal society that intrudes even into the intimate sphere. The first imperative, stemming from economic hypertrophy, is to consume. It is no surprise, therefore, that the writer sees his heroes in consumers and buyers of branded products.¹³ All of them are at the same time consumers of the sexual act in a world where the human body is seen as a marketable product. The second rule is to respect the cult of eternal beauty and youth that inspires the boom of technological means made available to those who deviate from the aesthetic ideal by being old, ugly, sick, not big enough, thin or blond. To emphasize these ideas, Michel Houellebecq quotes the case of Michael Jackson (Houellebecq, 2001, pp. 227–228) and describes meticulously the ugliness of some of his characters.¹⁴

According to Houellebecq, our ruthless world condemns economically and erotically determined man to success or failure. It is thus logical to ask: does this more and more fetishised push to success mark the initial phase of a process of *selection* carried out secretly by Western ultra-liberal societies?

Posthumanism – a course towards (un)happiness?

The negatively laden word *selection* was used intentionally in the previous sentence. In fact, some critics accuse the writer of reactionary discourse (Lindenberg, 2002). Such an interpretation is clearly wrong and implies a deep misunderstanding,¹⁵ even though it cannot be denied that Michel Houellebecq's revolt against the *doxa* offends some sensibilities. It should be noted, however, that similar complaints were voiced against Houellebecq's 19th- and 20th-century precursors¹⁶, and that, through his caustic objections, the author opens the most difficult political, ethical and bioethical issues of our hyper-technologized and hyper-wired society. The contemporary Western world promotes performance and success with no respect for man and his dignity. By creating two distinct categories of characters – the rich, young, good-looking and strong on the one hand, and the left-behind, old, ugly and weak on the other hand – Houellebecq seems to unveil the possible implications of the societal diktat on individual freedom and its gradual restriction. “Smoking cigarettes has become the only part of true freedom in my life” (Houellebecq, 1994, p. 61),¹⁷ admits one of the narrators. Houellebecq's narratives highlight the paradoxes of the libertarian but constraining “human-rights-based” society. His binary vision of humanity, like that of Louis-Ferdinand Céline,¹⁸ unveils the

¹² As in Hyppolite Taine's theories.

¹³ Michel from *Plateforme*, for example, wears a trendy rucksack, a *Lowe Pro Himalaya Trekking*, the most expensive model found in *Au Vieux Campeur* (Houellebecq, 2001, p. 37).

¹⁴ For example Tisserand, a secondary character of the first novel, is described as “fat” (*gras*) and “stumpy” (*courtaud*), with “features of a cane toad” (*le faciès d'un crapaud-buffle*) and “virgin at twenty-eight” (*puceau à vingt-huit ans*). Due to his physiognomy, he suffers from a lack of erotic attractiveness, as the narrator explains: “Poor, poor boy. I know in my heart why he enjoys my company so much – it's because I never talk about my girlfriends, I never flaunt my success with women. [...] It makes him lose one pain, and it slightly appeases his ordeal.” (*Pauvre, pauvre garçon. Je sais bien au fond pourquoi il apprécie tellement ma compagnie : c'est parce que moi je ne parle jamais de mes petites copines, je ne fais jamais l'étalage de mes succès féminins, [...] pour lui c'est une souffrance de moins, un léger apaisement de son calvaire*) (Houellebecq, 1994, p. 62).

¹⁵ Politically incorrect words are uttered by secondary characters in most cases. In *Plateforme* for example, the most vehement critic of Islam appears to be a Muslim (Houellebecq, 2001, pp. 338–339).

¹⁶ Gustave Flaubert, Louis-Ferdinand Céline, etc.

¹⁷ *Fumer des cigarettes, c'est devenu la seule part de véritable liberté dans mon existence.*

¹⁸ Louis-Ferdinand Céline puts it in a straightforward manner: “There are two very different humankind, the rich one and the poor one.” (*Il existe deux humanités très différentes, celle des riches et celle des pauvres*) (Céline, 1952, p. 85).

stalemate in which liberal democracies got stuck. Old beliefs, ideologies and traditional culture, now considered obsolete, yield to the absence of critical thought and to an ideological vacuum filled by business, high technologies, entertainment and manipulation. Obviously, Michel Houellebecq is not inclined to selection. His Manichean categorization of characters, with members of “the elite” promoted to the rank of protagonists, reflects neither the ideal of Nietzsche’s Superman (*Übermensch*) nor the so-called eugenic ideas. On the contrary, the lack of differentiation¹⁹ brings forward the common traits of each human, regardless of his/her social status (man or woman, winner or loser, victim or beneficiary of liberalism). Houellebecqian hedonists, looking for ephemeral pleasures and a featureless satisfaction of their desires, are characterized by emotional deprivation, sexual misery, existential emptiness and alienation. Chronically frustrated by the blind and irresistible push to succeed, they engage in a merciless fight on more and more fronts and fields, as the French title of the author’s first novel points out (literally: *Extension of the Domain of Struggle*). This struggle, a “fierce narcissist competition” (Houellebecq, 1991, p. 25; Houellebecq, 2005, p. 22)²⁰ which can be read as a caricature of the *Will-to-Live* (*Wille zum Leben*) concept coined by Arthur Schopenhauer,²¹ is endless. The pressure of instincts, enhanced by the increasingly insistent diktat of society, can be brought to an end only by the extinction of being. Human struggles are accompanied by perpetual suffering²² because every desire, as soon as it is fulfilled, generates boredom, new desires and, consequently, new pains.

Michel Houellebecq’s man thus oscillates between a constantly renewed suffering and a “relatively painless” (Houellebecq, 1994, p. 48)²³ boredom experienced, however, with the same dose of loathing as suffering itself. Happiness is defined only as a temporary cessation of deprivation or pain. Inaccessible to humans, it seems to be reserved for dogs,²⁴ as claims one of the narrators. Or should we rather say – reserved for neo-humans derived from genetic manipulation, asexual and immortal, safe from the fear of getting old and dying? The first appearance in Houellebecq’s novels of this alternative human species with no sensibility or sensuality dates back to 1998.²⁵ In 2005, the model reappears in an upgraded version. Yet, Houellebecqian neo-humans deprived of the *Will-to-Live* do not reach happiness. In the final episodes of *La Possibilité d’une île*, Daniel 25, the last post-biological creature searching for happiness among the ruins of a world without humans, notes that “happiness [is] not a possible horizon” (Houellebecq, 2005, p. 485).²⁶ This utterance, placed prominently in the novel, is charged with meaning. The role of two narrators-clones is not to announce a promising future, but to take a relative, suspicious view on transhumanist theories. Both of them bring to light the

¹⁹ Apart from economic and erotic criteria, considered as the most important success factors, Houellebecq’s characters are differentiated according to features that are intrinsic to nature. The author suggests, however, that sex can nowadays be modified and is therefore not a determining factor.

²⁰ *féroce compétition narcissique*.

²¹ This German philosopher is directly or indirectly evoked in several of Michel Houellebecq’s works of fiction (Houellebecq, 2001, p. 175; Houellebecq, 2005, pp. 82, 87, 110, etc.).

²² “The world is an expanded suffering. At its origin, there’s a cluster of suffering and every existence is an expansion and a crushing. All things are suffering until they are. Nothingness vibrates with pain, until it reaches the point of being in an abject paroxysm” (*Le monde est une souffrance déployée. À son origine, il y a un nœud de souffrance. Toute existence est une expansion et un écrasement. Toutes les choses souffrent, jusqu’à ce qu’elles soient. Le néant vibre de douleur, jusqu’à parvenir à l’être : dans un abject paroxysme*) (Houellebecq, 1991, p. 9).

²³ *relativement indolore*.

²⁴ “Fox [= a dog’s name] is happy. He scampers round the room [...], he plays with a ball or with his small plastic animals, [...] this is for him an obvious happiness” (*Fox, lui, est heureux. Il gambade dans la résidence [...], il joue au ballon ou avec un de ses petits animaux en plastique, [...] c’est pour lui un bonheur évident*) (Houellebecq, 2005, pp. 77–78).

²⁵ Publication of *Les Particules élémentaires* by the Flammarion publishing house.

²⁶ *le bonheur n’[est] pas un horizon possible*.

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