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EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

"Kronos" quarterly was established in 2007 as a project of a particular generation of philosophers all of whom started their studies around the transitional year 1989. "Kronos" soon became the largest philosophical journal in Poland. It is a new voice in Polish philosophy.

Poland at the turn of the 21st century was and is an inspiring place for thinkers; it is an interesting vantage point for observing and studying human nature. It is a place which saw genocide and two murderous experiments – the Nazi and the Soviet – the aim of which was to create a new type of human being. A philosopher brought up in Warsaw is living in a city destroyed by Hitler and rebuilt by Stalin.

The place and the time when we started studying philosophy influenced our choices and interests. Perhaps a philosopher is nothing but an emanation of the place and time which shaped him. These factors no doubt explain our interest in Hegel and Marx whom we have read through the lenses provided by religious messianists (Fyodorov) or 20th century prophets of the apocalypse (Kojève and Witkacy). The spirit of time and place prompted us also to study the Classics, to return in thought to Greece where – influenced by Heidegger and Nietzsche – we saw the eternally recurring point, where all history ends and every history begins.

Wawrzyniec Rymkiewicz

THE PHILOSOPHER OF CHAOS. A PORTRAIT OF SCHELLING

And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep.
King James Bible, Genesis 1:2

Great philosophy exists in fragments. The Presocratics are in fragments. Pascal's *Thoughts* and Nietzsche's *Will to Power* are in fragments, too. This fragmentariness, this dispersion, this textual chaos, however, does not diminish philosophy. Nor does it obstruct the understanding of it. This has been observed by the most influential minds of the 20th century, Heidegger and Wittgenstein, who also abandoned the idea of a philosophical masterwork at some point and chose their last books, *Contributions to Philosophy* and *Philosophical Investigations*, to be published as collections of loose thoughts, notes and outlines.

In this universe of fragments, in this tangle of fractions (its other name being "the European tradition"), Schelling's late philosophy appears to be a unique galaxy. His treatise *Of Human Freedom* which appeared in 1809 marks the date after which Schelling did not publish any major philosophical work. Schelling falls silent, and he does so at the age of 34, almost Christ's age. For the rest of his life he kept working on a piece which he could not finish, the more coherent form of which will be known in the 1840s as the Berlin lectures. Those lectures on the *Philosophy of Mythology and Revelation* were published posthumously by Schelling's son, Karl, who is considered to have imposed on them his own order and made them a whole which they had not been originally.

Schelling's reader faces an unusual textual universe – a universe devoid of a *masterwork* (and thus devoid of a Center), where everything is a *lecture* (and is thus an occasional text intended for a particular audience), a universe full of compilations (Karl Schelling completed the Berlin lectures with the help of earlier manuscripts), and existing in many copies and transcripts (today's editions of Schelling's lectures of the 1820s and 30s are based on his students' notes). In this universe one can encounter some strange objects, for example, the so-called *Paulus-Nachschrift*, which is a transcription of Schelling's winter term 1841/42 lectures, published against his will by one of his students, Heinrich Paulus, under the title *Die endlich offenbar gewordene positive Philosophie der Offenbarung* (*The Finally Revealed Positive Philosophy of Revelation*). Schelling sued Paulus but he lost the case. Still, the researchers today consider this work – the work of

Schelling-Paulus or Paulus-Schelling – to be an important source of knowledge about the development of Schelling's thought[1].

The dark center of this universe constitutes a group of texts written between 1810 and 1820, published as *Die Weltalter* (*The Ages of the World*). This was the last time when Schelling tried to write a philosophical work, and the first time he did not succeed. All that happened later was a result of this catastrophe.

THE CATASTROPHE OF THE *WELTALTER*

The first version of *The Ages of the World* was ready in the late summer of 1810. Schelling's diary contains the following entry on September 15: "3 of the *Ages of the World* drafted." But serious work on the book began only three months later: "The *Ages of the World* – Schelling noted on December 27 – started at last."[2] The previous night a violent storm hit Munich. The scene is very symbolic: the storm has passed, it is morning now, Schelling begins to write a book about God who rises from chaos.[3]

The book is supposed to consist of three parts, each of which is to describe one of the Aeons, or metaphysical dimensions of Time: past, present and future. Schelling's initial belief was that the completion of the book would not take him more than half a year: "For two months – Schelling writes in a letter to his publisher on January 30, 1811 – I have been constantly immersed in work. The book that I have been pondering over for many years should finally emerge before Easter."[4] 'Book One' of *The Ages of the World*, entitled "The Past", was indeed composed before Easter of that year and printed for proofreading. However, there soon occurred some difficulty, a discord of some kind, which caused Schelling to postpone the completion of the book. At first, until July. Then, until late summer. Finally, until Easter 1812. In November, however, Schelling had to stop working in order to write a response to Jacobi's polemic against him, titled *Von den göttlichen Dingen und ihrer Offenbarung* (*Of Divine Things and Their Revelation*). He published the response without delay and returned to his work on the *Weltalter* in February 1812. Still, rather than finish the book, he began writing it anew. That is how Schelling created the second (known to us) version of *The Ages of the World*, which he then published at his own expense at the turn of 1813. This second version also consisted of only the first book, "The Past."[5] Also in this case its printing would soon be suspended.

Thus, in the autumn of 1813, Schelling began writing *The Ages of the World* for the third time. This is the most comprehensive version of all that are available to us today. While working on it, Schelling felt that he would thus give the sum of his life: "I regard

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[1] Its latest edition is due to Manfred Frank's effort, see: F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophie der Offenbarung: 1841/1842*. Frankfurt/M, 1992.

[2] F.W.J.Schelling, *Philosophische Entwürfe und Tagebücher 1809 – 1813*, hrsg. von L.Knatz, H.J. Sandkühler, M.Schraven. Hamburg 1994, pp. 52, 58. Unless otherwise stated, the quoted fragments are given in a working translation prepared for the purpose of this publication.

[3] See: X. Tilliette, *Schelling, Biographie*. Paris 1999, p. 219. For a detailed reconstruction of the process of writing *The Ages of the World*, see also: A. Lanfranconi, *Krisis. Eine Lektüre der „Weltalter"-Texte F.W.J. Schellings*. Stuttgard, Bad-Canstatt 1992, pp. 59-79.

[4] *Schelling und Cotta. Briefwechsel 1803-1849*, hrsg. von H. Fuhrmans and L.Loher. Stuttgart 1965, p. 50.

[5] The two first versions were published a hundred and thirty five years later by Martin Schröter, see: F.W.J von Schelling, *Die Weltalter. Fragmente.* In den Urfassungen von 1811 und 1813. München 1946.

this work – we read in his letter of August 19, 1814 – to be the fruit of all my labors over the past twenty years. Regardless of the fact when or whether at all the system presented in it might prevail, it will remain a book classical for this vein of thought."[6] On May 23, 1815 Schelling informed his publisher that the book had already been finished, and that it was only the political turmoil, Napoleon's return from Elba and the Hundred Days, that prevented him from sending it to print. But yet again, everything seems to suggest that Schelling wanted to put into print only the first book of *The Ages of the World* since by that time he had decided to divide the work into two volumes of which only the first volume was to be published. But the book did not get published after all and Schelling continued working on it. Even four years later, in a letter written on January 29, 1819, he insisted that all he needed was a couple of hours to complete the whole: "I need a few hours of concentration, free from other activities, in order to complete the whole to my own satisfaction."[7]

Schelling clearly went mad. For how else can one call the state if between 1810 and 1820 he wrote, or drafted, at least a dozen versions of one and the same book. When in 1939 German researchers opened a huge box of manuscripts, submitted to the University of Munich by Schelling's heirs, they found in it (apart from the already mentioned three versions of *The Ages of the World*) "over a dozen reworks and detailed outlines of book one."[8] Still more notes were discovered later in the Archive of the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities, but these have been published only recently.[9] Let us make it clear once again at this point that what we are dealing with are almost exclusively drafts and versions of the first book. As if for all those years Schelling had been writing the same hundred pages over and over again, while the pages grew longer and gradually more disobedient to the author, thus developing into a whole against his will. To quote Schelling's publisher, Manfred Schröter: "The unexpected outcome of our study of the manuscripts was that we established many substantial differences between these reworks, revisions, outlines and concepts, all of which, however, relate only to the first book of the *Weltalter*. This multilayered legacy seemed to tell us that Schelling was not only editing over and over again a single manuscript, but also writing it down from the very beginning again and again."[10]

The whole story has yet another, tragic end, as if one catastrophe was not enough. At the time of the carpet bombings of Germany between July 11 and 13, 1944, the north wing of the University of Munich was razed to the ground. The library's basement was set aflame together with Schelling's archive which had been prepared for evacuation. It contained manuscripts of the 1840s lectures, manuscripts and printouts of the first two versions of the *Weltalter*, as well as a dozen or so other variants of this work – which Schröter saw, but the content of which will remain unknown to us. The first two versions of *The Ages of the World* survived thanks to Schröter who had managed to rewrite them

[6] *Schelling und Cotta. Briefwechsel 1803-1849*, p. 87.
[7] *Aus Schellings Leben in Briefen*, hrsg. von G.L.Plitt, zweiter Band 1803-1820. Hildesheim, Zürich, New York 2003, p. 429.
[8] M. Schröter, "Vorwort", in: *Die Weltalter. Fragmente*, p. VI.
[9] See: *Weltalter-Fragmente*, hrsg. von K. Grotsch. Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, 2002.
[10] M. Schröter, "Die Urfassungen von Schellings 'Weltaltern'", in: *Kritische Studien. Über Schelling und zur Kulturphilosophie*. München 1971, p. 91.

some time earlier. Schelling's work, which aimed to unveil the primordial chaos of Being (or the primordial chaos of God), thus returned to its source; to the place where everything originates. The chaos of the Spirit was engulfed by the chaos of Life from which the Spirit, as Schelling states, has just emerged in pains and is still struggling to rise.

The Ages of the World will thus forever remain a fragment. A fraction rescued from the flames. Yet this fraction has something monumental about it. Schröter visualized Schelling as an archaic Titan, and compared the discovered fragments to an archeological find. Fragments of the *Weltalter*, he argues, "can give us some idea of one of the greatest philosophical geniuses' long-term, tireless struggle for his major work whose fate, after all, was to remain a torso without a head."[11] Xavier Tilliette, the author of the already classic monograph that covers the whole of Schelling's philosophy, saw a romantic ruin in those fractions, "the grand ruin of the *Weltalter*", *La haute ruine des Weltalter*[12]. If my understanding of Tillette is right, Schelling's work can be said to resemble the ruined Gothic cathedral of Caspar David Friedrich's paintings.

This pathos is very much justified. Apart from being a ruin, *The Ages of the World* is an attempt at a grand synthesis which can only be compared with Hegel's synthesis. Let us recall the famous story of Schelling and Hegel sharing a room together in a student dormitory at Tübingen in 1790. The third occupant of the legendary room was Friedrich Hölderlin. The three of them were looking at the same reality. The king was guillotined in Paris. The world of their childhood, the old order of life, was collapsing before their eyes, and the modern world and modern humanity were born out of that collapse. A natural reaction to that great change was a desire for the synthesis of the old and the new, Christianity and the Enlightenment, religion and science. In his letter to Adolf Eschenmayer, dated April 5, 1812, Schelling writes: "Our true vocation is to transform science into religion, and religion into a fertile, living knowledge which is only possible through science and in which, I believe, lies the only hope for a future rebirth."[13] The advantage of Schelling's synthesis over that of Hegel's manifests itself in two respects. First, by revealing the rational sense of Christianity, Hegel annihilates a personal God, turning him into an abstract concept, the Spirit of history. The whole which he thus obtains is very incomplete. The God of the *Weltalter*, on the other hand, is – in Schelling's words – the living God. Schelling's God wants, needs and desires. The author of *The Ages of the World* goes further into what might be called the psychology or psychoanalysis of God, because this God, let us repeat, is still struggling to develop from the chaos of Nature as well as from his own Unconscious. This is yet another aspect which points to the advantage of Schelling's synthesis over Hegel's synthesis. Hegel is the philosopher of the End of History, while Schelling is, or he would like to be, the preacher of the eternal Beginning of Life.

We thus begin to see the first contours of the intended synthesis: Schelling wants to reconcile the Enlightenment project of human self-determination (man as a free and conscious being that rises from nature) with the pietistic vision of God who is being born

[11] M. Schröter, "Vorwort", in: *Die Weltalter. Fragmente*, p. XI.
[12] X. Tilliette, *Schelling. Une philosophie en devenir.* Paris 1970. Vol. 1, p. 581.
[13] *Aus Schellings Leben in Briefen*, zweiter Band 1803-1820, p. 304.

again and again and who emerges from the Divine. Man is the image of God. All that we know, or are able to know about God, is founded on our knowledge of ourselves. Schelling sees no difference between theology and anthropology: the analysis of human consciousness and the reconstruction of its genesis might show us the birth of God's Consciousness.

This grand synthesis does not, nevertheless, come into effect and the project of *The Ages of the World* breaks down completely. Still, one is likely to think that the breakdown was not due to the weakness of Schelling's mind or a sudden shortage of talent, but rather that it had some deeper causes. Maybe the Whole which Schelling sought does not exist at all? Maybe reality has no Center? The first philosopher to have looked at Schelling from this perspective was Heidegger: "But, if one may say so, Schelling had to get stranded in his work (...). The only essential thinker after Schelling, Nietzsche, broke down in the middle of his real work, *The Will to Power*, for the same reason. But this double, great breakdown of great thinkers is not a failure and nothing negative at all – on the contrary. It is the sign of the advent of something completely different, the heat lightning of a new beginning. Whoever really knew the reason for this breakdown and could conquer it intelligently, would have to become the founder of the new beginning of Western philosophy."[14] Heidegger's diagnosis is that Schelling (along with Nietzsche) is the last metaphysical thinker. He asks about *being* as a *whole* and seeks the *Highest Being*. Unable to find either that Whole or that Being, Schelling, just as Nietzsche, approaches the verge of a new era, and his philosophy suddenly sees an unexpected emergence of some new experience of existence. A reality in fractions. A horrific tangle of Life.

This is where Schelling's greatness lies: he did not try to replace the Christian God with some kind of a poor substitute, such as Matter, Man, History or Progress. Schelling wanted to believe in God. But he understood "faith" in a strictly philosophical sense. To simplify, faith in this case means repeating the act of God's self-positing. Only Free Spirits believe in God for only they are God's true image and likeness. In *The Ages of the World*, however, this act turns out to be unsustainable, which makes Schelling face a reality without God and also with nothing at all to replace him. A comparison with Friedrich Nietzsche's last writings seems irresistible. Nietzsche is the philosopher of the "death of God", while the Schelling of 1815 might be called the philosopher of a God who had never been born or who had been born dead.

THE LADDER TO HEAVEN

While working on *The Ages of the World*, Schelling was dreaming of a grand synthesis of the old and the new, of Christianity and the Enlightenment. That synthesis was to mean a radical reform of religion, as we read, again, in the letter of August 19, 1814: "The *Weltalter* is not only about a complete metaphysical system, but also a religious system. All the views in it were pushed to the point where they have to materialize."[15] Schelling's Christianity is of an unusual kind, and this unusualness is directly related to the form of *The Ages of the World*. The work was planned as a *philosophical mythology, or a transcendental*

[14] M. Heidegger, *Schelling's Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. J. Stambaugh. Athens, Ohio, 1985. p. 3.
[15] *Schelling und Cotta. Briefwechsel 1803-1849*, p. 87.

theogony; an intermediate form between Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and Hesiod's *Birth of the Gods*[16].

Still, in order to understand the form of *The Ages of the World*, we must go back in time and realize who the unhappy author of this philosophical ruin was before 1811. Schelling enters the field of philosophy as a very young man. Announcing in 1795 his treatise titled *Vom Ich als Prinzip der Philosophie* (*Of the I as Principle of Philosophy), he is only* twenty years old. Its main argument is that the center of reality consists in the absolute I or the absolute Freedom that we can find in ourselves and that each of us can actualize. There is something symbolic about Schelling's youth. It took place in the era which invented childhood as a state of mind – an invention that seems closely linked with the Revolution, the abandonment of tradition, and with the educational project of the Enlightenment[17]. Let us then look at our hero in the following way: in 1795 he was the first (and probably also the last) young man in philosophy, a philosopher-child, an Arthur Rimbaud of transcendental philosophy.

Young Schelling, a devotee of Fichte and Spinoza, was also an enemy of Christianity and a personal adversary of God. His state of mind is best illustrated by the blasphemous poem he wrote at the time, *Epikurisch Glaubenbekenntniß Heinz Widerporstens* (*Heinz Widerporsten's Epicurean Confession of Faith*). In 1799 Schlegel and Schleiermacher considered its publication in the *Athenaeum*, but wanted to conceal from the other editors the name of the poem's author. They were advised against the publication by Goethe, on grounds of moral turpitude. The poem begins with the following statements: "I think nothing of the invisible, / I cling only to what is evident, / What I can smell, taste, and feel". Then the tone becomes gradually more impudent: "My only religion is this, / That I love a pretty knee". This is followed by an ironic apology for the Catholic Church as a bodily religion of this world:

> For if there be a religion,
> (...)
> The one that could suit me of all
> Would be the Catholic religion
> As it was in old times.
> (...)

[16] It should also be noticed that one of the works that served Schelling as a model for his philosophical mythology was Dante's *Divine Comedy*. "It would be of minor interest to portray Dante's philosophy, physics and astronomy separately, because his peculiarity lies precisely in the way these are fused with his poetry. The Ptolemaic system which in a sense constitutes the basis of his poetic structure has a mythological color in itself." In *The Divine Comedy* – we read further on – we deal with a miraculous „interpenetration of science and poetry" (*Über Dante in philosophischer Beziehung*, V, 156 and 157; for rules which I follow when referring to Schelling's works see the end of the essay). As Wolfram Hogrebe has proved lately, the past-present-future structure of *The Ages of the World* was to correspond to the structure of *The Divine Comedy* (see: *Prädikation und Genesis. Metaphysik als Fundamentalheuristik im Ausgang von Schellings* "Die Weltalter". Frankfurt/ M, p. 31). I will return to Schelling's affinity to Dante later in this essay.

[17] Historians of culture point to Rousseau as the true author of the term "childhood" understood as a state of mind, not only a state of body. For further reference, see a collection of essays edited by Maria Janion: *Dzieci* (*Children*). Vol. 2, Gdańsk 1988, pp. 193-254. See also: P. Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood*, trans. R. Baldick. New York 1970.

They wouldn't go off on wild goose chases,
Nor gawk at heaven.
They had a living ape of God,
Thought the earth the center of the universe
And Rome the center of the earth.

Later on Schelling grows blasphemous:

And besides in the lofty house of heaven
They lived high on the hog,
They had a wedding feast every day
Between the Virgin and the Old Man.[18]

In 1809, however, Schelling returned to Christianity. The fact would not be surprising, except that Schelling turned to the most extravagant version of Christianity, namely – the theosophy of Jakob Böhme. Böhme was for Schelling who the Apostle Paul was for St. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas – the representative of Jesus Christ, the revelator of the truth about God's Life. Böhme is an *Erzähler*, a storyteller who relates the Beginning, a master Sorcerer, or a mythmaker, while Schelling, as we see him in the "Introduction" to *The Ages of the World*, is a researcher, a *Forscher*, who translates theosophical visions into dialectical constructs. In *The Ages of the World* Schelling repeats all of Böhme's doctrinal theses and evokes all of his wildest visions.

The affinity between Schelling and Böhme was considered by German researchers to be somewhat embarrassing. Above all, they had some doubts about Schelling's independence as a thinker. Horst Fuhrmans, author of the first monograph on the *Weltalter*, argues that Schelling is "almost slavishly dependent" on Böhme. "Böhme's irrationalism – he argues – that dark world of theosophical thought, according to which God is born in an ante-tellurian process", predominates over Schelling and his "deductions which in fact are not particularly apt."[19] In Jaspers's opinion: "It is astonishing how Schelling in his concept of »freedom« is opposing all kinds of dogmatism (...), identifying »daydreaming« with dogmatism, and how he then accepts both; therefore it is justified to consider him a Gnostic."[20] This tradition of the reception of the *Weltalter*'s can be complemented by one more book that seems to be its mirror image, as it negates Schelling's affinity with Böhme and tries to free him from the accusation of being a "theosophist" – a curious case of the art of interpretation, Herald Holz's *Spekulation und Faktizität* (*Speculation and Factuality*). For over five hundred pages Holz argues, and his argument is very instructive, that Schelling is a Neo-Platonist, which is to suggest that his affinity with Böhme is only a "legend."[21]

[18] W. Jens and H. Küng, *Literature & Religion*, trans. P. Heinegg. New York 1991, pp. 169-170.
[19] H. Fuhrmans, *Schellings Philosophie der Weltalter. Schellings Philosophie in den Jahren 1806-1821. Zum Problem des Schellingschen Theismus.* Düsseldorf 1954, p. 325.
[20] K. Jaspers, *Schelling. Größe und Verhängnis*. München 1955, pp. 210-211.
[21] H. Holz, *Spekulation und Faktizität. Zum Freiheitsbegriff des mittleren und späteren Schelling.* Bonn 1970, p. 7.

All those interpretations, however, are deaf to Schelling's irony, insensitive to his passion for literature or his predilection for various pseudo-scientific practices and theories (for instance: alchemy or hypnosis). They seem not to understand Schelling's gesture when he refers to God's actions as "magic" and to the act of creation as the Great Orgasm. Schelling distances himself to some extent from the language in which he thinks and works. This distance is also the source of Schelling's extravagance, and is deeply rooted in the theory of being proposed in *The Ages of the World*.

Let us refer once more to Schelling's letter of August 19, 1814, addressed to his would-be publisher of the *Weltalter*, Johann Friedrich Cotta. The tone of that letter, or rather – the sudden *changes* in its tone, should prove highly instructive to the readers of Schelling. The beginning of the letter sounds stilted: "the truth that I have mastered, I would now like to pour into the hearts of my contemporaries; I wish to leave behind me something that would serve my people."[22] But in the next sentence Schelling goes into technical details of his project: "the project of this kind requires adopting positive religion as its base."[23] The concept of a base, *Basis*, has its precise meaning in Schelling's philosophy. The base is not a principle that determines the Spirit but rather the ground from which the Spirit *detaches* itself (like salt when separating itself form the base solution mixed with acid). A philosopher who wishes to appeal to the hearts of his nation should therefore take as his base positive religion, i.e. revealed religion, and should then take a jump together with his reader, do a somersault, which would enable them both to rise above this religion and detach themselves from its dogma. Schelling continues: "I remember how in Jena Fromman would tease me, offering me serious money if only I wrote a collection of sermons. This is precisely what I would like to write once the *Weltalter* is completed – sermons devoted to the whole Christian doctrine, sermons which I could put in the mouth of a real preacher, myself acting as the publisher, sermons in their usual form, though of a very different content."[24]

Whoever wants to read Schelling and benefit from it, must look out for precipices which open up here and there. He must be aware of the fissures between the *who* that speaks, the *what* that is spoken and the *what for*. Of the sudden leaps from pathos to irony, from tears to laughter. Schelling begins with a description of the archaic Chaos which God's Consciousness develops from. God rises from nonbeing to being. However, in order to describe this process, Schelling must revise traditional metaphysics. *The Ages of the World* is the first (before Nietzsche's *Will to Power*) attempt to radically *invert Platonism*. Traditional metaphysics taught that there is no nonbeing, and if there is, it is a mere shadow of an idea, a lack of being, something secondary and derivative. This view is also the view of common sense: truth precedes fiction, waking goes before sleep, chaos is just a violation of order. In his description of the original Nonbeing, Shelling reverses these oppositions one by one: in *The Ages of the World* fiction goes before truth, sleep before waking, and order is only emerging from chaos. Yet this Fiction, this Sleep and this Chaos, have quite

[22] *Schelling und Cotta. Briefwechsel*, *1803-1849*, pp. 87-88.
[23] Ibid., 88.
[24] Ibid.

different meanings than it is usually assumed, for they are not about *lack*, but something frighteningly *positive*.

In order to achieve this inversion, Schelling needs a very special material for thought and a very unusual language. He needs pseudo-concepts. Phantasmagoria. Ancient myths. Schelling believes in all religions at once and is ready to bow down to any religious nonsense. One can see it clearly in his *Philosophy of Mythology*. Still, it is this nonsense, the dead religions that no-one believes in any longer, just as the theories of alchemists and Böhme's visions, that are particularly helpful when it comes to describing the dark Abyss, the Dark Pit which opens up in the middle of Nature. According to Schelling, it is precisely this Abyss and this Pit that God's Consciousness rises from (as does all human consciousness).

Schelling starts as a nihilist. In the beginning there is nonsense – but it is truly metaphysical nonsense. And this is only the beginning. The aim of this process is God's Freedom. Rising from Nonbeing, God creates the world, thereby gaining self-consciousness. Schelling owes this idea to Böhme: creation is a mirror in which God sees his own Power and only thus turns out to be God. Schelling – let us refer to some basic facts – was a German idealist: thought and being are the same for him. Hence his God *becomes* who he is (i.e. becomes God) only in the course of *finding out* who he is. However, at the end of the act of creation God detaches himself from the world and becomes radically alien to it. Just as a man who looks at his reflection in a mirror: he is *beyond* what he sees and is someone completely different than the face that stands before him. In the *Philosophy of Revelation*, Schelling states: "God is attached to nothing, not even to his own Being."[25] This is the meaning of the Freedom of God who rises above the world and his own Being.

Schelling describes this situation using a rhetorical figure which will help us to capture the *analogy* between the structure of the act of creation and the form of *The Ages of the World*. This figure is irony. Schelling would like to combine the old theology of the Word with Romantic irony. Following St. John, God is the Word that was made flesh. This sentence is interpreted as follows in *The Ages of the World*: all creation is God's Word, a story, that which is uttered, *das Ausgesprochene*. God himself is the Author of this story, the one who utters or the Uttering, *das Aussprechende*[26]. This Author, however, appears only at the end of his work. Every work, Schelling argues, is the fruit of inspiration, which means that it is created in a completely unconscious state of mind[27]. Consciousness appears at the end of the work and immediately separates itself from it. In order, however, to separate himself from his own work, God must put it in ironic quotation marks. In the *Philosophy of Revelation* Schelling speaks of "the Godlike art of disguise or irony"[28] which causes God to be always someone Other than he seems. One might put it another way: we know *everything* about God, because the whole world is a Revelation of him and we are his faithful Image. At the same time, we know *nothing* about God, because a Personal God, the true Subject of this Revelation, is completely free of the world and

[25] *Philosophie der Offenbarung*, XIII, p. 305: "Gott ist an nichts, auch nicht an sein eigenes Sein gebunden".
[26] See: *Die Weltalter*, VIII, p. 272.
[27] Ibid, p. 337.
[28] *Philosophie der Offenbarung*, XIII, p. 305: *die göttliche Verstellungskunst oder Ironie*.

external to it. This "everything" and that "nothing" can only be embraced and reconciled by the divine art of Irony.

As we can see now, there is perfect coherence between *what* Schelling says and *how* it was said. *The Ages of the World* was supposed to be a spiritual exercise – a Jacob's ladder that would enable us to descend into the dark bottom of Being (which is also the dark bottom of our own selves), and then ascend, as Free Spirits do, above all Being. Let us repeat that Schelling wished to reconcile Christianity with the Enlightenment, the theosophical idea of the Birth of God with the Münchhausenian act of the Subject's self-positing as it strives to pull itself out by its own hair from the mire of Nonbeing. The medium of this synthesis is literature. It enables Schelling to capture the dynamics of Being, its primordial Nonbeing, as well as to construct concepts so weightless, so frivolous that they disintegrate at once, allowing the author – and the reader – to detach from the work and move upwards. The notion of the Orgasm of Powers, *Orgasmus der Kräfte*, is precisely such an ironic concept[29]. Thus the act of writing – and the act of reading – turn out to be a repetition of the act of creation. Man is the image of God (one must keep repeating this sentence like a prayer). The act of creation must therefore be repeated by all Free Spirits.

In the beginning, however, is nonsense: Nonbeing's heavy dream which at times seems more real than the visible world. We are now about to descend into that Darkness with the assistance of two guides – Hume and Kant. These two philosophers of the late Enlightenment unmask the emptiness of metaphysical speculations. Metaphysics turned out to be mythology. Schelling will now attempt to transform it into a philosophical mythology.

THE MYTHOLOGY OF REASON: BEING

We need to regard Schelling as a successor of the Radical Enlightenment; a thinker who wants to return to Christianity and thus transgress the Enlightenment, carrying to an extreme one of its most nihilistic ideas: the conviction that fundamental concepts are empty. Our mind has at its disposal two fundamental concepts. The concept of "being", *das Seyn*, and the concept of "what-is", *das Seyende*. Schelling maintains that the meaning of these concepts issues from the structure of a subject-predicate sentence in which all our cognition of reality is articulated:

> For in all statements – as we read on one of the pages rewritten by Schröter – a double Being is distinguished: the objective one, which in the sentence 'A is what it is' is expressed by the words *what is*, and that which is more interior, which withdraws from the first one into the deep and finds its expression in the word *is*, and which constitutes the Being of the pure Subject or – according to a different formula – pure Essence (*esse more essentiae*).[30]

[29] See: *Die Weltalter*, VIII, p. 320.

[30] *Die Weltalter. Fragmente*, p. 213: „Denn in jeder Aussage wird ein doppeltes Seyn unterscheidet, das gegenständliche, welches im Satz ‚A ist seyend' (...) durch das Wort *seyend* ausgedrückt wird, u. das mehr Innerliche gegen jenes in die Tiefe zurücktretende, das in dem *ist* liegt u. welches eben das Seyn des bloßen Subjects oder wie es auch sonst genannt wurde des lauteren Wesens (*esse more essentiae*) ist".

Schelling's *das Seyn* is usually rendered into English as „Being". In the light of the above quotation it seems more appropriate than any other equivalent, because it is closer to the way we use this term today. A being is for us that what is. For instance, this chair is a being. It stands here and is the logical subject of any opinion that can be formulated about this object. This being (this chair) can be described in other terms as well (it is wooden and has one leg too short). These terms constitute what Schelling would like to call *das Seyende*. Unfortunately, English lacks an apt word for it. In the absence of better equivalents we can subsititute it with the noun-phrase 'what-is'. But what is a chair except that what it is? Reality seems to consist of entities (that we formulate opinions about), which exist (and thus are facts).

Yet in so thinking, we translate Schelling into a language and ideas that are completely alien to him. The conviction that reality is composed of things and facts is a positivist one. And there is no other school of thought that Schelling would distance himself from more than the positivists. The positivists were interested in positive facts; in the being that stands before our eyes and is tangible. But the problem that interested Schelling was Abyss and Freedom, Non-being and Supra-existence. "It cannot be the aim of philosophy – says Schelling – to stop with the once emerged being; it has to go *beyond* this being – real, accomplished and random – in order to comprehend it."[31] A philosopher should therefore go beyond the present and actual being, *über das vorhandene und schon bestehende Seyn hinweg*[32], because "our labors aim at discovering that which is *before* and *beyond* being", *was vor und über dem Seyn ist*[33].

In the above statements, which come from the *Philosophy of Revelation*, i.e. from the late forties, Schelling tends to use the word *das Seyn* in its positivist interpretation. In order to go beyond being thus understood, Schelling must provide his own definition of the term. We find this definition in *The Ages of the World*: *Seyn ist Seinheit, Eigenheit; ist Absonderung*[34]. Schelling exploits the fact that the noun *das Seyn* and the verb *sein* have the same form in German as the possessive pronoun *sein* "its" ("own"). The ending *-heit* corresponds to the English endings: "-ness" or "-ity". Consequently, Frederick de Wolfe Bolman translates this sentence as: "To be is se-ity, own-ness, seclusion."[35] In Jason M. Wirth's translation we read: "Being is ipseity, particularity. It is dislocation."[36]

For Schelling, to be means to be self-contained, to sustain an existential balance, irrespective of external circumstances. Schelling's definition of being applies both to a chair (standing over there on its own legs) and to objects that are not given to us directly, for instance – the Whole Universe (which can neither be touched, nor taken in by the eye). This definition also enables us to talk about Being as such which embraces all beings and is the true Center of reality. This is how the authors of the past understood God. Thomas

[31] *Philosophie der Offenbarung*, XIII, p. 203: "Es kann überhaupt nicht die Absicht der Philosophie seyn, innerhalb des einmal gewordenen Seyns stehen zu bleiben, sie muß über dieses Seyn, das wirkliche, das gewordene, das zufällige hinausgehen können, um es zu begreifen".
[32] Ibid., p. 204-205.
[33] Ibid., p. 240.
[34] *Die Weltalter*, VIII, p. 210.
[35] *The Ages of the World,* trans. F. de Wolfe Bolman, Jr. New York 1942, p. 96.
[36] *The Ages of the World*, trans. J. M. Wirth. Albany 2000, pp. 5-6.

Aquinas says that God is *Esse*, pure Being. This Being – pure Act and core of reality – reveals itself in entities or beings, in what-is or that which is, *entia*, *Seyende*, something created and finite. Let us refer to the positivists again: their definition of reality is: "that what-is is being". A thing – for example: this chair – is a fact. Schelling, however, just as the old metaphysicians, would like to go deeper and descend into the dark fundament of the visible world. His definition is therefore exactly the reverse: "Being is that what-is", something is a chair while something else is the Universe as such, considered as a whole, in which the chair stands and to which it belongs:

> The different entities or, as we usually say, the different things are distinguished from each other not through their Being as such, in which they all participate, but only through the *form* of that Being (...) Therefore, *the* Entity is always *the same* in all things.[37]

Being thus understood cannot be a *fact* (standing before our eyes). It is the *Subject* of the whole of our experience (it lies at its roots). In order to reach it, Reason must turn to itself and look deep inside itself. Now we are following Kant: we do not watch God directly, face to face, yet our mind possesses the idea of a Supreme Being as a necessary Basis of all phenomena. This is where a fearful abyss opens up suddenly before Kant's eyes. It is one of the most extraordinary passages in *The Critique of Pure Reason*:

> Unconditioned necessity, which, as the ultimate support and stay of all existing things, is an indispensable requirement of the mind, is an abyss on the verge of which human reason trembles in dismay. Even the idea of eternity, terrible and sublime as it is, as depicted by Haller, does not produce upon the mental vision such a feeling of awe and terror (...). Here all sinks away from under us.[38]

Confronted with that abyss, Kant steps back and transforms it into an idea of Reason, i.e. an idea entirely subjected to Reason[39]. It is us who have, command and use the concept of the Supreme Being. The abyss therefore opens solely in our minds. Schelling, for whom all concepts possess or reflect some reality (or non-reality), inverts Kant's critical idealism and turns the whole of his philosophy upside down. We find ourselves in a situation exactly opposite to the one Kant would wish for. Man is born out of the depths. The Abyss carries and gives birth to man. We thus return (rather unexpectedly) to the old doctrine of the German mystics, Eckhart and Tauler: "Deep calleth on deep

[37] *Philosophie der Offenbarung*, XIII, p. 223: „Die verschiedenen Seyenden oder, wie wir gewöhnlich sagen, die verschiedenen Dinge unterscheiden sich voneinander nicht durch das Seyn selbst, an dem sie alle Teil haben, sondern nur durch die *Art* dieses Seyns (...) Hieraus kann man dann durch einen umgekehrten Schluß herausbringen, daß *das* Seyende überall und in allen Dingen *das selbe* und durchaus sich gleiche ist".

[38] I. Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. J.M.D. Meiklejohn. A Penn State Electronic Classics Series Publication 2010, p. 419.

[39] The passage continues: "the greatest, as the smallest, perfection, hovers without stay or footing *in presence* of the speculative reason, which *finds it as easy* to part with the one as with the other." (Ibid., pp. 419-420.) [emphasis mine].

(Ps. xli: 8), exclaims the Psalmist. The created abyss, with its boundless knowledge of its own nothingness, calleth into itself the uncreated abyss that is the infinite God, and thus is it made one with Him."[40] Or, as Tauler claims earlier in his sermons: "This abyss is God's chosen dwelling place, far more so than in all creatures, yea even more than in heaven. Whosoever comes into these depths finds God most truly, and he finds himself most simply and in God."[41]

Schelling learned from Kant that the fundamental concepts of the mind are empty. In the *Philosophy of Revelation* we read of "This fruitless concept of Parmenides, to which every beginner is drawn (...) the barren and deserted Being."[42] However, it was in this abstract concept that Schelling saw (very much against Kant) the first rung of the ladder that would enable us to descend into the Primeval age and see for ourselves that pre-world when there was no God yet. The pre-world that precedes the act of creation. One can therefore repeat after Kant: the fundamental concepts of our mind (substance, the whole, infinity) do not reflect the entities which stand right in front of us and are empirically perceptible. There are basically *two* concepts of being at our disposal: the positivist one and the metaphysical one. According to the latter, which originates with Parmenides, Being is the Subject and the Whole of all being. This concept, speaking in Kant's terms, conditions the experience of any empirical existence since we always see the latter immersed in the Wholeness of Being. According to Schelling's project, deducing that Whole and revealing the way in which It organizes itself are meant to allow us to recreate God's act of creation.

The idea of going before and above being, *vor und über dem Seyn*, has therefore two meanings for Schelling. First of all, we should transgress the being which we can see, descend to its Subject and then embrace it as a Whole. Yet by revealing the original emptiness of Being Schelling goes far beyond traditional metaphysics and its concept of reality. Let me repeat that *The Ages of the World* might be considered the first attempt at *inverting Platonism*. This inversion, let me also add at this point, means *transgressing metaphysics*, although its sense as well as its form are different than in the writings of Heidegger. Schelling's aim is to introduce Non-being and Freedom which are before and above, and thus *beyond* Being.

Let us return to Kant. Kant showed that the concept of necessary Being (or the philosophical concept of God) is a fiction created by Reason in order to organize *a priori* its own experience. In doing so, Kant carried to an extreme the Enlightenment project of the demystification of the world: he turned Reason against Reason itself and showed that it is the greatest sorcerer of all. Reason creates fables. But perhaps we should intensify this inclination and thus transgress it, instead of opposing it. Man is Nature's creation. Acting in harmony with the deepest inclination of our mind, i.e. the inclination towards creating fables, we are likely to approach the primordial state of reality. Everything that philosophy struggles with: deserts of fundamental concepts, barren landscapes of abstraction, the horror of pure speculation – all this is considered by Schelling as a sign of the primordial state of Nature. This emptiness, the emptiness of pure reason, reflects the

[40] J. Tauler, *The Sermons and Conferences of John Tauler*, trans. W. Elliott. Washington D.C. 1910, p. 503.
[41] Ibid., p. 50.
[42] *Philosophie der Offenbarung*, XIII, p. 224: „Dieser unfruchtbare Begriff des Parmenides, zu dem jeder Anfangende Neigung empfindet (...) das öde und wüste Seyn".

inner emptiness of Being. God, let us repeat once more, created man in his own image and likeness. Therefore the disarray of the human mind reveals a horrifying truth about God. It shows us the Chaos of Nature which God is only emerging from. Reason creates myths because Nature itself is initially a fable.

It has become clear by now what *philosophical mythology* means and in what sense it differs from the ancient mythologies. It is not the case that reason ought to be rejected and replaced with its opposite – a senseless fable. Schelling's aim is to create a surrational discourse – one that would unite the demystification of the world with its re-enchantment. This aim is therefore a new kind of fable; fiction that is truth, and truth that is fiction. As we read in the *Weltalter*: "What holds back the anticipated golden age when truth again becomes fable and fable truth?"[43]. The story, however, will turn out to be an evil one. A grim German tale of Nothingness.

SCHELLING'S ONTOLOGY: FORMS OF BEING

We already know where it all begins. Now we need to look deep inside ourselves and start contemplating the fundamental concepts. This experience, Schelling claims, is truly terrifying. For he who sees (with his mind's eye) the concept of Being, sees the abyss that opens up inside him and experiences a terrible feeling of dizziness. Parmenides' unity, the concept of Being as such, "which is one and the same in everything (...) causes dizziness and is of no help whatsoever."[44] It is, as we read elsewhere, "a rotating movement, revolving around One Point."[45]

As we already know, this rotating movement, this whirl, this buzz is a relict of the Primeval age, a sign of the Preexistence that we reach by descending into the depths of consciousness. In the beginning, claims Schelling, Being is devoid of any balance whatsoever. It contracts and expands by turns; it explodes and then sinks back into itself. There are two primordial forces or two archaic Powers in it which are at war with each other: the attracting power and the expanding power, *anziehende und ausbreitende Kraft.* Nevertheless, this instability of being has a most logical structure. As I already mentioned, Being is a subject. That which is or that what-is is a predicate. The expanding power – which Schelling also refers to as the affirming power, *bejahende Kraft* – finds its expression in the phrase: "*that is what is*" or "*that which is*". The predicate points to an ontological expansion here. The attracting power, or negating power, *verneinende Kraft*, is expressed in the phrase: "*that which is not*" or "*that is a non-being*", describing a real lack, an existing absence. These, of course, are the two most basic sentences we can possibly utter.

Let us now face another of Schelling's concepts, the category of "what-is" or "that which is", *das Seyende.* "What is" is a form of being. However, "is" should by no means be understood in an existential sense. For example, my sentence: "the chair is a domestic tool" does not necessarily communicate that this chair actually exists. Schelling argues that "What is" initially means a kind of *possibility* or *potency* of being. At this point we are still following the old metaphysicians: pure ideas, which are the subject of our definitions,

[43] *Die Weltalter*, VIII, p. 200. English translation quoted after *The Ages of the World*, trans. F. de Wolfe Bolman Jr., p. 84.
[44] *Philosophie der Offenbarung*, XIII, pp. 223-224.
[45] Ibid., p. 97.

are God's thoughts before the act of creation. Schelling, a philosopher-polyglot, refers to the Arabic language in which the copula "is" in the phrase "it is a being" means "can":

> In the Arabic language the Is (the copula) is expressed by a word which in German means "can" (...) in opposition to all languages known to me, in which the verb *sum* is followed by a nominative, the Arabs construct it with the accusative. The Arab does not say: *homo est sapiens*. (...) Against other grammar systems, the Arab says: *homo est sapientem*. The accusative suggests that for the Arab Is means as much as *potest* since the verb *possum* by nature – and hence in most languages – governs the accusative.[46]

The structure of a sentence in Latin or German, in which the predicate is in the nominative, suggests that the subject and the predicate refer to the same substance (for example in the sentence "Man is wise"). But Schelling states that there is no substance in the beginning and reality is completely unstable. Reality begins with the gurgle of Being: the negating potency suppresses the affirming potency, the contracting power crushes the expanding power, or the other way round: the affirming potency represses and pushes into the deep the negating potency which, in turn, becomes being *to it*. Thus, being is originally *transitive*: something is being *to* something else. Being is the subject. The subject of expansion is the (repressed) contracting power. The subject of contraction is the (crushed) affirming power.

Thus, Being is initially an *empty place* into which one of the powers is forced, while the other one *exists*. Schelling interprets the latter term, *die Existenz*, according to its Latin etymology: the verb *existere* consists of the prefix *ex* (out) and the root which is derived from the verb *sisto* (to be situated, located). "To exist" then literally means "to be located or to stand outside", or "to out-stand." Read in the light of philosophical grammar, this term functions as a predicate in phrases such as: "being is what-is" and "being is which is not". Therefore, it has nothing to do with the scholastic *existentia* which denoted a created entity, *ens creatum* – the subject of the existential judgment "something exists."[47]

There are two fundamental statements, or two Principles: "that which is" and "that which is not". But Schelling claims that there is a third statement which is equally fundamental: "that which is neither something nor nothing". This statement expresses the third form of the original Chaos: the unity of opposites, a moment of stillness, a moment of stability when the two basic powers suddenly cease to struggle with each other and immerse in mutual indifference.

These three Principles constitute the original *wholeness* of what-is which, however, still lacks something in order to become Being since it is devoid of balance. Schelling

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[46] Ibid.

[47] The most famous existentialist of the 20th century states that "Schelling uses the word existence in a sense which is closer to the literal etymological sense than the usual and long prevalent meaning of »existing« as objective presence. Ex-sistence, *what emerges from itself* and in *emerging reveals itself*". Existence thus understood is the opposite of ground, *Grund*, and not the opposite of essence, *Wesen*. Hence the distinction between *Seyn – Seyende*, *Grund – Existenz* "by no means coincides with a current one in philosophy: that of *essentia* and *existentia*, (...) what-ness and that-ness", M. Heidegger, *Schelling's Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom*, p. 107.

defines this incomplete whole with the term *Daseyn*. The words *Seyn* and *Daseyn* are near synonyms. They differ in the prefix *Da-*, meaning "over here", "here." Literally speaking, *Daseyn* means a limited *Seyn*; present or local existence. The definition of the difference between *Seyn* and *Daseyn* can be found in Schelling's first work, a treatise titled *Of the I as Principle of Philosophy*:

> Almost all of them use the words *being* (*Seyn*), *presence* (*Daseyn*), *existence* and *reality* (*Wirklichkeit*) as if they were synonyms. Obviously the word *being* expresses pure, absolute being-posited (*Gesetztsein*), whereas presence even etymologically signifies a conditioned and limited being-posited.

And a bit further in the text we read:

> The word *being* (*Sein*) expresses an absolute being-posited, whereas *existence* (*Dasein*) always signifies a conditioned, and *reality* (*Wirklichkeit*) a specifically conditioned being-posited, determined by *specific* conditions. The individual phenomenon in the total context of the world has reality; the world of phenomena as such has existence; but the absolutely posited, the I, simply is. I am! is all that the I can say about itself.[48]

Consequently, the absolute I turns out to be the scholastic *Esse*: "The I is *only through itself*. Its original form (*Urform*) is that of pure being."[49] To describe this being, Schelling uses the metaphor of the Sun (a metaphor we already know from Plato's *Republic*) which emanates or emits from itself a being of a lower order. The absolute I gathers "all rays of existence in the center of its identity."[50]

This brings us back to the figure of inverted Platonism in Schelling's philosophy. Early in his career, in 1795, Schelling maintained that the light of the absolute I constituted Being which precedes the darkness of this world. What he claims in 1815, however, is precisely the reverse. First comes Darkness; from it there emerges the Sun of the pure Subject, the Eternal Dawn, in which God can see himself. Schelling describes this Darkness using the terms *Daseyn* and *Wirklichkeit* which in *Of the I as Principle of Philosophy* referred to secondary and derivative forms of being. *The latter* term, *Wirklichkeit*, meaning "reality", might prove confusing to the readers of Schelling. Its English equivalent suggests an image of a set of things. The word "reality" originates from Latin *res*, whereas the noun *Wirklichkeit* comes from the verb *wirken* "to work" or "to act". Reality, in German, refers us to working or acting. The German language seems to suggest an activist ontology here: only that which works, or acts, and shows some results is considered real. Being is not *a thing*, but an *act*. Whenever Schelling speaks of the reality of archaic forces, he points to their dark activity, an invisible actuality, devoid of any substantiality, which therefore

[48] *Vom Ich als Prinzip der Philosophie*, I, pp. 209-210. English translation quoted after: "Of the I as Principle of Philosophy, or On the Unconditional in Human Knowledge", in: *The Unconditional in Human Knowledge: Four Early Essays (1794-1796)*, trans. F. Marti. Lewisburg 1980, p. 105.
[49] Ibid., p. 221; p. 113.
[50] Ibid., p. 178; p. 83.

– if reality is understood to consist of real things – must seem utterly unreal. It is precisely this un-reality that every consciousness struggles to rise from.

Yet we can articulate Schelling's inversion of Platonism – sleep, let us repeat, goes before waking, dreaming before reality – in terms of the ontology outlined by Schelling in *Of the I as Principle of Philosophy*. We should keep in mind this early piece when reading *The Ages of the World* as it allows us to see the whole drama of the *Weltalter*. The basic ontological categories (whose first definitions I provided earlier in this essay) do not have stable, invariable meanings here, but they participate in *a game* in which and *via* which they acquire sense. Schelling therefore wants to articulate new thoughts in traditional language, turning it inside out, making a *derivative* of what used to be an *axiom*. Thus inverted, however, this language suddenly begins to change its meaning. And it is precisely the dynamics of this change, the spontaneous mutation of primary meanings, which Schelling could no longer control at some point, and which led to the collapse of the *Weltalter* project.

But before we answer the question why Schelling did not finish *The Ages of the World*, it is necessary to explain the purpose of this inversion as well as the expected ultimate outcome of the work. Schelling's aim was to transform the metaphysical concept of Being into what he calls *das Selbst*, the Self. Let us begin with the way we commonly perceive reality and so – with Johna Locke, the founder of philosophical psychology, who described this mode of perception. When I say "I am my self," I include in this formula my own being. A person, says Locke, is a being that "can consider it self as it self, the same thinking thing in different times and places."[51] When I identify myself with myself this way, when I "own myself" – Schelling would add – I exceed and transcend myself. The word „self" denotes not only my own spiritual interior and my own whole but something more: my personal freedom which allows me to direct myself. Keeping this experience in mind, as well as the analogy between human consciousness and the consciousness of God, we can already comprehend what it means that the creator of the universe has a "personal being."

Schelling's thesis would then be as follows: God is the Self. God determines the unity of the created world. The world is one because it was created by one God who is the Center, i.e. both the Middle of the *Universum* and its Interior. At the same time, God – who emerges from Nature amid exploding stars and the clangor of planets (Schelling often evokes such cosmic images) – encloses and contains the world as a Whole. Creation, as we know from the Catechism, is a faithful reflection of God's thoughts and is completely subjected to his will:

> The perfect Spirit is inevitably an all-unifyinig Spirit. It is *all*-unfyinig since it is not a pure One (*unum quid)*, nor any abstract Unity either, but a true living Allness. It is all-*unfyinig* because as a Spirit it is only One; and since it is not some random, but an inevitable unity of that Allness, *therefore* it is all-unifying.[52]

[51] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. by P.-H. Niddtich. Oxford 1975, p. 335.
[52] *Philosophie der Offenbarung*, XIII, p. 260.

God is the Interior and the Wholeness of being, yet at the same time he must be totally independent of his creation – and external to it. Only as such can he be called the Absolute in the fullest sense of the word. The word "absolute," to recall its Latin etymology, comes from the verb *absolvere* ("to untie from", "to free from"):

> He is by himself, by his very Nature a Solitary (*solitarius*) (...) who is detached, unconstrained and free of everything that can be thought *beyond* him; also in this sense he is an *absolute* Spirit; for being the absolute means being totally free of any attachment or relationship.[53]

If what we have called Self is to emerge from existence, all the above described forms of being must organize themselves into a harmonious order and create what Schelling refers to as the universal Organism. The negating principle, i.e. non-being, must become the Interior of the Self which – as the attracting power – gathers the whole of what-is and makes it a unity. This nonbeing should then subordinate itself to the affirming principle and become *being to it*. The affirming principle, the expanding power, establishes what-is in its Wholeness. Hence, if creation is to succeed, this power should itself exist. And finally, above that Interior and this Whole, there should rise the third Principle – Indifference through which God is wholly external to the world and absolutely free of it. God, therefore, is Non-being, Existence, Freedom. This is how his spiritual Organism is constructed, how the ontological anatomy of the Self functions. This is the Being which is derivative in respect to its various forms, and which contains both the unreality of Non-being and the supra-reality of Freedom.

CHAOS, ABYSS, ANTI-BEING

This question must be frankly asked: why would anyone want to read *The Ages of the World?* It is an incomplete work. A stillborn book. A sad fraction. There is no reason to deal with philosophy which is overtly untrue, and the philosophy of *The Ages of the World* is false by virtue of the very rules of truth which this philosophy itself establishes and directly formulates. For Schelling, truth is the whole of Being. We are dealing here with an ontological definition of truth (truth is what-is) combined with the coherence theory of truth (truth is a whole devoid of contradictions and uniting all fragmentary statements). Schelling's stance is very firm: there is not a single statement in science that would be absolutely true. What is true is only the wholeness of Being in its eternal Movement. Each fragmentary statement is therefore false insofar as it is fragmentary and is not part of the universal Organism. Just as any other form of being is something unreal as long as it is merely local existence, *das Daseyn*, and as such is devoid of "divine empowering."[54]

However, one can take the opposite approach. Schelling's greatness lies in his failure. *Die Weltalter*, read in accordance with what it really represents, is a work about Nothingness, about various forms of Nonbeing and hierarchies of Nonexistence. This is

[53] Ibid., pp. 260-261.

[54] *Die Weltalter*, VIII, p. 289. English translation quoted after *The Ages of the World*, trans. F. de Wolfe Bolman Jr., p. 177.

what seems to constitute the theoretical value of the book. One historical fact in particular is worth mentioning here: Schelling was viewed as a nihilist by his contemporaries. In 1803, a little book by Freidrich Köppen was published in Hamburg, titled *Schellings Lehre oder das Ganze der Philosophie des absoluten Nichts* (*Schelling's Doctrine or the Whole of Philosophy of the Absolute Nothing*), which denounced the young Schelling as a nihilist. Schelling was even claimed to be the author of *Nachtwachen* (*The Night Watches*), the famous Romantic nihilist manifesto of 1804 whose real author was hiding under the pseudonym Bonaventura. Schelling used the same pseudonym.[55] And even if Schelling was not Bonaventura, one can see a grain of truth in the suspicion. *The Night Watches* features a character that re-emerges in *The Ages of the World*: God who went mad, an insane Demiurge.

In the previous section of this essay I discussed Schelling's theory of being. Let me now propose an overview of his concepts of nothingness. The two orders, that of being and that of nonbeing, overlap or even mingle in an unfortunate way, as I will prove later. The *Weltalter*, let me stress it once more, is a description of Nonbeing that precedes the act of creation.

The first of these Nothingnesses is Nature, constituted by the three Principles mentioned before. Nature is being devoid of stability, an archaic Chaos. Schelling is clearly a disciple of ancient poets on this issue. To quote Hesiod: "Verily at the first Chaos came to be, but next wide-bosomed Earth"[56], or a corresponding fragment from Ovid: "Before the seas, and this terrestrial ball, / And Heav'n's high canopy, that covers all, / One was the face of Nature; if a face: / Rather a rude and indigested mass: / A lifeless lump, unfashion'd, and unfram'd, / Of jarring seeds; and justly Chaos nam'd."[57]

Schelling, a Romantic traveler to the Interior of Being, links this Chaos chiefly with emotions. It is an emotional chaos, emotional welter. First, claims Schelling, there is a clash of two forms of desire: *Sucht* and *Begierde*. The former is a morbid mania, a narcotic passion, a desire that goes beyond its usual limits. *Der Süchtige* means a drug addict, *zigarettensüchtig* means a heavy smoker, and *fernsehsüchtig* in the modern German language refers to a person addicted to television. Therefore, the hunger in question is not a simple *lack* of something, located in the *interior* of an organism, but a voracious passion, which draws in and devours the object of the mania. Narcotic hunger – as the term should be translated – is not some inner emptiness, self-contained and static, but a kind of surplus, a centripetal power that encloses and draws in its surroundings. *Die Begierde*, desire, is then the symmetrical opposite of hunger thus understood; the centrifugal power. It is a kind of desire that we are bursting with. The two basic powers of nature manifest themselves in both these forms of desire: the attracting power and the expanding power.

[55] Bonaventura was identified as Schelling in the lexicon of pseudonyms published in 1830 by Friedrich Rassmann. A copy of *The Night Watches*, signed by the author (Schelling), was allegedly to be found in Friedrich Schlegel's library. More on this issue, see: Michel Herman's introduction to *Nachtwachen*. Berlin 1905, p. XXXV-XXVI. Today, the authorship is attributed to August Klingemann; the researches refer to the manuscript discovered in Amsterdam in 1987.

[56] *The Theogony of Hesiod*, trans. Hugh G. Evelyn-White 1914. (Internet Sacred Text Archive.)

[57] Ovid. *Metamorphoses*, trans. Sir Samuel Garth, John Dryden, et al. 1727. (Internet Classics Archive.)

Schelling's reasoning is as follows: Life is initially Madness. Insanity is not a disease in the ordinary sense of the word (i.e. not like flu that comes from outside and is something accidental). Insanity constitutes the dark Interior of Nature which (at best) can be hidden and subordinated to some higher Order. Madness is something necessary and its character is metaphysical. It points to the fundamental instability of local existence, *das Daseyn*, which first disintegrates into three principles, then curves and loops to become what Schelling calls the Wheel of Life, a nonsensical succession of the consecutive forms of reality, which contradict and annihilate each other. This instability, however (and here a fundamental reversal should come about) points dialectically to *something more* which is over and above Nature.

Another form of Nothingness rises above that emotional welter*: Divinity. It constitutes the mysterious background of all that is taking place in Nature (*Schelling follows *here* Jakob *Böhme's vision). Referring to it, Schelling repeats the ancient formulae of apophatic theology: Divinity is* Being devoid of being, Supra-being, Supra-reality, Supra-existence. This Divinity – self-contained, devoid of being and existence – is the object of those archaic hungers, the first object of all desire. What yearns for something, claims Schelling, in fact wants to stop yearning. Every not-yet-being or half-being wants to become a nothingness of a higher order.

Many readers of *The Ages of the World* were misled by Schelling's description of Nothingness and labeled him a Neo-Platonist. If this was the case, if Schelling was indeed a Neo-Platonist, then my theory that *The Ages of the World* represents the first attempt at inverting Platonism and transgressing metaphysics would obviously be false. But let us carefully examine to what extent Schelling makes use of that ancient model. First of all, he selects from it (and is infallible in his choice) that particular element which does not fit into what is commonly called the "metaphysics of presence", i.e. the apophatic theology of Dionysius the Areopagite. God is Nothingness. Second, Schelling modifies this model in a way that still reinforces and intensifies the nullity of this Nothing. According to Schelling, created reality is not an *emanation* of God's Nothingness which (dialectically) turns out to be the Fullness of Being, a Surplus overflowing into the lower orders of being. In *The Ages of the World*, Nothingness, which is an absolute Identity (and therefore we cannot claim that it has being), is also a *model* for Nature rising from Chaos by her own efforts and achieving balance – an unapproachable model of stability. Nothingness thus interpreted is completely *beyond* all reality.

Bearing in mind this highest of all Nothingnesses, we can now change the order in which we have so far been reading the *Weltalter*. Until now, when talking about the original Chaos of Life, we were moving downward. Still, Schelling claims that when we reach the very bottom of Being and inquire about what is first and most primordial in this Chaos, the vertical order will reveal itself to us. On the one hand, there is the Abyss of the old mystics, God who is Nothingness and who is the primary object of all desire. On the other hand (we are dealing with a dialectical necessity here), there is the attracting power which constitutes the first principle in Nature and which is a reverse Absolute. God's Nothingness, again, is the absolute Identity, which is self-contained and devoid of all being, whereas the attracting power is its demonic caricature. It is a terrifying Power which opens up in the midst of Life, draws everything in, swallows everything, and then tightens – or wants to tighten – to a point where it becomes pure Identity.

The Ages of the World, as we have already said, is a fable. Now we can follow its order and propose the following: in the beginning there are two Abysses, deeper even and vaster than the chaos of Nature. The idea originates in Böhme's theosophy. After Jakob Böhme, Schelling calls them *Abgrund* and *Ungrund*. *Abgrund* is the attracting power, Nonbeing, the first principle of Nature. There is a word in the Polish language that seems to perfectly express Schelling's thought. That word is *czeluść*, meaning "a cavity," "a pit," "the depths." According to Andrzej Bańkowski's etymological dictionary, it used to mean "jaw" in Old Polish. The source of the word is the Slavic *čeljustъ* "the moving lower jaw". It appears in this meaning in *The St. Florian Psalter* 57:7 (as in the phrase: "the lions' jaws") and begins to be used as "abyss" only in the 19th century (as in Adam Mickiewicz's ballad *Świteź* where it refers to "the unfathomable depths of a lake")[58]. But going back to *The Ages of the World*: the first principle, *Abgrund*, is precisely the Polish *czeluść*, God-Nature's lower jaw that grabs at everything and wants to swallow everything. Consequently, *Sucht*, the narcotic hunger, is an archaic desire that makes the jaw move.

The second of the Abysses, *Ungrund*, is the Nothingness of the old mystics. It is, again, the pure Identity that is self-contained and self-supporting. The word *Ungrund* consists of the prefix *un-*, meaning "un-" / "non-" or "-less", and the root *Grund*, meaning "ground" or "cause." What one should visualize then, is an abyss devoid of any basis, rising above Nature, the uplifted depths – if such a speculative image indeed can be visualized.

If we compare the descriptions of the two Abysses, it will become evident why *The Ages of the World* remained a fraction. The concept of God's Nothingness seems somewhat bland and unconvincing, despite Schelling's intention. Schelling was not a mystic but an intellectual. By reading voraciously he compensated for his lack of first-hand experience. Schelling learned about God's Nothingness from books and transformed the knowledge into a dialectical construct. The concept of Nonbeing appears rather ominous against such a background. In his description of it, Schelling reaches new heights of both writing and metaphysical speculation, so that the reader has no doubt that the author actually sees what he is writing about and that he is writing about something that affects him directly. In this work the reader encounters the most interesting (from a philosophical point of view) concept of factual nonbeing; psychologically penetrating passages on narcotic hunger; and finally, some wonderful, poetic images of the depths of this world.

Still, in order to fully comprehend what happened between 1811 and 1820, we must consider the conceptual dynamics which drove Schelling to the edge of madness, and which makes – in his opinion – traditional metaphysics go beyond its form, with its concepts coming apart and developing into some monstrous new thing. Schelling is trying to invert Platonism. His effort, however, unlike that of Nietzsche, is pious. Schelling would like to understand the essence of God's Freedom. We know from the Catechism that God is free. Freedom (and this we know from our own experience) is a choice between Yes and No. If God were mere Being (i.e. an eternal plenum of everything that is positive), then he would have no freedom. The logic of this reasoning seems irresistible. God also contains a negative element. If the world is God's Revelation, this element constitutes the dark side of life, the horror of being itself, which we usually want to forget or turn away

[58] See: A. Bańkowski, *Etymologiczny słownik języka polskiego.* Vol. 1, p. 223.

from. Rising from Chaos and positing himself in his Self, God is meant to overcome this horror – or at least this is what Schelling expects from God.

In order to describe this horror, Schelling introduces the concept of factual nonbeing. Let us have a closer look at it. For Schelling, Non-being is the attracting power, the first principle of Nature, which finds expression in the phrase "something is a nonbeing." The horror of life consists in the fact that this force, which is a destructive one, at the same time posits every being in its ownness. Being exists due to the affirming power which strives towards expansion and consequently – towards dispersion and disintegration. Non-being, the centripetal power, sustains and gathers every self within itself. At the same time, however, this power does not allow it to settle down within itself. The drama experienced by every sentient being lies in the fact that what makes it itself, is also some foreign power, an inner abyss. This is precisely what might be called *Unglück des Seyns, mahleur de l'Existence*, "the unhappiness of Being."[59] (Were we to put the thought in vegetarian terms, it could be said that life is a slaughterhouse where eating and digesting are the condition of individual survival.)

We can finally comprehend the dynamics of inverted Platonism in the pages of the *Weltalter*. Schelling expresses his thoughts in a traditional language and – rather modestly – lays no claim towards originality (which might confuse the superficial reader). However, traditional metaphysics regarded being as a primary thing, and nonbeing – its absence, something which is secondary. Being was something positive and active. Nonbeing was its shadow. Schelling inverts this order by 180 degrees: Nonbeing turns out to be real to some extent. Let us repeat: "real" is that which works and involves some results. For Schelling, nonbeing is real, because it is active. This inversion of Platonism, however, turns – in the very next moment – into its *deconstruction* (against Schelling's will), and a new form of existence emerges in the field of Schelling's reflection: *being mingled with nonbeing.*

A visible sign of this deconstruction is the violation of narrative time in *The Ages of the World.* Schelling wished to return to the radical past, that which had already been overcome by God when he had risen from the Abyss. However, in its most illuminating passages *The Ages of the World* describes the world that we live in. It is a vision of our present existence. This is how Schelling's narrative breaks away from the order of time. There in no line any longer, no past – present – future, that would confirm the sequence of the act of creation. Instead, there is psychotic repetition, a compulsive series: past – past – past. Schelling writes successive versions of the first book of the *Weltalter*, immersing himself in some appalling timelessness. This repetition is nonetheless a sign of Schelling's struggle with an experience he cannot cope with.

So what exactly happened between 1811 and 1820? Let us relate it in the order of the fable. *The Ages of the World* is a fabulous journey into the Interior of Being. Schelling wanted to descend to the bottom of Life from which God's Consciousness struggles to rise – to follow Jakob Böhme once again. Yet it was precisely there, at the bottom of Life, that Schelling saw *nonbeing* as *more real than being.* Nonbeing, which no God is able to cope with, and which no God is able to overcome. What was meant to rise from it was the Self, a wonderful, organic synthesis of being and nonbeing. Meanwhile, Something

[59] *Darstellung des Philosophischen Empirismus*, X, p. 267.

quite different appeared before Schelling's eyes. Some terrible confusion whose nature (if indeed one can still speak of any nature) lies in deconstructing that older, metaphysical difference. Nonbeing which is not quite nonbeing (for it is not "lack"), and which is not being (for it is something negative), but which is at once both being and nonbeing (for it is an actual abyss). Emptiness as fullness. God turned upside down. Anti-being.

Thus read, the story brings to mind Nikolai Gogol's experience. The two writers, Schelling and Gogol, have a lot in common. Both of them wanted to believe in Jesus Christ. And both had a profound awareness of the terror of life and the horror of being. Finally, both were fascinated with Dante and both wanted to write a book modeled on *The Divine Comedy*. Each of them, however, managed to write only its first part, that corresponding to the *Inferno*. Gogol wrote the *Dead Souls*. Schelling presented us with a small fraction of his *Weltalter*.

Schelling Works quoted after edition: *F.W.J. Schellings sämtliche Werke*. Hrsg. von K.F.A Schelling. 1 Abteilung: 10 Bde. [= I-X], 2 Abteilung 4 Bde [=XI-XIV]. Stuttgart--Augsburg 1856-1861.

Paweł Dybel

THE QUESTION OF ETHICS IN THE THOUGHT OF HEIDEGGER AND GADAMER

THE PLACE OF ETHICS IN THE HERMENEUTIC TRADITION OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

The question of the relationship between hermeneutics and ethics may be posed in various ways, with various possible answers. This is vividly demonstrated by a collection of essays entitled *Hermeneutik als Ethik* published a few years ago (2004) in which virtually every author articulates this relationship in a different way, examining it in various contexts.[1] In Polish criticism, this wide range of views on the issue is represented in *Ethics in the Light of Hermeneutics* by Andrzej Przyłębski (Przyłębski, 2010), an impressive attempt to capture the plurality of views which emerged within the hermeneutical tradition.

Such variety of opinions would not have been possible had the concept of hermeneutics not undergone a profound transformation in the twentieth century. The main change was in the approach – hermeneutics was no longer seen solely as "the art of understanding" (*Kunstlehre*) and, at the same time, a universal method of interpreting human cultural products (W. Dilthey). It began to be treated as a separate philosophical discipline, the main task of which is to develop the pre-ontological structure of human understanding and to discover its relationship to "exegesis" (*die Auslegung*), or "interpreting." Martin Heidegger made the first significant step in this direction in his *Being and Time*, arguing that the primary determinant of human behavior is *Seinsverständnis*, the understanding of Being, closely connected with its "exegesis." What Heidegger had in mind, however, was not the combination of two originally separate processes, endowed with different properties, but an intertwining of two overlapping moments within the scope of understanding. The peculiarity of this intertwining is determined by the fact that any "understanding of Being" is from the very beginning accomplished as its "exegesis." This approach implies that there is no such thing as "pure" understanding, following its own rules, on which a separate procedure of interpretation is superimposed, also governed by its own rules. Understanding is always a kind of interpretation, of one sort or another. In short, Heidegger's "existential analytic" may be seen as a hermeneutics of *Dasein*, the purpose

[1] H.M. Schönherr-Mann, HRSG, *Hermeneutik als Ethik*. München 2004, p. 208

which is to lay down the groundwork for the philosophical task proper, i.e. to develop a hermeneutics of Being which would attempt to grasp its "meaning."

This approach implies that human understanding is not only – as assumed in the Cartesian tradition – one of the primary determinants of human existence, besides other properties such as feelings, moods, desires, etc., which are separate from it. Understanding as a mode of being embraces man as a whole, opening him to the world. One can even say that according to Heidegger man exists "hermeneutically" because all his moods, feelings and actions prompted by desires represent a specific "mode of being" and thus always already presuppose some kind of understanding of Being. They are in themselves also a particular "exegesis" of this understanding. Dilthey's concept of hermeneutics as the methodology of human sciences appears therefore as the ontic derivative of man's "hermeneutic" way of being.

Heidegger's attitude towards Dilthey's concept of hermeneutics and – indirectly – towards the entire contemporary hermeneutic tradition was later developed along similar lines by Hans-Georg Gadamer in his philosophical hermeneutics. Gadamer, also departing from the idea of hermeneutics as *Kunstlehre,* focused instead on expounding the phenomenon of the historicity of understanding. He pointed out that the constitutive elements of understanding as such are prejudice, tradition and authority, all of which were radically criticized within the rationalistic tradition of the Enlightenment.[2] Although diverging in numerous instances from Heidegger's "hermeneutics of *Dasein*" and its successor – "the hermeneutics of Being", Gadamer shares with the author of *Being and Time* the conviction that all procedures of understanding and interpretation formed in the hermeneutic tradition are rooted in the historicity of the human way of being which is founded on the "understanding of Being". From this conviction also springs hermeneutics' claim to universality.

It is worth noting here that all the authors who developed their own hermeneutical approaches on the basis of Heidegger's and Gadamer's concept of the pre-ontological, temporally historical dimension of human understanding, usually discarded the philosophical radicalism of this position.[3] Thus, they either attempted to transform the traditional version of hermeneutics as *Kunstlehre* by opening it to the historical dimension of understanding (Peter Szondi), or reformulated it in confrontation with other theories and methods of interpretation (Paul Ricoeur, Karl-Otto Apel, Jürgen Habermas). Also, there appeared many "applications" of hermeneutics in such disciplines as literary theory (Hans Robert Jauß), the history of art (Gottfried Boehm) and theology (Rudolf Bultmann, Gerhard von Rad). In all of these theories, the problem of the relation between hermeneutics and ethics either did not appear altogether, or was alluded to only indirectly and was understood very narrowly. For example, one of the questions was whether hermeneutical approaches to understanding and interpretation ensure an accurate reading of the meaning of a given work, and whether they can provide reliable criteria to assess that work's value.

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[2] For a more detailed discussion of Gadamer's views on this issue, see my book *Granice rozumienia i interpretacji. O hermeneutyce Hansa-Georga Gadamera.* Cracow 2004.

[3] Post-modern hermeneutics of Gianni Vattimo, emphasizing the anti-metaphysical edge of Heidegger's and Gadamer's hermeneutics, may be seen as an exception of a certain kind. Cf. G. Vattimo, *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Post-modern Culture*, trans. J. R. Snyder. Cambridge 1991. Translation of *La fine della modernità*. Milan 1985.

One of the reasons behind such an approach was precisely the treatment of hermeneutics as *Kunstlehre*. This meant, in practice, that the issues it dealt with were limited to questions concerned with developing appropriate techniques (methods) of understanding and interpretation in strict relation to the "subject field" of a given discipline. They were therefore mainly formal and technical issues, focusing on the problem of formulating appropriate rules of understanding and interpretation which would take into account the specific subject areas of a given discipline. In other words, it was a matter of creating rules that would enable an adequate identification of the research field of a given discipline and thus make it possible to properly interpret the meaning of the specific works constituting that field. Within the framework of this perspective, any ethical questions mattered only if they happened to influence, as a kind of side-effect, the process of solving the methodological problems related to understanding and interpretation.

HEIDEGGER'S ETHICS OF BEING "CLAIMED BY BEING" AND HIS CRITIQUE OF THE CONCEPT OF "ETHICAL VALUES"

Heidegger's and Gadamer's views of the ethical issue are entirely different. Their premise of the close link between understanding and the historical dimension of human existence implies that the phenomenon of ethics (and related issues) is an immanent part of hermeneutics. In Heidegger's thinking ethics is rooted in the way man as *Dasein* refers to Being, always understanding it in one way or another. Thus, one's own way of being is closely connected to the question of "the meaning of Being." In view of this, the existential analysis of *Dasein*'s way of being as presented in *Being and Time* constitutes – in essence – an ethics, since it elucidates the fact that *Dasein* is "concerned" about Being, unable to remain indifferent to the question of its "meaning."[4]

This close relationship of the human way of being with the phenomenon of ethics will become fully explicit only after the so-called "turn" in Heidegger's thought. At the same time it will imperceptibly gain a whole new meaning. In the works from this period, man's ethical task in the face of "the truth of Being" as it is revealed to him consists in his being a shepherd responding to Being's call, or in other words – in being "claimed by Being." Thus formulated, "ethics" appears as the primary task facing man in his Being. Man must fulfill his destiny by resisting the many forms of "the oblivion of Being" occurring in the modern world whenever Being – in one way or another – is appropriated.

For Gadamer, on the other hand, the ethical phenomenon is part of the practical aspect of human activity, always conducted in a particular historical situation characterized by specific determinants. Initially, therefore, it is indistinguishable from other factors determining these activities. At the same time, precisely because of the premise of the close connection between the ethical and the hermeneutic aspects, both Heidegger and Gadamer rarely speak directly about this relationship.

For Heidegger, there is yet another factor motivating his unwillingness to stress the strictly ethical dimension of *Dasein*'s way of being. I am referring to his critical attitude to ethics in the form in which it has developed as a distinct philosophical discipline with

[4] This is how we should understand Heidegger's indignant reaction to the question asked by one of his students, "When will you write ethics?" to which Heidegger replied that *Being and Time* is an ethics.

its own "subject field," dealing with the specific issues which it considers ethical. Thus understood, ethics loses sight of the fundamental relationship between the phenomenon of ethics and the opening of the human *Dasein* to the truth (unhiddenness) of Being. It is only in view of this relationship – Heidegger believes – that *Dasein* can become "understanding." But instead of making an effort to rethink this relationship, ethics obfuscates the phenomenon of ethicality with its artificial conceptual structures, assuming – for example – the existence of distinct "ethical values" which it treats as self-evident entities. In general, thinking about being in terms of such or other "values" of which it is constituted implies alienation on the part of the thinker from the truth of Being. Therefore, a critique of this type of thinking has nothing to do with nihilism or relativism, but to the contrary – it establishes an *ethos* revealing itself in the experience of Being as unhiddenness:

> To think against "values" is not to maintain that everything interpreted as "a value" –"culture," "art," "science," "human dignity," "world," and "God" – is valueless. Rather, it is important finally to realize that precisely through the characterization of something as "a value" what is so valued is robbed of its worth. That is to say, by the assessment of something as a value what is valued is admitted only as an object for human estimation. But what a thing is in its being is not exhausted by its being an object, particularly when objectivity takes the form of value. Every valuing, even where it values positively, is a subjectivizing.
>
> (Heidegger, 2008, 251)

If, however, the concept of "values" inflected in all possible ways in contemporary thought has undergone a peculiar fetishization, degrading everything "valuable" to the position of an object, then has it not become necessary to radically reformulate the status of everything ethical? Furthermore, taking into consideration this critical approach, is it still possible to treat ethics as it is treated today, namely – as a distinct philosophical discipline? But these are questions which go beyond the scope of this article. One way or another, only by taking into account the fact that Heidegger believed the phenomenon of ethicality to be rooted in the openness of man to the unhiddenness of Being, can we begin to understand his critical approach towards the concept of "ethical values", central to the various contemporary theories of ethics.

According to Heidegger, such an approach – based on the assumption of the existence of some separate sphere in the realm of human relations, a sphere whose basis is fixed in itself – remains essentially alienated from the phenomenon of ethicality as it appears from the perspective of the unhiddenness of Being. Thus the belief that on the basis of this sphere one could derive some objective criteria for the assessment of what is good and evil is all the more unreasonable. The conviction that such criteria may exist is based on the assumption that either man himself has access to the essence of what is ethical (alternatively – that he is capable of somehow determining it), or that the ethical core resides in some higher authority (in God for example). In both cases, the result of this assumption is a kind of objectification of the phenomenon of the ethical, concealing the fact that it is embedded in man's experience of the unhiddenness of Being. This leads to an

illegitimate absolutization of this phenomenon, that is – to the abovementioned treatment of the field of ethics as a sphere the sole justification of which lies in itself and which sets out the criteria for its own analysis and evaluation.

Therefore, says Heidegger, seeking to get at the root of the phenomenon of ethics as it is experienced from the perspective of man's being as "understanding," we must renounce the notion of "ethical values." The notion of "ethical values" refers to nothing which exists in reality. It is merely an abstract conceptual formulation superimposed on the actual experience of the phenomenon of ethics. The emergence of this concept corresponds with the tendency characteristic of the modern metaphysical tradition and lately made more radical, i.e. the tendency to objectify all manifestations of Being in order to make them fully subordinate to the human subject which – modeled on the Cartesian cogito – "oversees" this process.

From this perspective, contemporary metaphysical theories of ethics, in which the notion of "ethical values" plays a key role, similarly attempt to take over and subdue the realm of the ethical, claiming it for absolute "objectification" (i.e. for a lucid and unambiguous conceptual examination of the sphere in order to arrive at "objective" criteria of good and evil). In doing so, however, they lose sight of the fundamental attribute of this phenomenon, namely – that it impossible to objectify and conceptually manipulate it in this manner.

Meanwhile, according to Heidegger, the ancient Greek writers and thinkers were able to get at the root of the ethical and describe it in a far more comprehensive way. One of these thinkers was Heraclitus:

> Ηλος means abode, dwelling place. The word names the open region in which the human being dwells. The open region of his abode allows what pertains to the essence of the human being, and what in thus arriving resides in nearness to him, to appear. The abode of the human being contains and preserves the advent of what belongs to the human being in his essence.
>
> (Heidegger, 2008, 256)

These words reflect the very essence of Heidegger's idea of ethics. We may consider as ethical such a form of dwelling on earth in which man claims the open space of being and thus makes his dwelling possible. Only then man, opening himself to that which "belongs to the human being in his essence," claims his essence. Through this he is capable of responding to Being's ultimate "ethical" calling, namely – to be claimed by man. At the same time, man claims himself, his innermost nature which is revealed in the simple dwelling within the open space of Being. This approach implies that "ethics" is not a matter shaped by man himself, but becomes feasible as such only from the perspective of his relation to Being. Ethics "besets" man the moment he responds to Being's call, i.e. – the moment he claims Being. Man can exist "ethically" once he has learned to dwell on earth like a shepherd, concerned about claiming the truth of Being.

On the other hand, all "metaphysical" theories of ethics, in which the phenomenon of the ethical is objectified, inevitably lose sight of what is most essential about this phenomenon: man's openness to the truth of Being thanks to which he can fulfill his essence

by dwelling on earth. These theories – contrary to their universalist claims – are inherently "subjective" because they regard the *ethos* of Being in terms of "ethical values" and in the process they objectify it. It loses all its sublime "dignity," is appropriated by the subject and becomes its function.

It is not difficult to identify Heidegger's main antagonists in this dispute. Even though he does not write about it directly, clearly the main targets of his critique are the leading figures of twentieth-century phenomenology in whose work the notion of "ethical values" was the key term in any discussion of ethical issues – such figures as Edmund Husserl, Max Scheler and Roman Ingarden. These thinkers assumed that "ethical values" belong to the fundamental "givens" of human consciousness; that they are intuitively grasped and therefore are intersubjective in their essence. This in turn implied that they are rooted in the socio-cultural sphere (*Lebenswelt*), lending them a definite distinction in relation to other values. Thus, all these phenomenologists tacitly assumed that within the sphere of human consciousness a certain "essence" of all ethical values exists *a priori*, ideal in its nature and possible to identify in its general, universal significance.

From Heidegger's point of view, however, all these phenomenological notions of the ethical are encumbered by the classical schemes of the metaphysical tradition, bent upon "objectifying" the various spheres of Being, and in this respect they do not substantially differ from the theory of ethics developed on the basis of German neo-Kantianism (Nicolai Hartmann) or the tradition of analytical philosophy. The only sensible alternative to this approach (which alienates the individual from the phenomenon of the ethical) is therefore – according to Heidegger – a persistent pondering of the roots of this phenomenon in the light of man's "exposure" to the unhiddenness of Being, experienced by him in the "clearing," in order to claim in thoughts and words the truth of Being thus revealed to him:

> If the name "ethics," in keeping with the basic meaning of the word ηθος, should now say that ethics ponders the abode of the human being, then that thinking which thinks the truth of being as the primordial element of the human being, as one who eksists, is in itself originary ethics.
>
> (Heidegger, 2008, 258)

For Heidegger then, ethics is synonymous with human consideration of the "truth of Being" by which he claims it for himself. Thus understood, ethics is rooted deeper than any ontology. Ethics "besets" the moment he enters Being, and only through Being is it possible to think about existence, to differentiate it and to denote its constituent structures. Ethics experienced in this way is a power which seizes man and discloses before him the possibility of "dwelling" on earth, of inhabiting it in accordance with Being's ultimate calling.

Heidegger's critique of the metaphysical assumptions underlying the concept of ethical values and norms as it was employed within the phenomenological school creates a new foundation for ethics and in general lays bare the crucial weakness of all theories of ethics based on the concept of "ethical values." It not only points to their dependence on conceptual schemes derived from the metaphysical tradition, but most importantly – it reveals their reductionist nature with regard to the phenomenon of ethics as it is primordially experienced in man's opening to the unhiddenness of Being.

The question remains, however, whether this kind of experience of the phenomenon of ethics is not perchance impeded by a certain absence. When Heidegger discusses man's destiny to "claim" the "truth of Being" – and thus establish his own way of being as an ethics (or an *ethos*) – does he not overlook an important aspect of the phenomenon of ethics as it has been described by traditional philosophy?

I am talking here about the aspect almost entirely ignored by Heidegger: the significance of human coexistence for the formation of ethics. While in *Being and Time* he argues that Being-with-others (*Mitdasein*) is an immanent element in the existential structure of *Dasein*'s Being-in-the-world, he still does not develop further the implications of this statement, neither in this work nor in his later writings. He does not raise the question of the role this anterior Being-with-others in the world can play in grasping the nature of the circular relationship between Being and time. Also in his later works written after the war, when with increasing consistency Being is identified with language, the relationship between *Dasein*/man and others seems to be of secondary importance to the "truth" of Being / language itself. In any case, Heidegger does not explain what is the function of this Being-with-others within the structure of Being / language. All that seems to matter is the opening of man to the "truth of Being" itself, as well as his experience of its calling to be "claimed". One can only assume that the "truth of Being" also somehow contains the relation to others, though Heidegger does not undertake any serious analysis of this relation.

We must seek the reasons for this approach in the origins of Heidegger's philosophy. Having proposed that "the question of Being," ignored by European metaphysics, should become the starting point of any consideration of particular entities, Heidegger naturally assigns a secondary ontological significance to the "intersubjective" dimension of the "truth of Being." What is important from Heidegger's perspective is the "truth of Being" as such, and not the fact that it already presupposes a relation to others. Even if this relation is inherently contained in this truth, it does not have a material impact on the way this truth experienced. An earnest reflection on the truth of Being does require the thinker to focus on this relation, but to experience that truth by allowing oneself to be spirited away by the circle of time and Being. And to express that experience in a semi-poetic language.

Also, from the point of view of *Dasein*'s way of Being, its Being-with-others is of secondary importance. This is clearly implied by the analytics of Being-towards-death, in which *Dasein* reaches the level of "authentic Being" (*eigentliches Sein*) through direct confrontation with the possibility of its own death, and not the death of others. It follows that the attainment of the fundamental existential structures that reveal to *Dasein* its way of Being is possible only as a result of this confrontation with the possibility of *Dasein*'s own death. At the same time, the death of others is merely a painful fact experienced by *Dasein*, which does not have any significance from the perspective of the constitution of its way of Being. Yet, it also means that *Dasein*'s "authentic" relation to others which results from this "critical" experience of the possibility of one's own death is simply a consequence of this individual experience.

A similar situation appears when *Dasein* next raises the question of Being in the perspective of the temporality of its own existence, the true meaning of which lies in its historicity. *Dasein*'s "authentic" experience of this historicity as shared with others to whom it is now "authentically" directed, experiencing with them the "resoluteness"

of Being-towards-death, is also a simple consequence of the possibility of *Dasein*'s own individual death. In short, *Dasein*'s relation to others plays here a secondary ontological function compared to the significance attributed by Heidegger to *Dasein*'s existential experience which comes into being through its relation to itself, possible only in the perspective of *Dasein*'s relation to the truth of Being.

In the end, this experience turns out to be decisive when Heidegger later poses what he calls the "ascending" questions about Being. These questions place *Dasein* in the context of experiencing the "impossible possibility" of its own death, which opens it to "temporality" (historicity) as the ultimate "meaning" of its own existence, "drawing" – by its "resoluteness" – others with whom it is connected through a particular historical situation. Apart from the fact that in the historical context in which they were written Heidegger's words gain sinister overtones (the statement about the "resoluteness" of a generation willing to face its own Being-towards-death sounds quite ominous today), this approach stresses the "individualism" of *Dasein*'s questioning of Being and of experiencing its "truth."

What counts first and foremost in this perspective is the way the individual *Dasein* experiences and expresses in semi-poetic terms the "truth" of Being/language, "claiming" it for itself and others. Similarly, when in his late works Heidegger speaks of the "fourfold of Being," one pole of which is represented by the Mortals and the other – by the Divinities, these words merely imply the existence of an "intersubjective" dimension opened by Being/language. However, he says virtually nothing about the relationship which connects these Mortals both to other Mortals and to the Divinities within this "fourfold."

This is presumably because such issues are to Heidegger's mind of secondary importance (just as in *Being and Time* the hermeneutics of *Dasein* is secondary to the hermeneutics of Being which was supposed to grow out of it). The only thing that matters is the truth of Being/language that reveals itself in the "clearing," while all relations to others contained within it are mere contingencies (to say nothing of the ethical dimension inherent in these relations). A closer examination of this problem, however, is rendered almost impossible by the fact that the truth of Being/language must be proclaimed – as Heidegger insists – in a manner akin to poetry. After all, for Heidegger only language matters, the very fact of using it by the thinker to proclaim the "truth" of Being/language to Mortals and thus to claim it for himself and for others.

HEIDEGGER AND THE EXTERMINATION CAMPS

In the end, the most problematic point in Heidegger's views on the phenomenon of ethics is precisely what is most crucial here: the identification of the ethos with a particular way of being human, in which man "claims" the truth of Being. Even if the phenomenon of the ethical thus formulated opens a whole new perspective of thought ignored in the context of the contemporary metaphysical tradition, building awareness of the threat posed by the modern man's ill-conceived "essence" of technology, the fact that this view ignores the crucial significance that the relation to others has for this phenomenon, drastically narrows the consideration of all that is ethical. And this neglect which may even be called ignorance, may seem astonishing especially if we consider the way that the ethical issues are explored in the most recent philosophical tradition. However, in both the early and late

Heidegger's works, one will not find even a sentence on the subject. It is as if something which to us seems quite obvious, bore no significance for him. Our astonishment grows the more when we read the following statement by Heidegger, in which he eloquently, brutally, and yet astutely speaks about the hundreds of thousands people dying in the extermination camps:

> Do they die? They decease. They are eliminated. They become pieces of inventory in the warehouse of the fabrication of corpses. They are imperceptibly liquidated in extermination camps... But to die (*Sterben*) means: to bear death in one's own Being. To be able to die means: to be capable of this decisive bearing. And we are capable of it only if our Being is capable of the Being of death... Everywhere we face the immense misery of innumerable, atrocious deaths that have not died (*ungestorbener Tode*), and yet the essence of death is closed off to man.
>
> (Heidegger, 1994, 56)[5]

Giorgio Agamben, from whose work the above citation is borrowed, points out that it does accurately capture the essence of the inhuman way of dying of the millions of people in the extermination camps, with "the dignity of death to be so negated for them" (Agamben, 1999, 74). At the same time, however, by reading it in the context of the distinction between "authentic" and "inauthentic" Being-towards-death which appears in *Being and Time,* he recognizes that when speaking of "inhuman" dying, Heidegger refers to the latter way of Being. And this makes Agamben pose the question of whether such an approach is justified and appropriate.

It seems, however, that such a reading by the author of *Remnants of Auschwitz* of the above citation is an interpretive misunderstanding. It is based on the fact that in *Being and Time* "inauthentic" Being-towards-death originates from *Dasein's* failure to recognize death as the deepest possibility of its own Being, reducing it to an experience of anonymous death by strangers, to which it may remain indifferent. In other words, it concerns the common manner of referring to death, in which the individual tries to marginalize it in some way, to treat it merely as an event which concerns others. This approach has nothing to do with the way in which millions of people were dying in the extermination camps, from whom the "essence of death [was] closed off." This seems to be yet another way of dying, which is not really dying, which would be something that Heidegger had not even remotely suspected when he wrote *Being and Time*. The radical distinction between this way of dying and *Dasein's* "authentic" / "inauthentic" ways of Being-towards-death lies in the fact that – according to this author – it was the system itself that deprived people in the camps of the opportunity to "die," turning it into a mechanical process of human elimination, the process of fabrication of corpses.

This statement, with all its brutality, cannot be denied a certain rather striking astuteness, which is admitted in some measure by Agamben. Yet, the truly shocking aspect

[5] Translator's note: the passage is taken from the English translation of Agamben's book. One can also consult the English edition of Heidegger's work containing the above passage, translated by Andrew J. Mitchell.

of this statement which may be held against it, is decidedly not the issue suggested by the author of *Homo sacer*.[6] The first shocking aspect is that, according to Heidegger, the "fabrication of corpses," of people who were denied the proper death, is primarily a matter of workings of an anonymous system of destruction, the efficiency of which is guaranteed by the modern technology, enabling the construction of the "factories" of human death. This approach implies, that the heaviest burden of "blame" for this kind of factories lies in fact on the modern interpretation of Being, while those who were responsible for the appearance of these factories and "run" them were – like soulless cogs in the machine – merely the normal outcome, a consequence of this understanding. In other words, it is as if everything really happened here, in the space of Being, understood one way or another, while the question of responsibility of those who made use of it in a particular way, or of those who silently accepted this state of affairs, was quite of secondary importance in this perspective. Similarly, neither here nor in any other work does Heidegger mention anything about the fact that the unavoidable result of these "factories" was a formation of a pathological relationship between the "managers" and the victims, which amounted to the total annihilation of human relations in the form they usually take in the social sphere, including those that take place at the level of "Being-fallen." It is as if this annihilation was merely a simple consequence of the development of the contemporary "technical" interpretation of Being, the extreme form of "forgetting" the truth of Being. And as if it was not something that also took place in the sphere of human relations, representing a total obliteration of all forms of social consensus.

Secondly, Heidegger's statement is shocking also because he seems to write about the death camps as if it was something that had no relation to him. As if the fact that in the thirties he has joined the party whose leaders made a peculiar "use" of the technical understanding of Being had not the slightest significance in this respect. As if it was merely a matter of the natural and inevitable consequence of the emergence of this interpretation, and the degeneration of human relations in the death camps was merely a result of its "application." And nothing more.

The distaste that one feels while reading this statement, however, originates not in the fact that it is untrue or hypocritical. On the contrary, this statement with all its brutality in a strikingly perceptive way captures the inhuman nature of the process of dying in the camps, converging with Agamben's main thesis in *Remnants of Auschwitz.* This distaste stems largely from the fact that the author of this statement acts as an external commentator of those events, as if they had not the least "personal" relevance for him. As if they were happening somewhere far away in Europe, while he, like a visitor from another planet, only dispassionately examined whatever he was observing.

We may imagine a similar situation, with an intellectual known as one of the leading ideologues of the Party in times of People's Republic of Poland (deriving benefits from his position), who would begin writing in the nineties penetrating critiques of that past era, examining in a brilliant analysis the various pathologies of social relations that emerged during the communist era. Pretending that he never participated in

[6] Translator's note: for the English text of this work, see G. Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life,* trans. Heller-Roazen. Stanford 1998.

this process and was not – as the member of PZPR[7] – in any way co-responsible for the excesses and – indirectly – for all the crimes related to the political tradition which was the origin of the Party.

This distaste is compounded by the fact that Heidegger never managed to make a thorough and truly honest account of his own Nazi past. Whenever he talked about it, he kept stressing that his role in the NSDAP was in fact marginal, and in the forties he was actually isolated and boycotted. Naturally, we may fancy that such statements stemmed from the simple bourgeois pettiness (surprising in the thinker of his rank) and his rather pathetic wish to "white-wash" his political role in the thirties. And even though there might be some truth to these speculations, it still seems that at least equally important reason of Heidegger's silence about his own liability in consequence of his political activity in the thirties was the described above method of subordinating all issues related to the "inter-subjectivity" to the contemplation of the "truth of Being."

In short, we should seek for the origins of his silence not only in the purely subjective factors, pathetic and petty as they are, but also in the fundamental "post-metaphysical" structure of his philosophical thought. It is based on the act of granting a fundamental primacy to the question of "the truth of Being," which represents an existentially radicalized form of the question of entity particular for the Western metaphysics, a primacy in relation to all ethical issues, which deem the issue of I's relation to the Other crucial.

LÉVINAS AND GADAMER. TWO MODELS OF THE I –OTHER RELATION, CONSTITUTIVE FOR THE PHENOMENON OF THE ETHICAL

Emmanuel Lévinas pointed out this weakness in Heidegger's approach, seeing in his neglect of the ethical issues the impact of European metaphysical tradition, in which the ontological questions were customarily given primacy over any questions related to ethics. The author of *Totality and Infinity* also believes that the emphasis laid by Heidegger in his late works on language, considering it to be the seat of the truth of Being, has a special relevance here. Lévinas opposes this view with a statement that, for himself, "what is said matters less than the very fact of saying. The act of saying matters to me not so much because of its content, but because it is directed towards the other, a partner in communication" (Lévinas 1980, 28).

In Lévinas's view, Heidegger's focusing in his late works on "what is said" relates to what the latter considered to be a kind of "message" of the truth of Being, which man is to accept and claim in his own worldly Being. Lévinas suggests that, strictly speaking, this truth does not enjoy the status of an "information," which could be communicated to man by Being. This would have presupposed a kind of objectifying distance between man and the truth of Being, while in fact, the truth of Being experienced by him in the clearing spirits him away, overwhelming him. It is something that imposes itself with the irresistible force as a kind of revelation and a message at once. That is why, – since in a sense it is a part of his being, of his own experience in the opening to the disclosedness (unhiddenness) of Being – it cannot by its very nature become "objectified" by man in

[7] Translator's note: Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza – Polish United Workers' Party (PUWP).

any way; it cannot be reduced to the status of an "information" communicated to man by Being. As a result, it also cannot be developed conceptually, as philosophers are in the habit of doing, but it may be expressed only in the semi-poetic manner.

However, even if we describe the status of Heidegger late semi-poetic "language" this way, Lévinas's criticism still holds: the relation to the other, understood as the partner in communication, is entirely ignored by Heidegger. This does not mean that this relation is altogether absent here, but that it is assumed to be something obvious, and therefore irrelevant for the philosophical thought. Therefore, even if it does appear in some texts – for instance, in the form of conversation between a Japanese and an Inquirer, in the essay "A dialogue on language" – it appears in a strange and incomplete form (cf. Heidegger, 1982, 1-56).

However, such an objection to Gadamer's hermeneutical concept of language would be grossly inadequate. The latter clearly assumes that relation to the other, encountered as "Thou" is the constitutive element of every act of speaking. And even if that "Thou" is not a "live" interlocutor, but an "abstract" author of a text, which we read and which reaches us from tradition. As Gadamer writes, "For tradition is a genuine partner in dialogue, and we belong to it, as does the I with a Thou" (Gadamer, 2004, 352).

Thus, in the view of the author of *Truth and Method*, it is not the language of Being which overtakes and spirits away the questioning *Dasein*, demanding its attestation/claiming through its semi-poetic philosophical language that is man's main point of reference. It is difficult to say of Being which is making itself known to man in such manner that it is his "partner" in conversation. The "place" out of which this silent "speaking" of Being resonates, contains – and Heidegger seems to tacitly accept this fact – something profoundly inhuman, at least in the sense that it is placed outside of any sphere in which any kind of "Thou" might speak. Moreover, this applies to "Thou" both mortal and divine. It is man / *Dasein* that may in some measure "domesticate" this "inhuman" speech in the language of philosophical metaphors, which resembles the speech of the Delphic priests, proclaiming some truth, and yet remaining ignorant of its origin.

According to Gadamer on the other hand, it is first and foremost tradition and its testimonials, created by man and reaching us from the past, that is our primary partner in "communication" about Being. And, it is peculiar partner, who speaks to us in an inaudible voice of the authors of the testimonials, whom we encounter as an anonymous "Thou." This view implies that in our historical Being we are from the start implicated in the certain human-inhabited space of an "intersubjective" nature, in which we may recognize some others "addressing" us. And it is mostly in conversation with them, with what they have to say to us through their works, that we shape our self-knowledge.

Gadamer, however, also assumes that in every relation of I to Thou shaped this way, the primacy should be granted to what Thou says, that is, to the "object" expressed by it, while the purely personal dimension of this relation is of minor significance. Strictly speaking, this dimension is relevant only so far as it remains in close immanent relationship with this "object." This implies that access to Thou, a reference to it, is effected through the "object" it articulates. Finally, "Thou" speaking to us from the depths of tradition is relevant here only in so far as it utters something related in some

way to our self-knowledge. Its specific, individual features which define it as someone who is / was a particular person, or as someone who holds/held some specific opinions, in this perspective is completely irrelevant: "Rather, I maintain that the understanding of tradition does not take the traditionary text as an expression of another person's life, but as meaning that is detached from the person who means it, from an I or a Thou" (Gadamer 2004, 352).

For Lévinas, such view of the I – Thou relation, subordinating its personal dimension to an "object" they "converse" about, is surely unacceptable. And this view in which the speech coming from the other / Thou, or addressed to the other / Thou, does not in fact matter in its personal dimension, neglects something very important, which is equivalent to the ethical dimension of the relationship. Of course, one may ask whether the difference between Lèvinas's and Gadamer's positions does not per chance lie in the fact that each of them, as a starting point, uses a completely different type of context in which the relation between I – Thou (other) is enmeshed. For the first of them, it is the context in which the I is related to an Other (Thou) as someone, to whom one must behave in a certain way. The I is then linked with an Other through the feeling of responsibility for one's behavior, whatever it may be. In this case, what is being said by an Other, or what words are said by the I to an Other is virtually irrelevant. What matters is above all the way the I behaves towards an Other in a given situation, for instance, when it becomes dangerous for the I.

In the bond that is forged in such a situation between the I and an Other, its purely personal dimension gains importance. The I is related to an Other in all the concreteness of his individual being. As a result, one must meet the challenge contained in the "face" of an Other turned to one. Whereas in a situation which is the starting point for Gadamer, the Other is encountered as a co-interlocutor; and thus matters primarily because of what he is saying. This does not imply that here too we may not speak of any ethical dimension of the situation, but this dimension has an entirely different form than in the first case. This dimension is manifested primarily through the I taking a position appropriately open to something that is being said by the Other. Thus, the I allows the other to actually communicate something:

> In human relations the important thing is, as we have seen, to experience the Thou truly as a Thou– i.e., not to overlook his claim but to let him really say something to us. Here is where openness belongs. But ultimately this openness does not exist only for the person who speaks; rather, anyone who listens is fundamentally open. Without such openness to one another there is no genuine human bond.
>
> (Gadamer, 2004, 355)

The ethical dimension of this situation is rooted in an attitude of intellectual openness to the words of the Other. Significantly, this attitude does not apply to the Other as a person, whom the I tries to understand in all the "subjectivity" of his being. It refers to what the Other says, and only in the light of this attitude the opening of the I to the entire personal dimension of the Other's being becomes possible. The I should first want

to hear something from the Other "in general," even if this would go beyond the scope of its self-knowledge. Only then can the I relate to the Other as a person just as openly.

If, however, the I even before joining the conversation with an Other, already considers itself better informed on the "object" that an Other is speaking about, is tantamount to a kind of obliteration of the Other as a partner in communication. The I's attitude towards the Other is shaped by a belief that nothing essential can be learned from him. The unethical nature of such an attitude is manifested in the demotion of the Other's meaning before it is even pronounced. In this clearly arrogant attitude, the I choses to cling tight to its own "prejudices," not letting them be directly confronted with the "prejudices" motivating the speech of the Other.

Their conversation is unilaterally dominated by the scope of the prejudices defining the I's self-knowledge. But what disappears entirely from the view of the speakers in such a conversation is not only the scope of the Other's prejudices, ignored by the I, but even the most essential manner of referring to the "object" of their conversation, which figures as their joint participation in it (*die Teilhabe*). The way of reference, in which both equally belong to this "object" requires precisely a partnership, equality in their relationship to each other. And it is the I's neglect of this crucial moment in its understanding relation to the object of the Other's speech which makes the I unable to "hear" the Other – to open itself to his different opinions and to authentically confront them with its own "prejudices."

According to Gadamer, this most essential way of relating the I to the "object," in which the Other is being met in the light of their joint participation in it, was best manifested during festivities in ancient Greece, when processions carrying figures of deities passed through the streets of the cities. In their presence, all the participants of the procession fell into a state of ecstasy, enjoying the feeling of joint participation in a common truth they shared with each other.

In his line of reasoning, Gadamer emphasizes the morphological form of the German word *Teilhabe* and related words such as *Teilnahme* and *Teilgabe*. The pattern of semantic affinities between these three words in his view determines the singularity of the I – Thou relationship, which is established through their joint participation in *logos*. *Teilhabe* – the crucial element in that "trinity" – literally means participation as an act of taking part (*Teilnahme*) in something that was granted to all (*Teilgabe*) and which is shared between all as a gift of the holy truth, in which they partake together.[8]

Here it must be emphasized that this approach is clearly at odds with Heidegger's understanding of the relationship between the "thinker" and the truth of Being/speech proclaiming itself to him and reproduced by him in the semi-poetic language. This approach implies a privileged position of the "thinker's" I in relation to that truth compared with others, to whom he is supposed to announce it and for whom he is to "claim" it. Thus, in this case it is difficult to talk of his co-participation in the truth of Being on an equal basis with others, and of his sharing it with them in Gadamer's sense. Furthermore, the

[8] I must refer here to the long conversation I have had with Gadamer at the end of the eighties. He tried to explain to me how crucial the relationship between *Teilhabe, Teilnahme i Teilgabe* is for his idea of ontology of *logos* itself, and how it in the most fundamental way defines the attitude of the speakers to the object they are speaking about.

latter replaces the notion of the "truth of Being" with "truth" passed on to us by tradition. Tradition is the work of others and instead of making itself known out of the murky and inaccessible heights of Being, it "addresses" us just through its works.

Ultimately this approach assumes a very different understanding of the concept of *ethos* than that which motivates the author of the "Letter on 'Humanism'." For Gadamer, *ethos* is not synonymous with the appropriate "dwelling" of man on earth in accordance to the message of Being – thus, it is not originally positioned on the existentially-ontological level. It is not about the proper "dwelling" of man on earth, whatever that word could mean. *Ethos* is primarily a participation along with others in the "object," to which we are open by tradition and its works, and it is also the act of "sharing" it with others in conversation. This is a basic ethical requirement imposed on man in his Being-with alongside others by *logos* itself.

The I that adopts such "participating" position towards objects of others' conversation, opens itself to everything that is alien to it in their speech, allowing something to be communicated to it. Yet, it is not the I that consciously imposes this attitude on itself by force, as in: "And now try to forget for a moment about your preconceived ideas and try to be open to others, listening without prejudice to everything they have to say to you." Apart from the fact that in this attitude there is something profoundly artificial and abstract, it contains a requirement virtually impossible to fulfill. Despite his best efforts man is never able to simply and absolutely, in a sense, against his own self, get rid of his prejudices. In addition, the prejudices that remain virtually inaccessible to him are precisely those that have the crucial significance for his understanding of the world, himself and others. They are rooted so deeply within him that he is practically oblivious to them, treating them as something self-evident and completely obvious. Thus, when he attempts to distance himself from these prejudices, his position may be compared to an attempt to pull oneself out of the mud by one's ears.

According to Gadamer the premise of openness to the speech of others must be understood quite differently. It does not entail the need to give up all one's prejudices, but merely a willingness to confront them directly with the prejudices of others. And as a result, accepting whatever in the prejudices of others gets through to one and where one recognizes some hitherto disregarded views, initially fundamentally alien to one's self-understanding.

Such attitude to what others are saying is also naturally rooted in the "intersubjective" structure of *logos* mentioned above, which implies joint participation with others in the "object" that is being understood, as well as sharing of the object in the conversation. This attitude is not superimposed on top of the structure of logos as an ontically secondary appendix, but essentially grows out of it, merely enacting what the latter implies.

DIALOGICAL OPENING AND PARTICIPATION IN THE "OBJECT" ACCORDING TO GADAMER AND TISCHNER

This was the direction also taken by Józef Tischner in his reflections on the most essential dialogic nature of the human relationships ignored by the contemporary metaphysical tradition almost in its entirety. According to the author of *Philosophy of Drama,* any kind of human contact, any "meeting" shaped as a dialogue, presupposes some "background,"

something shared, which "binds, exposing and imposing at the same time"[9] (Tischner, 2008, 13). Thus understood, the "background" creates a dialogical connection between people, relating them to each other in a specific way. And it is because of this bond that their "meeting" becomes at all possible. Now they may begin talking with one another, no matter if their words communicate some information or take the form of a dispute.

The dialogue's "background" always possesses a certain structure, called "hierarchy" by Tischner. The "hierarchy" is constituted by the matters tacitly accepted by those who meet as something obvious, "the world of important and unimportant affairs, momentous and trivial moments, sacred and profane times" (Tischner, 2008, 13). In Gadamer's terms, this refers to the specific "prejudices" which the I shares with an Other (others), its partner in the dialogue, and which are rooted in a specific cultural tradition.[10]

For Tischner, just as for Gadamer, the opening to a "hierarchy" (prejudice) is a form of participation, as well as:

> a dialogic opening in which the primary data is neither entity nor an object, but another person – thou, he, she, we, you, they. It is dialogue, rather than observation, that places us at the origins of the world's hierarchy. Yet, it is not as someone looking into the water and seeing the reflection of things above and below, but as someone who enters the stream and lets himself be carried away by the current of the words spoken, questions asked and answers given, invitations, challenges, warnings and so forth.
>
> (Tischner, 2006, 14)

According to Tischner, the I's bold entry into the "stream" of dialogue represents the highest form of its "participation" in logos, in the act of sharing the truth with the Other, and it opens a field for understanding between them based on the common point of view, worked out by them. Thus, the dialogue is prerequisite for the emergence of the I's identity, on the basis of which the I can at last comprehend itself to be a subject addressing some objects encountered out in the world.

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[9] Translator's note: all citations from Tischner's works are by the translator of the essay.

[10] However, at this point there may be observed an important distinction between the views of Gadamer and Tischner. For the former, the openness to the "object" of conversation in itself is something that creates the bond between the speakers, while the level of their prejudices ("hierarchy"), i.e., the specific cultural understanding of this "object" is the level of differences which they introduce to the conversation. For Tischner, "the dialogue will be fruitful only if our hierarchies will be similar or will manage to become similar" (Tischner, 2008, 14). In other words, if for Gadamer the diversity of the prejudices ("hierarchies") preconditions the fruitfulness of the dialogue, by virtue of which each of the speakers has a chance to transform and reevaluate the "hierarchy" that he has so far accepted (and thus, to open towards the prejudices of the other), for Tischner the initial similarity of the prejudices is the condition of such fruitfulness – at least to the extent of allowing the worlds of the speakers to "resemble each other" by the end of the conversation. Thus understood "assimilation", differs from Gadamer's figure of "fusion of horizons" which lays emphasis on the diversity and variety of prejudices as the most productive aspect in the process of understanding taking a form of conversation. According to Gadamer, the more the "hierarchies" of prejudices of the speakers differ from each other, the greater is the challenge for the I to understand the meaning of the Other. And thus, the greater is the chance of learning something from the other.

At this point, however, we have to mention again the clear distinction between the respective positions of Gadamer and Tischner. The assumption of essentiality of the dialogic relation between people, indication of the need for an element of community in their vision of the world, necessary to bring about their meeting (despite all the important differences in their understanding of the nature of that community), and the idea of participation in the truth of logos are shared by both authors. However, in Gadamer's view, the "fused horizon" of self-understanding of the I does not necessary coincide with the "fused horizon" of the Other's self-knowledge. In other words, the end result of a successful dialogue is by no means a full concurrence between the subjective identity of the I and the Other, but merely their agreement about the "object" of their conversation, which still allows their views defined, for instance, by different cultural or religious traditions, to remain at variance with each other.

In addition, the very next moment, as a result of new developments, new readings, new experiences etc., by both of them, their consensus concerning the "object" may become outdated, requiring yet another conversation about it. By constantly renewing itself, human understanding continuously departs from the previously possessed knowledge of the "object," seeking to form new "fused horizons" of this understanding. In this perspective, the identity of the conscious subjects is not only a minor matter in their dialogical relationship, as Tischner claimed, but it is actually something entirely fictional. It is really something impossible to realize.

GADAMER AND ARISTOTLE. HERMENEUTIC MODEL OF "PRACTICAL ETHICS"

Paraphrasing Heidegger'd words on human "dwelling" on earth, one can state that for Gadamer, the way in which man participates with others in *logos*, sharing with them the truth which "addresses" him through the works of tradition, constitutes ethics. This approach implies that there is a profound analogy between the "openness" with which we relate to others on the level of our informal contacts, imposed on us by *logos*, and the way in which we encounter things communicated to us by various testimonies of the past. Of course, provided that the deep-rooted way of relating to these testimonies will not be overwritten by some kind of previously imposed "methodology," set on various forms of objectification of their essential meaning.

To my knowledge, the author of *Truth and Method* has not written any text in which he would undertake an attempt to take a closer look at the assumed by him twist of the hermeneutic and the ethical. However, he has produced several works in which he seeks to reveal the ethical dimension in the "ontology" of the situation of understanding / interpretation of the tradition's testimonials, arguing that it can be treated as a special application of Aristotle's model of ethics as the "practical knowledge."

And this is not all. He points to the fact that in the tradition of the eighteenth-century an understanding of hermeneutics as *Kunstlehre* was already established, and it was not only modeled on the Greek *techne*, but also referred to the Aristotelian idea of "practical philosophy" (Gadamer, 2007, 251). This in turn implied that to be a good hermeneutics practitioner, one not only needed to possess a purely *technical* ability to understand and interpret texts, but also to have an "understanding approach toward others" (Gadamer, 2007, 259). To illustrate this view Gadamer cites Johann Peter Hebel, who in a letter

to a friend stated that the greatest feature of hermeneutics is an ability "to understand and humanely interpret human foibles." (Gadamer, 2007, 232). According to Aristotle, ethics is "the practical knowledge" as determined by *prohairesis*, particular to man and alien to animal *bios*, that is, man's ability to model his actions and choices on the basis of their "goodness" (which is not "learnable" as one may learn to make pottery). Similarly, hermeneutics is not limited to its application in life – in relation to the texts and to others – of the purely technical knowledge on the regulations of understanding and interpretation, but it also includes the knowledge gained through practical experience.

The above observation of Gadamer harmonizes with a number of his earlier remarks, made in other works, in which he refers to the key role of Aristotelian concept of "practical knowledge" as *phronesis* in the process of understanding, in the form it is applied in humanities. Thus, this would not be some abstract, detached from situational relevance, purely technical knowledge, but the knowledge that comes into force whenever it is required for the assessment of the particular context of the given situation.[11] Relating this model of knowledge to a situation in which human action is ethical, one would have to say that the ethical dimension of this action is not construed solely through certain preconceived ethical standards and values, but also through the peculiar, singular nature of the situation, which confronts these norms and values. The "practical" nature of all ethical knowledge and actions is based on this.

This view implies that the concept of ethical standards and values perceived as ideal unchanging data of consciousness which can be intuitively identified, regardless of the specific context of human action, is a flawed conceptual construct, which does not allow one to properly take into account the full ethical dimension of a given situation. The primary determinant of the phenomenon of the ethical is the fact that in its deepest form it is inextricably bound to the specific situation of action. In this sense, it is the organic part of *phronesis* and may only become a self-contained object of knowledge (i.e. ethics in the classical sense) when it is artificially separated from it. And since *phronesis* as practical knowledge according to Gadamer is identical with the intrinsic way understanding occurs, in relation to which all its other forms – such as mathematical or scientific understanding – derive from it, this approach implies fundamental, close connection between the hermeneutical and the ethical elements. The ethical is already present in *phronesis* as a kind of a priori sensitivity of the acting man to the good and evil. However, whether his action can be considered "good" is primarily determined by the way he reacts to a given situation, i.e. whether we can call his behavior ethical or not. As a result, as Karl Ineichen points out,[12] the ethical consciousness pertaining to a particular situation replaces for Gadamer the fixed rules and standards.

In our search for the predecessors of the relationship between the hermeneutic "practical knowledge" rooted in human self-understanding and the phenomenon of the ethical (that is – a sensitivity to the concepts of good and evil), we can descend even

[11] I have written more extensively on the subject of importance of the model of knowledge as *phronesis* in Gadamer's perception of philosophical hermeneutics in: *Granice rozumienia i interpretacji. O hermeneutyce Hansa-Georga Gadamera,* Cracow 2004.

[12] K. Ineichen, *Hermeneutik und Inferentialismus,* in: *Ethik im Lichte der Hermeneutik,* ed. A. Przyłębski. Würzburg 2010, p. 141-148.

deeper into the past and point to Socrates's view of the ethical. One of the fundamental assumptions of his philosophical thought was, after all, the belief that the "goodness" of life of every individual should be organically connected with his perceptions of good and evil. These perceptions should find ample fulfillment in his life, where he is obliged to constantly confirm them in each particular situation.

Only in the light of that assumption the famous Socratic formula of ethics, identifying goodness with knowledge and evil with ignorance, becomes fully comprehensible. The profound meaning of this formula is not simply a conviction that knowledge of goodness in itself induces a person to do "good." This formula also assumes, that the knowledge of what is right is not something given once and for all and self-evident. On the contrary, it must be acquired continuously and attested anew, through persistent inquiry into the nature of goodness and man's endorsement of it in his works. Thus, man not only comes closer to the true understanding of that which is good, but also is able to better apply it in his life.

If we assume such understanding of the ethics, it becomes difficult to justify the ethics in the form it has taken as a separate philosophical discipline, claiming to be applicable to a distinctly specific "subject field." Thus, all the efforts of the philosophers who, embarking from this premise, attempt to formulate a theoretical ontological foundation of all ethical standards, on the assumption of their "timelessness," in an attempt to codify these norms, – all these endeavors appear to be limited, to say the least. They do not take into account precisely the "practical" nature of the ethical, which is confirmed and gains explicit meaning only in the specific practical situation.

The formal ethics of Kant is characterized by a similar reductionism – as Gadamer writes, the solution of the question of the moral sense that it proposes is highly unsatisfactory.[13] This is vividly expressed in Kant's distortion of the Christian commandment of love, which is treated as a practical obligation to accomplish good deeds. Meanwhile, "love, even viewed in moral terms, is something nobler than the charitable acts that duty requires" (Gadamer, 2007, 283).

However, limitations also characterize the material ethics of Max Scheler and Nicolai Hartmann, built in opposition to Kant, which create an a priori system of values based on the immediate consciousness of the values. This approach assumes that the world phenomena that press upon man somehow contain "ethical values" which may be easily isolated and identified, timeless and ideal in nature, subject to the general laws which are essential and exist a priori. The assumption inherent in this kind of ethics that in its conduct it must endlessly engage and elucidate intricate connections between the various values – which implies endless advancement and perfection of the ethical consciousness – is inconsistent with the above-mentioned presumption of the a priori nature of these values: "an ethics of value expressly includes the concept of ethos and the changing forms it takes, however, it cannot escape the inherent consequence of its methodological claim to intuit a priori systems of value" (Gadamer, 2007, 283).

[13] Here my reading of Gadamer's attitude to Kant's ethics differs from the views expressed by Andrzej Przyłębski, who does not consider this attitude as critical at all. Of course, it is undeniable that Gadamer sees in Kant's ethics various interesting elements, which do not correspond with its formalism. Yet, I believe that the author of *Critique of Pure Reason* is Gadamer's main antagonist in his reflections on the issue of ethics. Cf. A. Przyłębski, *Etyka w świetle...* op. cit., p. 129.

Therefore, by assuming that it is possible to "progress" in elucidation of the a priori nature of the ethical values, these ethics contradict the initial assumption of the aprioricity – that is, the immutability – of that nature. In their view, a priori meaning of the ethical values may vary depending on the progressive analysis, because under its influence the ethical consciousness itself changes. Meanwhile, according to Gadamer, the ethical phenomenon due to its close relationship with a particular practical situation, has a historical quality. It corresponds to the historicity of the human way of Being, therefore any attempt to formulate fixed ethical norms and a priori values with a universal status simply ignores this initial situation. This aporeia may be avoided only by a concept of ethics which rejects such way of proceeding and has a quality of "practical knowledge."

By abandoning the idea of "ethical values" granted a priori, such ethics assumes a circularity of the relationship between ethical consciousness and socio-cultural situation which has formed this consciousness. Thus, the ethics has a historical quality, since it is determined by the circle of mutual implication between the notions of good and morality formed in the cultural tradition of a given community and personal sensitivity of man to what is good and decent in life. Gadamer believes that the prototype for the construction of such model of ethics may be found in the notion of ethos proposed by Aristotle, without any a priori concept of value, placing the main emphasis instead on such notions as "virtue" and "good." These concepts, inherited through the cultural traditions and instilled in each person by the environment, make up the particular "ethos" that is the basis of one's actions:

> The concept of ethos with which he began makes precisely this explicit: "virtue" does not consist merely in knowledge, for the possibility of knowing depends, to the contrary, on what a person is like, and the being of each one is formed beforehand through his or her education and way of life.
>
> (Gadamer, 2007, 284)

In the case of ethical actions, no knowledge about goodness may exist detached from one's upbringing – it is decisively defined by it. This is why Aristotelian concept of ethos is more acceptable then the concepts of timeless ethical values created by the various theories of the twentieth century ethics. This is because it takes into account the "upbringing" of an individual accomplished within the scope of historical tradition, when a particular social environment instills in one "prejudices" about the good and evil. Compared to this approach, the weakness of the ethics implying a priori nature of ethical values and standards lies in the fact that in their ideal generality these concepts have been artificially abstracted from the particular historical relationship in which ideas of good and evil normally function. Whereas, the Aristotelian concept of ethos implies a kind of universality which makes space for such relation, since it is, in a sense, its product. It is a universality that is not the product of the theoretical mind, but a sediment of the ancient historical experience of a given community, which remains closely connected with the tradition which determines it.

The "superiority" of Aristotle's ethics over a number of nineteenth-century conceptions of ethics, in Gadamer's view, is based on this fact, whether maintained in the

spirit of Kant, or Scheler, or Hartmann. A common feature of the latter ideas – maintained despite the profound differences between them – is their disregard of the role of the understanding of ethos, specific to Aristotle, for the ethical phenomenon. The peculiarity of this concept is determined by the fact that for Aristotle it remains closely connected with the concept of phronesis:

> His [Aristotle's] analysis of *phronesis* recognizes that moral knowledge is a way of moral being itself, which therefore cannot be prescinded from the whole concretion of what he calls ethos. Moral knowledge discerns what needs to be done, what a situation requires; and it discerns what is doable on the basis of a conviction that the concrete situation is related to what is considered right and proper in general.
>
> (Gadamer, 2007, 284)

The advantage of such a "universality" of ethos is its greater "flexibility" and openness in facing the specific situation to which it must "relate." The ethos is substantiated in society only when it accommodates the specific peculiar quality of this situation as historically determined. This in turn implies that all particular elements that make up this dimension are equally constitutive for the ethical. And ultimately it is these two "qualitatively" different moments that constitute the specific model of *phronesis*: "Moral knowledge does not climax in courage, justice, and so on, but rather in the concrete application that determines in the light of such knowledge what should be done here and now" (Gadamer, 2007, 285).

If, however, Gadamer is just as critical as Heidegger of any attempt to build ethics on the notion of universally valid standards and ethical values, discovered in all their ideal alikeness by the philosophical mind through rigorous analysis, at the same time his critique is based on a very different kind of argumentation than used by the author of the "Letter on 'Humanism'." According to the latter, such version of the ethical phenomenon was a manifestation of a tendency to objectify Being, characterizing the modern and contemporary man. However, in Gadamer's eyes, this takes place due to a departure from the model of knowledge as phronesis, in favor of considering all ethical issues within the model of theoretical knowledge. Such "theoretical" approach to ethics is, in his view, not only particular to post-ancient times and later periods. It was present already in Plato, who – like Kant later – emphasized the authoritarian nature of moral law ("ideas"), imposed on the subject with intolerant ruthlessness.

As a result, Gadamer replaces Heidegger's rather awkward argumentation with considerations in which the question of the metaphysical foundation of the "ethical values" is not seen within the scheme of sharp dichotomy where one binary consists of metaphysical concepts of ethics formulated from the perspective of "oblivion of being" and the second binary is represented by "ethics" contained in the very contemplation of the truth of Being which requires man to properly "dwell" on the earth and testify its truth in the semi-poetic words.

Instead, the author of *Truth and Method* indicates various tensions and divergences between the most significant concepts of ethics in the metaphysical tradition, some of

which are closer to Aristotle's model of knowledge as *phronesis*, while others are nearer Plato's and Kant's models, albeit considerably reformulating them (e.g. ethics grown out of phenomenology and neo-Kantianism). Curiously, Gadamer does not consider these models to be mutually exclusive, but sees them as even complementary in some measure.

At the same time, he is clearly much closer to the first model which captures the abovementioned doubly circular structure of the ethical phenomenon. In this phenomenon on the one hand, "universality" of moral judgments is inseparable from the historical relation which shaped it (upbringing, tradition), on the other hand it is predetermined to take account of the actual circumstances of action. Therefore the motive of an ethical action cannot be formulated in advance as some commandment or a standard of behavior with discernible "content," but has a form of a "general" reference point, open to all kinds of concretizations:

> That which we consider right, which we affirm or reject, follows from our general ideas about what is good and right. It achieves its real determinacy, nevertheless, only from the concrete reality of the case. This is not a case of applying a universal rule. Just the opposite: it is the real thing we are concerned with, and for this the generic forms of the virtues and the structure of the "mean" that Aristotle points out in them offer only a vague schema.
>
> (Gadamer, 2007, 285)

This "vague schema," which determines ethical action is precisely the "generality" mentioned above, impossible to be conceptually identified because of its very nature. However, this vagueness or openness allows it to be "relevant" for the concrete situation of action (which confirms it in a way), through which it receives finally its particular meaning. This meaning becomes a peculiar "synthesis" of the "vaguely" general and the particularly defining for a given situation.

Interestingly, this openness or "vagueness" of "universality," which navigates each ethical act, in Gadamer's view eliminates any difference between the philosopher contemplating the ethical phenomenon and the ordinary mortals, who attempt to navigate their actions in accordance with ideas of "virtuous" life acquired through education. In this aspect as well the approach of the author of *Truth and Method* to the ethical phenomenon considerably diverges from Heideggerian idea:

> Thus it is *phronesis* – the virtue enabling one to hit upon the mean and achieve the concretization – which shows that something can be done, not some faculty special to philosophers. On the contrary, those who deliberate on what is good and right in general see themselves as referring to this practical logos just like everyone else who has to put their ideas of what is good and right into action.
>
> (Gadamer, 2007, 285-286)

Thus, it is not the glorious truth of Being/language revealed to the solitary thinker wandering through the paths of Black Forest, but a "practical *logos*" shared with others

that designates the horizon of the ethical phenomenon. This *logos* in itself is nothing extraordinary, but it is something experienced daily and certified through acts of life:

> [Ethics] is not at all a knowing in general, a knowing at a distance, which would in fact conceal what the concrete situation calls for, like the priest and the Levite's sense of fidelity to the law by contrast to the Good Samaritan's. The universal, the generic, that can be expressed only in a philosophical inquiry dedicated to conceptual universality is in fact not essentially different from what guides the usual, completely untheoretical sense of norms present in every deliberation on moral practice.
>
> (Gadamer, 2007, 287)

Some may consider Gadamer's argument in which he blurs the line between ethics as a kind of theoretical knowledge, achieved through reflection and analysis of the various real-life situations, and the ethical phenomenon as it manifests itself in these situations, a scandalous premise. However, it simply represents the hermeneutic development of the various implications inherent in Aristotle's ethics, which was based on the model of *phronesis*. Therefore, its "archetype" appeared at the very roots of European metaphysical tradition, even though the approach to ethical issue implicit in it has since been almost entirely ignored.

HERMENEUTIC ETHICS AND A SITUATION OF ETHICAL ACTION

This model of ethics, departing from Platonic belief in the authoritarian ideas irresistibly imposing themselves on man in their "pure" idealized form, may be called, paraphrasing Vattimo's famous definition, "weak" ethics. Instead of relying on the assumption of a vertical relationship between the ethical world of human activities and ideas that determine them ("categorical imperatives," "values," "standards," etc.) which may be identified in idealized form, this version of ethics places these "ideas" alongside the human activities taking place in a specific cultural and social context. As a result, it resolves that in a practical situation of action they are just as accessible to philosophers professionally dealing with the problem of ethics, as to the little ones often entirely ignorant of ethics thus understood.[14]

Another important feature of this "weak" ethics is the fact that it resists easy abstraction of the ethical phenomenon out of the particular situation of human action, consisting of various components. Naturally a whole range of questions arise with regard to this perspective of the ethical phenomenon, which must remain outside the framework of the present paper. Therefore, in conclusion of this inquiry I would like to merely indicate the astonishing parallelism apparent in Gadamer's texts between the way in which he treats the issue of ethics and his diagnosis of the condition of understanding and interpretation of cultural products brought to us by tradition. His use of this analogy is justified by the acknowledgement that in both cases the model that best describes the relation between

[14] It is not accidental that Gadamer in the essay cited above criticizes Max Scheler, who, answering a question of how he manages to reconcile the lofty ethical slogans with his behavior towards the wives of his colleagues, famously said that the road sign does not need to go in the direction it indicates.

particular elements constructing the condition of understanding and interpretation is the Aristotelian *phronesis*. Interpreter's exigency to make sense of the meaning of cultural products passed on by tradition, the strangeness of which he must overcome, is constructed in a way similar to the exigency of an individual to make sense of ethical requirements of a given situation, when he acts in his specific situation. In this sense, a situation that would be typical for a hermeneutic scholar making an attempt to answer in his own interpretation questions posted by the testimonials of tradition, has something of a "practical" nature of the ethical phenomenon as formulated by the author of *Nicomachean Ethics*. Thus, according to Gadamer, this approach, by virtue of being essentially a response to the question of possibility of moral philosophy, applies equally to the key issues faced by hermeneutics. To this question he answered that ethics as it is practiced by philosophers

> is only a theoretical enterprise, and that anything said by way of a theoretic description of the forms of right living can be at best of little help when it comes to the concrete application to the human experience of life. And yet the universal desire to know does not break off at the point where concrete practical discernment is the decisive issue. The connection between the universal desire to know and concrete practical discernment is a reciprocal one. So it appears to me that heightened theoretic awareness about the experience of understanding and the practice of understanding, like philosophical hermeneutics and one's own self-understanding, are inseparable.
>
> (Gadamer, 2004, 245)

However, the problem is that this "structural" analogy between the typical procedure of hermeneutic condition of understanding and interpretation of the testimonials of the past and the situation of ethical action remains... just that – an analogy. So even if the conclusion that the first situation always immanently includes the ethical dimension is justified, it does not follow that this dimension is constituted in the same manner as in the case of ethical action, in which the main point of reference is benefit of the Other. In other words, even if my method of understanding of a cultural product, consistent with the requirement of interpretative adequacy imposed on me by the model of *phronesis* (i.e., the requirement of relating to the meaning of this product addressing me), contains a specific ethical postulate, it has an entirely different weight and scale compared with the situation of my action towards the other, in which his good is at stake.

In the latter case, I must, firstly, conform to certain ethical "universality" shaped by tradition, and, secondly, relate in my action to the "living" other, and not to the "virtual" author of a text. This gives special ethical importance to my proceedings, substantially different compared to a situation when the ethical postulate is strictly limited to the realm of hermeneutic understanding and interpretation of what is said by the other. Of course, this does not mean that between the two attitudes there are no correlations (for instance, the way in which I relate to the meaning of the other's statement may naturally affect my behavior towards him in a particular situation). However, in this case as well these two aspects of the ethical phenomenon should be clearly distinguished from each other; that is, the strictly hermeneutic aspect related to the condition of understanding of the Other,

and the existentially-individual aspect, connected with a particular behavior towards him. And if so, the ethical dimension included (undeniably) in the hermeneutic understanding of the testimonials of tradition cannot be equated with "weak" ethics of Aristotle's brand, based on knowledge as *phronesis.* It is, at best, only its very approximate paraphrase.

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Piotr Augustyniak

"THEOLOGIA GERMANICA" AS A CRITIQUE OF THE MODERN LIFESTYLE

The subject of this article is *Theologia Germanica*[1], an anonymous mystic treatise of extraordinary depth and great importance for the development of the German intellectual tradition. The treatise's argument leads towards two basic conclusions. The first is that the recognition of individual human identity as a separate, autonomous, finite being – described as the Self or the Me which illegitimately appropriates and spans all – is false and synonymous with sin. The second conclusion contrasts this representation with a vision of personality rooted in divine being [wesen] (unified, infinite being).[2] However, the present discussion will not be dealing with these issues, but it will rather focus on what follows and becomes apparent from the subsequent part of the treatise. There we find something that is the true subject of my interest: a radical critique of a way of life that may be called liberal or individualistic and that clearly looks forward to what will become the hallmark of the modern self-understanding of the human subject.

The focus of this discussion will therefore be *Theologia Germanica* seen as one of the sources of the modern critique of consumer society centered on self-fulfillment. Moreover, I intend to demonstrate that the treatise in no way anticipates the anti-modern attitude, but rather it is seeking for an alternative formula for the budding self-awareness of the modern subject emerging out of the limitations of the feudal world. This means that *Theologia Germanica*, if I may venture to say so, both criticizes modernity and is at the vanguard of modern theory, in a fashion quite characteristic of the German philosophical tradition.

This individualistic, proto-modern way of being is described in *Theologia Germanica* as a careless dwelling in earthly temporality, characteristic of the adherents of a false ontology which believes in multiple autonomous, separate beings. "A life of carelessness and freedom is to nature and the Self and the Me, the sweetest and pleasantest

[1] All citations from *Theologia Germanica* refer to the following edition: *Theologia Germanica,* Golden Treasury Series, ed. D.Peiffer, trans. S. Winkworth, Grand Rapids 1996. The citations will indicate the chapter number in this edition.

[2] I explain this in more detail in my book: P. Augustyniak, *Istnienie jest Bogiem, ja jest grzechem. Theologia Deutsch i początki niemieckiej filozofii,* Warsaw 2013. This paper almost in its entirety is included in the above monograph.

life."[3] This carefree way of life derives from human complacency, not to say – narcissism. It relates to those who consider themselves spiritually accomplished which makes them light-hearted and carefree (they uncritically affirm and adore themselves and the world in which they are settled so comfortably): "Behold! now it is reported there be some who vainly think and say that they are so wholly dead to self and quit of it, as to have reached and abide in a state where they suffer nothing and are moved by nothing, (...) thus they profess to continue always in an even temper of mind, so that nothing cometh amiss to them."[4] As a result, these people take credit for any good that they help to bring about, at the same time considering any evil to be alien to themselves, excluding the possibility that they may be the cause of it. Therefore, we are dealing here with a type of man who "will excuse himself for sin, by refusing to take what is evil unto himself, and laying the guilt thereof upon the Evil Spirit."[5] People of this sort believe that even if they still lack something in terms of their own perfection, they are nevertheless capable of eventually achieving it due to their own efforts, that is – due to their talents and curiosity, or more precisely: "by much questioning, or by hearsay, or by reading and study, nor yet by high skill and great learning".[6]

The author of *Theologia Germanica* is describing the type of man who "clingeth (...) above all to himself, and holdeth converse with [himself]," and therefore "is deceived and blinded" because he "perceiveth what is good no further than as it is most convenient and pleasant to himself and profitable to his own ends."[7] Every exhortation to rise above himself, just as Christ has risen above the vision of the Self, makes such a man feel "a horror" and therefore he "thinketh it evil."[8] In short, such a person wants to make his / her life "comfortable and pleasant (...) and taketh enjoyment in [itself] and [its] own powers, and looketh only to [its] own peace and comfort and the like."[9] At the same time such a man is convinced of his divine status. "Yea, now I am above all other men, and know and understand more than any one in the world; therefore it is certainly just and reasonable that I should be the lord and commander of all creatures, and that all creatures, and especially all men, should serve me and be subject unto me."[10]

To demonstrate to what extent this image of a carefree and liberal life anticipates the critique of the modern society of self-fulfillment and consumerism, we need to go no further than compare it with the assessment of this society by Friedrich Nietzsche, probably the most radical of all the nineteenth-century German critics of modernity. The excessively worldly way of life described in *Theologia Germanica* is strongly reminiscent of Nietzsche's vision of "the last man." To demonstrate this, we must first recapitulate the features that characterize this lifestyle according to the author of *Theologia Germanica*. These are as follows: (1) A belief in an individualistic ontology, the essence of which is

[3] *Theologia Germanica*, p. 18.
[4] Ibid., p. 17.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid., p. 19.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid., p. 20.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid., p. 25.

exemplified by the categories of the Self and the Me, or in other words – by the negation of the idea of the world as a dynamic embodiment of the all-encompassing Divine Being, replaced instead by an image of numerous separate things-in-themselves. The practical consequence of this replacement is a perception of oneself as an end in itself, coupled with the unawareness of one's dependencies and of one's secondary role in relation to the dynamism of *wesen* that surpasses the individual aspect. This in turn is manifested as: (2) aspiration to unrestricted freedom in life and carefree pursuit of pleasure and comfort in life; (3) an almost boundless faith in one's own capabilities, skills and talents (and intellectual abilities in particular), as well as in the unlimited power of human knowledge; (4) an uncritical attitude towards oneself and narcissistic complacency; (5) a far-reaching inability to see anything of value and importance beyond oneself (one's own good and advantage). (6) These opinions result in a conviction that one is at the very heart of the universe, that one is entitled to everything (autodeification). Finally, these culminate in (7) a desire and a capacity to make oneself securely comfortable in life, mainly by rejecting any difficult and unpleasant aspects of life which might make it dangerous and unmanageable.

All these qualities can easily be found in the Nietzschean description of the last man. (1) Zarathustra is an "advocate of life,"[11] prophesying that the world is immersed in a river of becoming. To him life is an all-encompassing ontological dynamism in which mutual belonging and unity is prior to any distinctions[12]: "Everything breaketh, everything is integrated anew; eternally buildeth itself the same house of existence."[13] The last men, however, deny the truth about this eternal flux. "»What?« say the simpletons, »all in flux? Planks and railings are still over the stream!«." For them, those planks and railings are the "heavy words and worths: »good« and »evil«."[14] In the thought of the last man the place of dynamic unity is thus usurped by a plurality of separate beings, each of which is an autonomous entity, or the Me, which, of course, appalls Zarathustra: "The main idea! [Hauptgedanke!] It is not nature that deceives us, the individuals, and furthers her goals through deceiving us: rather the individuals explain all of existence according to individual, that is false, criteria; we want to be just and consequently »nature« [die Natur] must appear as a »deceiver« [die Betrugerin]. In truth there are no individual truths, but rather individual errors; the individual itself is an error."[15]

Thus, the last man perceives a world in which, as an autonomous entity, he is a goal to himself: "All beings hitherto have created something beyond themselves: and ye want to be the ebb of that great tide"[16] and thus (2) one is to seek only one's own convenience and pleasure: the last men "have left the regions where it is hard to live; for they need warmth." At the same time, the last men are (3) full of cynical conceit in their own knowledge and wisdom: "They are clever and know all that hath happened: so there is no end to their raillery." They also (4) exhibit a narcissistic complacency and uncritical

[11] F. Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zaratustra,* ed. J. Manis, trans. T. Common, Hazleton 1999, p. 128.
[12] I have written on this aspect more extensively in: P. Augustyniak, *Inna Boskość. Mistrz Eckhart, Zaratustra i przezwyciężenie metafizyki*, Cracow 2009.
[13] Ibid., p. 198.
[14] Ibid., p. 182, 175.
[15] F. Nietzsche, *Nietzschean Narratives*, trans. G. Shapiro, Indiana 1989, p. 92.
[16] F. Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zaratustra*, op. cit., p. 22. Unmarked citations further – p. 26-27.

self-adoration: "»We have discovered happiness« – say the last men, and blink thereby." They are (5) incapable of perceiving anything of consequence beyond themselves: "»What is love? What is creation? What is longing? What is a star?« – so asketh the last man and blinketh." And the result of the above is a parody of autodeification (6): "The earth hath then become small, and on it there hoppeth the last man who maketh everything small. His species is ineradicable like that of the ground-flea; the last man liveth longest." Not surprisingly, the self-proclaimed god, besides seeking pleasure, must above all avoid hazards and tread "warily" (7): "He is a fool who still stumbleth over stones or men!" He must exterminate any otherness which may remind him of the uncontrollable element of life: "Every one wanteth the same; every one is equal: he who hath other sentiments goeth voluntarily into the madhouse."

This unmistakable similarity between the careless and free life as it is described in *Theologia Germanica* and the Nietzschean image of the last man is both intriguing and disturbing, because the people who, according to the author of *Theologia Germanica*, lead such a life are by no means the ordinary citizens of late medieval Rhineland, indifferent to any deeper religious commitment, who might be considered as precursors of the modern "middle class," focused on self-enrichment and worldly pleasures. These were the people criticized by Meister Eckhart for their quotidian lifestyle when he wrote that they see material goods only: "Alas, how many are there who adore a shoe, a cow, or any other creature, and for whom this is their only concern. How foolish they are!"[17] However, the author of *Theologia Germanica* does not attribute this manner of thinking and being to the "regular," down-to-earth materialists, preoccupied with temporal matters, but to the followers of the free spirit heresy, that undeniable (however illegitimate) spiritual vanguard of his times.

The fact that they are the main target of *Theologia Germanica*'s attack can be learned already from the preface in which it stated clearly that the enemy to be resisted and overcome is the "false and unjust" religion of the free spirits.[18] Although the Brethren of the free spirit were mostly of secular origin, they were not just ordinary folks of contemporary Western Europe, but its spiritual elite. I am talking about the Beghards, semi-monks and adherents of radical asceticism – a movement focused on evangelical poverty, and thus by definition distancing itself from the attitude of pursuing worldly pleasures – and Beguines, their female spiritual counterparts, also secular, and yet leading a similarly ascetic life. The author of *Theologia Germanica* is targeting them, and not the regular non-religious or superficially religious secular majority (merely observing external forms), as those convinced of their spiritual perfection (equality with God), by which they claimed the right to lead a life free from the observance of external laws and regulations, such as the sacraments, moral principles, social conventions etc. Unlike them, ordinary laymen were incapable of such radical inner emancipation. They regarded outward obedience either as a necessary evil, i.e. an unwarranted coercion and burthen to which one must submit (most likely, out of fear of punishment after death), or – more positively – as a task to be

[17] Meister Eckhart, *Wandering Joy: Meister Eckhart's Mystical Philosophy*, trans. R. Schürmann, Great Barrington 2001, p. 59.
[18] *Theologia Germanica*, "Preface".

performed for which the "God-cow" (as Eckhart called their image of God) would grant them temporal and later eternal reward. "But ye must mark: There are four sorts of men who are concerned with order, laws, and customs. Some keep them neither for God's sake, nor to serve their own ends, but from constraint: these have as little to do with them as may be, and find them a burden and heavy yoke. The second sort obey for the sake of reward: these are men who know nothing beside, or better than, laws and precepts, and imagine that by keeping them they may obtain the kingdom of Heaven and Eternal Life, and not otherwise. (...) The third sort are wicked, false-hearted men, who dream and declare that they are perfect and need no ordinances, and make a mock of them."[19] (For the moment let us not comment on the fourth type of people, as according to the author of *Theologia Germanica* their way of life is a positive alternative to the ways of the Brethren of the Free Spirit, and this issue will be discussed in the final section of this paper.)

Free Spirits are those among the Beguines and Beghards who, having rejected the attitude of "ordinary" laymen (the first and second group mentioned in the above quotation) and having devoted themselves to long-term radical asceticism and evangelical poverty, experience some sort of inner illumination which gives them a sense of becoming one with God, or even a feeling of "becoming God,"[20] and thus a conviction of absolute inner freedom and sinlessness, even while they indulge in sexual libertinism and other moral transgressions. According to Norman Cohn, it was commonly believed among them that "for the »subtle in spirit« sexual intercourse cannot under any circumstances be sinful. And it was held that one of the surest marks of the »subtle in spirit« was, precisely, the ability to indulge in promiscuity without fear of God or qualms of conscience."[21] This attitude led them to believe themselves to be the elite of humanity and feel nothing but contempt for the ignorant: "the Free Spirits hold them in derision, and say that they cleave unto weak and beggarly elements, and the like."[22] As Cohn writes, the newly enlightened "adept of the Free Spirit (...) felt like some infinitely privileged aristocrat."[23] They were transformed – or at least asserted their right to do so – from ascetics to promiscuous epicureans, focusing on consumption and hedonistic self-indulgence. For the newly enlightened Free Spirit, "vigils were at an end, it was right to sleep in a soft bed. There was no more fasting; henceforth the body must be nourished on the finest meats and wines, and no feast was of greater spiritual value than to partake of Eucharist. A golden goblet was now a more appropriate gift than a crust of bread. The outward bearing and appearance of the heretic was changed. (...) the Brethren of the Free Spirit did in fact dress as nobles. (...) a heretic symbolized his transformation from the »lowest of mortals« into a member of an elite which believed itself entitled to dominate the world."[24]

Cohn argues that the sect of the Brethren of the Free Spirit, called by him "an elite of amoral supermen," clearly prefigured what was to take place in modern society.

[19] Ibid., p. 39.
[20] N. Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages,* Oxford 1970, p. 181.
[21] Ibid., p. 179-180.
[22] *Theologia Germanica*, 39.
[23] N. Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, op. cit., p. 178.
[24] Ibid., p. 178-179.

"They were in fact gnostics intent upon their own individual salvation; but the gnosis at which they arrived was a quasi-mystical anarchism – an affirmation of freedom (...) that amounted to a total denial of every kind of restraint and limitation."[25] I agree with Cohn that this anarchism is to be understood as an extreme form of individualism which is easily transformed into a social and moral rebellion. I also concur with his opinion that the views of the Free Spirits and "their creed of total emancipation" constituted "the only thoroughly revolutionary social doctrine that existed [at the time]." Unlike Cohn, I do not think that this rebellion and this emancipation anticipated the reckless desire of a later self-proclaimed spiritual elite to negate and revolutionize the philistine society of the last men. (That is what Cohn seems to be claiming when he writes that the Brethren of the Free Spirit "could be regarded as remote precursors of Bakunin and of Nietzsche – or rather of that bohemian intelligentsia which during the last half-century has been living from ideas once expressed by Bakunin and Nietzsche in their wilder moments," therefore considering them congenial to those who through their anarchist opposition triggered the revolution of the national socialists.) I am convinced that we are dealing here not with an adumbration of the Nietzschean idea of the superman, but rather with a prefiguration of the last man and, at the same time, with a symbolic description of his origins. The individual, striving at first for genuine emancipation, is ultimately reduced to a consumerist, hedonistic self-indulgence. We may even say that the Free Spirits are the ancestors of the modern, rebellious masses which – like the Nietzschean superman – emancipate themselves from all social or moral restrictions. However, unlike the superman, they do so not for the sake of radical creativity and overcoming the self (after all, as Nietzsche says, the superman continually overcomes himself[26], becoming a creative child, free of any ressentiment)[27], but for the sake of vulgar self-deification, or in other words – in order to allow themselves the appropriation and unconstrained consumption of all tangible and intangible possessions.

Thus, the paramystical movement of the Free Spirits (which co-existed with Rhineland mysticism) heralded the modern inclination towards narcissistic individualism, focused on self-satisfaction and consumption. (By the way, the general civilizational and social processes of the 14th century, which led to the collapse of the feudal system and the gradual emancipation of the urban population, confirm that the origins of modernity are closely tied with the phenomenon of the Free Spirits). The example of the Brethren of the Free Spirit demonstrates that one's focus on individual religious experience may easily turn into individualistic complacency and self-admiration. This occurs when – as a result of ignorance or uncontrolled lust – the false ontology of the Self is not conquered. In other words, the seeming triumph over the Self and openness to the divine *wesen* in practice leads to such a vision of oneness with God which entails a deification of one's own mortified and humbled, but still unconquered Self, seeking to be reborn and finally liberated.

It is due to his dispute with the progressivism of the Free Spirits – who are, it seems, an anticipation of the Nietzschean "last men" – that the author of *Theologia Germanica* can be viewed as the ancestor of the modern German critique of modernity. Modern not

[25] Ibid., p.148. Unmarked citations further – ibid.
[26] Cf. F. Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zaratustra*, op.cit., p. 19.
[27] Cf. Ibid, p. 20.

in the sense that it criticizes everything new, but because it attempts to root the (irrevocably) modern individual in the irrevocably modern world in a way that would go beyond consumption and superficial "self-fulfillment." According to the author of *Theologia Germanica* this may be possible through *imitatio Christi*.

For those who cultivate the Self and therefore indulge in temporal pleasures the life of Christ must seem quite repulsive. It is "to nature and selfishness the bitterest life. A life of carelessness and freedom is to nature and the Self and the Me, the sweetest and pleasantest life."[28] Meanwhile, *Theologia Germanica*'s argument suggests that the life of Christ, so revolting to the newfangled man, is characterized by features that not only may and should be attractive from the point of view of modernity, but – more importantly – can be properly understood and fully appreciated only in a world where man's individuality retains a priority over his belonging to a group. They are intended precisely for such a world. This is suggested by the fact that it was not a way of life which would demand a withdrawal from the world, or contempt for mundane problems and for secular life in general. On the contrary, the imitation of Christ entails such behavior which aspires to cope with the quotidian, without avoiding its challenges. As radical as this transformation may be, "such a man hath liberty as to his outward walk and conversation, so long as they consist with what must be or ought to be."[29]

The most important thing, however, is that being a disciple of Christ entails changing entirely our perception of our desires by freeing us from the Self. One may say that the modern man is averse to the classic formula of Christian life because it involves surrendering one's will to the extraneous will of God, represented by the will of the institution of the Church, i.e. by the various ritual and behavioral requirements set before man by the community to which he belongs. Of course, as long as the pre-modern way of life and its understanding was still current, there was no apparent conflict whatsoever. This was because the individual will was perceived as something profoundly infantile or – if one may say so – was entirely suppressed by the collective superego. But when the individual will began to free itself from the superego's influence (in the simultaneous process of emancipation and maturation), signaling the approach of a new era, the conflict became clear and confrontation was inevitable. For the modern character any perspective of obedience to an external authority, or of a consistent, irreversible and unconditional renunciation of one's own aspirations, must induce a feeling of continuous self-denial, unbearable loss, unfair restraint and of being deprived of the rights which are granted to us by the mere fact that we are human.

However, the example of Christ demonstrates that obedience, understood as an internal act, is something entirely different. It is based not on the relationship of subordination of the Self to some external power, but on the inner transformation of the former (or, more precisely, it is a question not so much of transforming the Self, as of fulfilling its secret truth). This in turn leads to a discovery that the seemingly external will of God is in fact a more profound dimension of one's own will. It is a matter of giving oneself up to God's being in such radical devotion that God's desire becomes synonymous with

[28] *Theologia Germanica*, p. 18.
[29] Ibid., p. 21.

one's own desire: "Where the Truth always reigneth, so that true perfect God and true perfect man are at one, and man so giveth place to God, that God Himself is there and yet the man too, and this same unity worketh continually, and doeth and leaveth undone without any I, and Me, and Mine, and the like."[30] This may be all the more appealing to modern man, since what is described here is not the inner voice of the father (i.e. the internalized will of an external authority), which would be equivalent to the demands of the superego, but a more profound dimension of the individual will – it is that to which the being-*wesen* of every man aspires, that to which every man was predisposed: his true, more profound selfhood.

The imitation of Christ as an alternative way of being a modern individual is therefore based on the belief that what we call "God's will" is in fact the genuine will of man, as well as the collective and single will of being (not a will to be, but the being's will and its very dynamics). Radical self-absorption, however, obscures the fact that anyone who, like Christ, is able to find God's will within himself is not less of a man, but more so, precisely because he finally fulfills the essence of his being. Such a man is not stifled in his individuality, but is at peace with himself, rooted in the world and able to participate fully in every aspect of life: "there is true perfect manhood, so there is a perfect perceiving and feeling of pleasure and pain, liking and disliking, sweetness and bitterness, joy and sorrow, and all that can be perceived and felt within and without. And seeing that God is here made man, He is also able to perceive and feel love and hatred, evil and good and the like."[31]

This aspect of Christ's humanity should no doubt be seen as something that answers the requirements of modernity. Moreover, it is only within its temporal boundaries, within the realm of modern expectations and necessities, that we may comprehend this deeply humanizing aspect of submitting to the will of God as to one's own, inner (true and profound) dynamics of desire.

The proto-modern Free Spirits discovered something quite true, namely – that ontologically speaking they were all Christs (abiding in ontological unity with God). What they could not appreciate was how this being-as-Christ was fulfilled in the life of Jesus.

[30] Ibid., p. 24.
[31] Ibid.

Piotr Graczyk

MATERIALIST HISTORY OF IDEAS. WARSAW – FRANKFURT – PARIS

The world of meaning and the world of being are one and the same.
Bruno Latour

1. The list of cities in the title should actually be preceded by Trier, as a presumed birthplace of the history of ideas interpreted in a specifically materialistic way. However, the "materialism" I'm referring to is not an ontic term, that is – it does not refer to some characteristic aspect of being, but rather is a logical term – it refers to the historical and dialectic aspect of ideas. This materialism states that ideas – not individual ideas, but entire constellations of ideas, contradictory, mobile and internally conflicting constellations – are a *product*, the result of production. Their emergence is based on labor, and labor, in one way or another, is connected with the body, and thus it engages in us something that is finite, random and incomplete; puts us in touch with a radically heterogeneous element, impenetrable by thought. A laboring body is vulnerable to pain and this is a factor which puts any project at risk. Thus, the body implies unreliability, fallibility, uncertainty – it is the opposite of everything that is calculable *more geometrico*. Embodied labor, the process of material production – understood very broadly as the manufacture of the world, life, society and nature – is also the origin of ideas. Therefore, ideas do not inhabit some kind of transcendental realm and are not passed on to us in an unchanging form; ideas cannot be reached through contemplation – unless we perceive contemplation as yet another kind of labor, one that is quite advanced technologically and becomes possible only at a higher stage of social development. Ideas emerge due to one's exertion, action, communication, life with and among others. The term "history of ideas," crucial for the line of thought I wish to outline, can be found in its explicit form in the *Communist Manifesto*. It states: "man's consciousness, changes with every change in the conditions of his material existence, in his social relations and in his social life," and further: "what else does the history of ideas prove, than that intellectual production changes its character in proportion as material production is changed?"[1]

[1] K. Marx, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, trans. S. Moore and F. Engels, 1888. Marxists Internet Archive (marxists.org) 1987, 2000, 2010, p. 25.

2. As the next step, the *Manifesto* outlines the history of ideas thus understood. First, we learn that the ideas which are predominant in a society are always the ideas of the ruling classes. However, they undergo disintegration: in an old society the embryo of the new one always emerges. "When the ancient world was in its last throes, the ancient religions were overcome by Christianity. When Christian ideas succumbed in the 18th century to rationalist ideas, feudal society fought its death battle with the then revolutionary bourgeoisie. The ideas of religious liberty and freedom of conscience merely gave expression to the sway of free competition within the domain of knowledge."[2] This last comment in particular is especially inspiring: the authors of the Manifesto suggest that ideas in a free-market society must become "free" in the same sense in which the hired workers are "free" – the freedom of both is in fact a necessary aspect of their final transformation into a commodity. A slave or a serf can afford the luxury of waiting for his master's orders; a free hired worker must himself find a master for himself, must himself ensure that he gets his orders, must on his own initiative convert himself into an attractive slave, shaping his very thoughts, emotions and his bodily abilities (and even his outward appearance) according to the requirements – otherwise, he will not survive. The same applies to ideas in a free-market society: from the very beginning they should take into account their marketability, shaping themselves in such a way as to seem attractive, to meet the conditions of the marketplace of current ideas. Those who control the market of ideas are called by the authors of the *Manifesto* "the ruling class."

3. The above version of the history of ideas may of course be read in the spirit of crude naturalism: being precedes consciousness, matter precedes idea. Such naturalism, however – even though Marx seems to lean toward it in some of his later texts – is in fact also a kind of idealism, an "ahistorical, abstract point of thought,"[3] as Stanislaw Brzozowski writes, according to which the things are material in their essence; the real world – as an idea – is nature; societies are born on the foundation of processes in the natural world, using concepts to establish their domination over nature. Brzozowski attributed this type of naturalistic interpretation of the Marxist history of ideas to Engels. Brzozowski himself was the author of *Anti-Engels* – a text which he declared to be the starting point for the philosophy of historical maturity – i.e. of a conscious and active attitude to history, achieving precision unattainable on the basis of modernist critical theories, including Marx's own. Brzozowski's philosophy, fervent, intense and impassioned, practiced throughout his short life, seems to me an anticipation and an unsurpassed model for the historians of the Warsaw school of ideas, created at Warsaw University in the critical year of 1956. However, I am not talking here about direct historical consequence: the disciples of Kołakowski could not be simply assumed to be the followers of Brzozowski, although they often expressed respect and admiration for him. What I mean is, rather, that the interpretation of the thought of the Warsaw school of the history of ideas in the light of Brzozowski's theoretical intentions seems to be very productive. And I do not only have in mind the period in Brzozowski's thought when he declared his greatest proximity to Marxism

[2] Ibid., p. 25-26
[3] S. Brzozowski, *Idee. Wstęp do filozofii dojrzałości dziejowej*, Cracow 1990, p. 72.

(e.g. in *Historical Materialism as a Philosophy of Culture*) – although it would probably be easy to point out similarities between such texts as "Epigenetic Theory of History"[4] and Kołakowski's essays included in *Culture and Fetishes*.[5] There are even more interesting parallels between Kołakowski's thought and Brzozowski's last writings, particularly his comments on Catholicism from *The Diary*.[6]

4. Seen from the perspective of *The Diary*, Brzozowski appears to be a post-secular thinker: someone who goes beyond the dispute between the Enlightenment and religion (without taking sides). To him, Catholicism is the epitome of human culture in general – the totality of human culture in its human aspect. In other words, it is directed towards liberation, or – as Brzozowski puts it more precisely – towards liberation from fact,[7] i.e. from the need to submit to any external objective structure which exists independently of human action and labor. Labor can be understood here either as collective work, social labor, or individual labor. Just before his death, Brzozowski had been emphasizing this last aspect in particular: the individual life that is ours while we live from day to day and from hour to hour can be seen as an effort to create a free humanity. Herein lies the superiority of Catholicism over Marxism in Brzozowski's view. The latter is insufficient in its attempt to salvage that which is connected with human isolation and which becomes most strongly felt in illness and death. Catholicism is a kind of Marxism in which a lonely, terminally ill man is not excluded from the human community, i.e. from the labor of culture. Or perhaps the concept of "the collective," introduced by the third hero of the present paper, Bruno Latour, would be more appropriate here than the term "culture." Latour's "collective" is the sum of the products – both objective and subjective – of a certain culture-nature. Catholicism, however, would be a very peculiar collective, capable of recognizing its collective nature and – at the same time – of transcending it. To put differently, Catholicism would represent the earthly (human) truth of man's unearthly (super-human) calling, ensuring that no system of determinants could ultimately be binding to him. This truth is contained, according to Brzozowski, in each of the "partial truths" propounded by Catholicism. Unlike other Christian religions, Catholicism represents the truth of freedom that was made flesh, that is – a freedom that transpired through labor, entered into customs, became part of the institutions, works of art, merged with the landscape of nations which accepted it. Catholicism defines itself as the outcome of the process of the overlaying of traditions; it sates that the meaning of every human act is infinite and that it changes the entire world from the very moment of its incipience. According to the later Brzozowski, Catholicism is the highest freedom combined with the greatest embodiment or "naturalization," by which he meant its functioning in external, objective reality. Catholicism, as Brzozowski states, goes beyond thinking about the superhuman (in which Nietzsche's works find their fulfillment) by "creating superhuman facts."[8] In other words, Catholicism puts great emphasis on the requirement most deeply ingrained in culture, namely – to transcend culture; on

[4] S. Brzozowski, "Epigenetic Theory of History" in: *Idee. Wstęp do filozofii dojrzałości dziejowej,* op. cit.
[5] L. Kołakowski, *Kultura i fetysze,* Warsaw 2009.
[6] S. Brzozowski, *Pamiętnik*, Wrocław 2007.
[7] Cf. ibid., p. 93.
[8] Ibid., p. 44.

the ability most profoundly rooted in tradition to break with tradition, and on the habit of treating tradition merely as a thin shroud thrown over things, a covering that one must tear down in order to find a new beginning. This ability belongs to this, and not the other world, but – as Bruno Latour rightly observed – "this world is not of this world!"[9] At the same time, Brzozowski laments the fact that he cannot believe in the supernatural nature of faith, but sees in it merely the greatest achievement of culture. But perhaps this particular detail is irrelevant, for it seems that the Christian faith is in principle equivalent to despair caused by the impossibility of faith. Without this element of despair faith would become knowledge, and therefore – pride, and hence – unbelief. However, another aspect requires our attention: Brzozowski as a historian of ideas remains an unwavering materialist. "*The word* does not possess any absolute a-historical meanings. However unique, it is always an imperfect and limited creature of life – even if we consider it to be the product of the entire species. Human reality is always relative, underdone, unfinished; there is no such thing as a complete, finished, sealed reality."[10] I believe that all of Kołakowski's later works dealing with the necessity of myth and the need for religion remain within this dualistic perspective: language, culture – the only human reality – is something infinitely incomplete; we need God not because we long to close up this openness of language and culture as mere products of social life, but rather as a constant reminder that their horizon must remain open.

5. We may find similar post-secular themes in the work of the leader of the first Frankfurt School, Adorno. We should remember to take into account his principally Jewish / Protestant background, while also keeping in mind that on his mother's side, and therefore in the musical dimension, which is not immaterial, he did have some contact with Catholicism. His mother, an opera singer, introduced him to the world of music; however, it was Schoeberg, that Moses of dodecaphony, who presided over his maturity – or, perhaps, his immediate teacher, Alban Berg, was also more of a Catholic? Protestantism rejects any intermediaries between man and Scripture, Faith and Grace; it rejects institutionalized virtue. Auschwitz discredited culture as the sphere of mediation. Yet, as Adorno taught, rejecting it now in the name of some unmediated form of experience would be a betrayal: a betrayal of the messianic aspects which can live only within cultural frames. One must not throw away the broken mirrors of culture – after all, we are obliged to be faithful to the hope that springs up even in Beckett's *Endgame*. How may *Endgame* bring hope? By the very fact that it is a play, a moment of self-awareness amidst the chaos of culture, arising from the will of *mimesis*, which – having traversed the boundary of cultural awareness constituted by Auschwitz – is no longer an imitation of the intelligible essence of nature, but rather a shattering of all intelligibility in order to make audible the things silenced and denied by the reason – the stone rejected by the builders. For the late Adorno, art is a parliament of things that come into their own despite totalizing reductions.

[9] B. Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. C. Porter, Cambridge, MA, 1993, p. 138.
[10] S. Brzozowski, *Pamiętnik*, op. cit., p. 77.

6. In *Prince of Networks* Graham Harman wrote of Bruno Latour (whom I had in mind mentioning Paris in the title of this article) that his philosophy derives from his strangely experienced Catholicism, from his admiration of the richness, diversity and irreducibility of creation. Such an understanding of Catholicism may be summed up with a motto from Thomas Aquinas: *concede parum, nega frequenter, distingue semper* (rarely affirm, seldom deny, always distinguish) – everything that exists is worthy of preservation (it appears that the same idea somehow guides the intellectual efforts of Aristotle and Hegel; and in a sense, the Husserlian call "back to the things themselves" may be understood in the same spirit – phenomenology is drawn to Catholicism). Harman cites the magic formula of epiphany conceived by Latour on the road from Dijon: "»Nothing can be reduced to anything else, nothing can be deduced from anything else, everything may be allied to everything else.« This was like an exorcism that defeated demons one by one. It was a wintery sky, and a very blue. I no longer needed to prop it up with cosmology, put it in a picture, render it in writing, measure it in a meteorological article, or place it on a Titan to prevent it falling on my head... It and me, them and us, we mutually defined ourselves. And for the first time in my life I saw things unreduced and set free."[11] Reductionist urges create bad philosophy.

7. Modernity is drawn to reduction. That is, it feels obligated to cut off nature from culture. However, in order to live it cannot acknowledge the reduction that is its own handiwork (this is called by Latour "work of purification"): it must constantly mix together things, people and words and then obliterate the traces of this confusion; it lives by constantly transcending the boundary which it itself announces to be impenetrable, impassable. Actually, modernity is a certain state of hysteria – it is a tendency to sense the abyss whenever one is treading safe ground; it is an unwarranted fear that the sky will fall on our heads unless we somehow uphold it with decontextualized laws of nature or social actions. This kind of hysteria has its consequences. In fear of the lethal cold of infinite space into which we have supposedly been led by modernity (as we are persuaded by our hysterical poets, be it Pascal, Hölderlin, Kafka or Beckett[12]), we tend to use exaggerated measures of remedy. It is in this light that Latour perceives the great crimes of the twentieth century: the Bolshevik Revolution and the national-socialist takeover, as well as the totalitarian systems which grew out of both. Revolutions, in which the moderns believe, are like treating a simple cold with chemotherapy – no wonder that after this sort of treatment we do not feel well. But does that mean that no one has ever suffered from cancer? Of course not, says Latour, but cancer is merely a kind of a very bad cold. This is precisely where Latour's argument becomes implausible: when he insists that "the differences are sizeable [i.e. the differences between modernity and the premodern period], but they are only of size."[13] This sounds more like self-soothing rhetoric.

[11] B. Latour, *Irreductions*, cited in: G. Harman, *Prince of Networks: Bruno Latour and Metaphysics*, Melbourne 2009, p. 13.
[12] For instance, Latour's comment: "A Kafkaesque society cannot be renegotiated" (B. Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern,* op. cit., p. 125) – and therefore we may assume that Latour would exclude Kafka from his collective!
[13] Ibid., p. 108.

8. We have never been modern, Latour says. Both supporters of modernity and its antagonists, for example Heidegger, exaggerate, vexing hysterical: "And yet – »here too the gods are present«: in a hydroelectric plant on the banks of the Rhine, in subatomic particles, in Adidas shoes as well as in the old wooden clogs hollowed out by hand, in agribusiness as well as in timeworn landscapes, in shopkeepers' calculations as well as in Holderlin's heartrending verse."[14] If our creations, just as the creations of the premoderns, always come into existence through a confusion of the natural and the social; in other words, if we constantly cogenerate nature and culture, then this also means that we, just as the premoderns, cannot in fact distinguish signs from things. "For Them [the premoderns], Nature and Society, signs and things are virtually coextensive. For Us they should never be."[15] It is thus that Friedrich Schiller in his essay "On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry" (a text central to modern self-knowledge), separates the naivety of the ancients from the sentimentality of the new poetry: Homer does not differentiate between the sign and the thing, and where Homer walks with self-confidence over safe ground, the new poets perceive a chasm between the sign and its meaning.[16] We have never been modern – does that mean that we have never been sentimental in Schiller's sense of the word? Is sentimentalism only a kind of hysteria which leads to the treating colds with chemotherapy?

9. The abyss that the modern (sentimental) poets see between the sign and the meaning is understood by Schiller to be identical with the gap between reality and the ideal. An ability to perceive this abyss – which swallows up all our words – is also the most important feature of Heidegger's theory of "the oblivion of Being."[17] This idea, as it has been often noted, responds in a certain way to the Marxist idea of alienation (especially in Lukács's version). Alienation is not only the feeling that we've been deprived of something that is ours: for example, that our ideas are not free, or rather – that their freedom is reduced to the most absolute necessity of adapting them in advance to the requirements of the market. Underlying this concept is a more complex theological structure, crucial to a certain type of temporal sensitivity, which in turn allows for a particular kind of historical experience. The experience of alienation is conditioned by faith (the Christian *pistis* as opposed to pagan *episteme*), the belief that beyond the current shape of the world there may be – in the horizontal or historical order, in the future which awaits us in this world – another world, one in which all that has been taken away from us may be recovered; a world in which our true identity is situated; where words such as "we" and "us" no longer need inverted commas.

10. In his interpretation of "history as a history of fulfillment and salvation"[18] Karl Löwith said that it was Joachim of Fiore (Gioacchino da Fiore) who placed the Christian ideal of

[14] Ibid., p. 66.
[15] Ibid., p. 100.
[16] F. Shiller, "On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry," in: *The Aesthetical Essays*, eds. T. Riikonen and D. Widger, *Project Gutenberg*, November 2012.
[17] M. Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism", trans. F. A Capuzzi and J. G. Gray, in: D. F. Krell (ed.) *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, revised and expanded edition, London, 1993, p. 242.
[18] K. Löwith, *Meaning in History: The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History*, Chicago 1957, p. 1.

another world within history, thus replacing the vertical order of official Church teaching, and leading to a gradual fading of apocalyptic expectations by the horizontal order.

11. Joachim of Fiore considers any interpretation of sacred texts possible only within the framework of prophecy. Just as the meaning of the Old Testament was revealed in the New, so the meaning of the New Testament will be revealed only through the events foreseen by St. John's Revelation. Löwith suggests that this is a consequence of Joachim's peculiar mystical materialism, namely – his consistent concern with the dogma of the Church as the body of Christ. In such a case, the death and resurrection of Christ occur in the historical order, not only vertically, but also horizontally. Löwith is horrified by this transformation. He sees parallels between the Third Age prophesied by the Joachimites and the Third International or the Third Reich. Yet, he does not reject the idea of alienation – to the contrary, the Third International and the Third Reich are, after all, the culminating points of alienation.

15. The myth of the Christian *eschaton*, however, differs from other myths. Yes, we may agree with Latour that those myths live with us and ensure that we have never been, or can ever be modern. They are part of the myth of eternal return, and reappear with it. However, the Christian myth is something that opens our eyes to the abyss. Yet, the abyss may be perceived either in the vertical order (the tension between the top and the bottom, heaven and earth, spirit and body) or the horizontal one (the difference between the future and the past).

16. If the *eschaton* is transcendent – if it may be fulfilled only in the vertical order – the horizontal order remains in the realm of the myth of eternal return. In that case, humanity lacks the capacity to make great, and always risky, historical changes. If, however, the *eschaton* is placed within the horizontal order, the eschatological fever rises and the third age – the era of the Holy Spirit – is just a shot away, as Mick Jagger sings, from the era of the Third Reich and the Third International.

17. One may come to a seemingly simple conclusion that when dealing with the question of the *eschaton* the best thing would be to stick to the principle of the golden mean. Yet, the point is that we are dealing with processes over which man has never had and never will have any control. In this respect, Heidegger is probably quite right: it is *Geschick des Seins*. Or, as pious Christians, Jews and Muslims say – it is God and not man who is the master of history.

18. One might think that this conclusion does not go along with our interest in the materialist history of ideas pioneered by Marx, as avowed in the title of this article. This is not so. Whether it is God who is the Master of history, or whether history is governed by the contingency of being, one thing remains true: it is not possible to confine history within a system, as if it was already created, waiting to be expressed and fulfilled. There is a factor independent of all thinking which precedes all thought and inhibits its totalizing tendencies; a factor which prevents us from thinking geometrically of history – it is

human corporeality. Man produces history, yet not arbitrarily, freely, but in a continuous struggle with everything that is other. And in the spectacle that this struggle affords us, we are given the role of Jacob: we cannot rest until we tear ourselves away from history, until we gain the right to say "we" without inverted commas.

Mateusz Werner

THE POLISH DIALECTIC OF ENLIGHTENMENT. *LEGENDS OF MODERNITY*

Czesław Miłosz's *Legends of Modernity* and *Dialectic of Enlightenment* by Adorno and Horkheimer – these two books, conceived at the same time and born out of the same passion, though on two different continents, have so much in common that one can properly compare them only by pointing to the differences between them. It is indeed surprising that they have not been read side by side before. The Frankfurt exiles' initial diagnosis reads: "Yet the wholly enlightened earth is radiant with triumphant calamity,"[1] which can be complemented with Miłosz's statement that "scientifically and soberly, working from the standpoint of biology, did they [those currents that are hostile to reason] look at the life of the human animal, agitating for a planned animality (...). The right to murder the weak, to establish state slavery, to conduct breeding experiments with people, *had been proved*."[2] Thus, "hell is ourselves" – the catastrophe we witness did not come from the outside; its unique character, whose systemic totality arouses fear, had originated from the ideas constituting the foundation of modern civilization rather than from some peripheral relics of defeated prehistory. The possibility of catastrophe was conditioned by the ideas of empirical science, logical rationality, self-conscious subjectivity and the enlightened confidence in knowledge which used the concept of demythologization to eliminate the beliefs it considered superstitious (especially the moral ones) and incapable of being logically derived from experience or the observation of nature. How is it possible that the enlightenment turns into its opposite at the climax of its own actualization, while "humanity, instead of entering a truly human state, is sinking into a new kind of barbarism"?[3] Why does "the subjugation of everything natural to the sovereign subject culminate in the domination of what is blindly objective and natural"?[4] Adorno poses these questions as a man of the Enlightenment in order to shield them from self-destruction. He is trying to reverse the process of transformation of critical thinking into the mindless procedure of

[1] M. Horkheimer, T.W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment. Philosophical Fragments.* Ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr. Trans. Edmund Jephcott. Stanford, California, 2002. p. 1.

[2] Cz. Miłosz, *Legends of Modernity. Essays and Letters from Occupied Poland, 1942-1943.* Trans. Madeline G. Levine. New York, 2005. p. 139.

[3] *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. xiv.

[4] Ibid., p. xviii.

mastering objectivity – a procedure which styled itself "instrumental reason" and which underwent secondary mythologization due to the fact that it absolutized its own mastery.

Miłosz poses his questions about the origins of catastrophe from a very similar perspective, as indicated by the book's title. The apparent contradiction which it expresses is full of significance. "The legend of modernity" means as much as "the myth of the enlightenment," a *petitio principii* unaware of itself (though constituting the foundation of self-awareness) and presupposed unreflectively (though in the name of critical rationality). Writing about the legends of modernity, Miłosz did not have in mind any ideological substitutes for faith, fabricated for the purpose of political control over the masses, even if Alfred Rosenberg's *Myth of the Twentieth Century* appears here and there in the book as an example of "the *rational exploitation* of irrationality" (especially in Miłosz's correspondence with Jerzy Andrzejewski which comes from roughly the same time as Rosenberg's book.) It seems that Miłosz would have acknowledged his affinity with Adorno's statement "that the cause of enlightenment's relapse into mythology is to be sought not so much in the nationalist, pagan, or other modern mythologies concocted specifically to cause such a relapse, as in the fear of truth which petrifies enlightenment itself."[5]

Nietzsche's cry: *Pereat veritas, fiat vita* – "let truth die, let life begin"[6] – appears in Miłosz's book as an obituary on the demise of reason, a collective label for all kinds of "irrationalisms" which prepare ground for a future disaster and which constitute the major target of his attacks. It is precisely the attitude towards Nietzsche that reveals the difference between Miłosz and the authors of *Dialectic of Enlightenment.* The task that Miłosz assigned to himself was to unfold a set of influential ideas developed within the paradigm of modernity, but eventually turning against its fundamental message. Thus, apart from the idea of "natural man" who needs to be "freed" from the fetters of civilization, Miłosz points to the conjecture that the concept of truth has its deeper "substratum." This conjecture led to the relativization of the idea of truth in concepts such as "the will of might," "naked life," psychological "unconsciousness," or the pragmatic "interest in life." Miłosz refers to it using a rather general and misleading term – "irrationalism." He sees the history of modernity as a history of a struggle between "good" Europe and its "evil" *alter ego* – the centrifugal, decadent and destructive forces that carry it into the unknown. In the rich gallery of the representatives of the latter, a special place has been reserved for Friedrich Nietzsche, alongside Rousseau, Bergson, James and Freud.

The authors of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* did not draw a distinction between a "good" and a "bad" Enlightenment. The process of absolutizing instrumental reason is continuous and directly proportional to the gradual disenchantment of the world and the growing domination of the forces of scientific progress. Considered from this perspective, Marquis de Sade and Nietzsche appear to be allies of the Frankfurt School in that they bring the mindless enlightenment to its extreme consequences, thus allowing its radical critique. We owe to them the unashamed sharpness of vision that anticipates the future catastrophe and denounces the poisoned source of progress. As Adorno puts it: "It is because they did not hush up the impossibility of deriving from reason a fundamental

[5] Ibid., p. xvi.
[6] *Legends of Modernity.* "The Legend of the Will," p. 46.

argument against murder, but proclaimed it from the rooftops, that Sade and Nietzsche are still vilified, above all by progressive thinkers."[7] Miłosz might seem such an outraged "progressive thinker," hurling thunderbolts at Nietzsche, cursing the messenger for bearing the bad news. But this would be a simplification. His "irrationalism," which seeks "the substratum of ideas," praises the "arbitrariness of will" and as such is embodied in the figures of a "superman filled with resentment," an "emancipated peasant," a "rebel of the disenchanted anthill" (Julien Sorel), or a "tourist in Hell," a "bourgeois pseudo-Communist" who with a "humanitarian" grimace inspects plantations in Congo and kolkhozes in the Soviet Union (André Gide in his *Journals*) – this kind of "irrationalism" echoes what Adorno refers to with disgust as "positivism" or "mindless enlightenment." In other words, it is an ethically blind practical application of falsifying procedures, directed at the objectified world in order to effectively take control over it. They are simply two sides of the same coin: the modern awareness of the "un-foundedness" of one own's thinking. Or a nihilistic self-consciousness, to follow the terminology of German Romanticism. As Richard Rorty convincingly argued, the Nietzschean slogan: "Truth is a kind of error" does not come into conflict with the self-preservation instinct of the knowing subject. Quite the contrary, it is a condition for the effectiveness of the pragmatic "schematization of chaos." The most lapidary way of expressing this thought is Paul Feyerabend's joyous slogan: "anything goes!"

Miłosz was not a philosopher, a fact which he himself fiercely stressed, and which generates some obvious differences between his *Legends* and the work of the Frankfurt philosophers. These differences are most visible in Miłosz's language which shuns excessive terminology, as well as in his literary set of references which give additional forcefulness to his line of argumentation. Yet both the diagnosis that he formulated and the conclusions that he aimed at are philosophical in nature. What is more, emerging from his proposal is an intellectual project whose main points correspond with Adorno and Horkheimer's message. It can be summarized in one phrase: "to enlighten enlightenment," a travesty of the Fichtean imperative: to "think thinking" which, in turn, was to influence instrumental reason's self-critical reflection – to turn thinking against itself, starting with itself. As a result, "enlightenment itself, having mastered itself and assumed its own power, could break through the limits of enlightenment,"[8] thus becoming "the opposite of mastery" and enabling reconciliation between subject and nature. This might come into effect through negative dialectics – a theory developed by Adorno. In his letter to Andrzejewski, Miłosz states that "all my effort turns (...) to a new systematic doubting that might be capable of unearthing the few values worthy of rescue and development."[9] And further on: "I am seeking a philosopher's stone."[10] The aim of this quest and of these verifications was an anthropological project, a model of subjectivity which could stand the test of "war experience." Miłosz considered this experience as a kind of existential experiment that enabled the distillation of what might be called "the human element":

[7] *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 93.
[8] Ibid., p. 172.
[9] See: *Legends of Modernity.* "Letter Essays of Jerzy Andrzejewski and Czesław Miłosz" (Letter dated August 22, 1942), pp. 150-151.
[10] Ibid., p. 157.

"So perhaps there dwells inside man some kind of intercessor that those currents [i.e. Communism and Nazism] do not consider, an intercessor that proclaims its veto against so-called unassailable arguments."[11] He then goes on to confess: "I desire only one thing: to be a man."[12] Thus, it is for his own sake that the thinker sets in motion the machine of "systematic doubting." He speaks from the position of an eyewitness to an idea in action, a participant in the events, rather than that of a speculatively distant, trans-Atlantic mentor.

With great wit and ease Miłosz reconstructs before our eyes the various heroes of modernity, only to severely test them against the requirements that the experience of Warsaw in 1942 and 1943 poses to a thinking subject. Some of the most impressive literary constructions of the last few centuries fail the humanity exam, among them – Robinson Crusoe who constitutes an illustration of a "noble savage" that lurks in all of us beneath the crust of social and cultural automatisms. Or the characters from Balzac's *Human Comedy* – the Hobbesian-Darwinian reverse of Rousseau's idyllic version of the "natural man" popularized by Defoe. For Miłosz, the latter is closer to truth as it takes into account the vastness of nature's suffering and human participation in it. Still, he considers it unacceptable because of its positivist reductionism. The Nietzschean concept of a strong subjectivity, in turn, based on the absolute affirmation of one's will to live and illustrated by the Stendhalian figure of Julien Sorel, is deconstructed by the arguments of *Zarathustra*'s author himself. With much bravado, Miłosz points to the *ressentiment* underlying the motivation of the supposedly sovereign Superman: the driving force on the peasants' way to emancipation is their hatred for the crowd which they have emerged from.

What seems a real *tour de force*, however, is the confrontation with André Gide who is treated by Miłosz as both a literary hero and this hero's creator. Gide is an illustration of what might be referred to, after Miłosz, as a depraved subject, i.e. proclaiming and pursuing the idea of freedom at all costs, regardless of the consequences: "Gide's chief theme is *the rapture of self-liberation* (...) and destruction. Self-liberation to what end? To crime and slavery. Farther down the road, that is what awaits all these people possessed by a Dionysian frenzy."[13] A serious accusation follows: "The delicate hands of intellectuals are stained with blood from the moment a death-bearing word emerges from them, even if they saw that word as a word of life. Perhaps their books are not read by the masses, but the journalist who writes articles for the daily press reads them. These articles are read by the tribune of the people, the teacher, the man in the street. And so the coin of ideas, of thoughts, starts rolling; along the way its more subtle letters are rubbed out until, smooth and simplified, it reaches the masses in the form of a single motto, a cheap slogan."[14] Gide's intellectual celebration of radical freedom, practiced for the purpose of his private writing, reveals its true essence when the writer goes on a journey to the Congo and the Soviet Union, which Miłosz describes as a tourist trip to a concentration camp. Gide's writing, full of humanitarian sympathy, turns out to be intellectually helpless in the face of the new reality emerging at that time, in which the author had his share: "a certain insectivity

[11] Ibid., p. 154.
[12] Ibid.
[13] *Legends of Modernity.* "Absolute Freedom," pp. 59, 61.
[14] Ibid., p. 60.

of life and death,"[15] as Miłosz phrased it in one of his letters to Andrzejewski. The result of that new anthropology is "the mass extermination of people, akin to the extermination of bedbugs and flies."[16] Man becomes deprived of the "ceremoniousness of death" for he himself has reduced his subjectivity to biological corporeality in the process of escaping from metaphysics. For Adorno, this is the ultimate result of the objectification of the world: "In humanity's self-abasement to the *corpus* nature takes its revenge for the debasement of the human being to an object of power, to raw material. (...) The body cannot be turned back into the envelope of the soul. It remains a cadaver, no matter how trained and fit it may be. The transformation into dead matter, indicated by the affinity of *corpus* to corpse, was a part of the perennial process which turned nature into stuff, material."[17] This is the central problem in Miłosz's work – his fear of nature's blind objectivity which is devoid of a *telos* and immersed in meaningless suffering, stripped of its tragic dimension, which can swallow up the human world, transforming it into a *universum* of insects. The problem is discussed most comprehensively in *The Land of Ulro*, but it is already signaled here, in the figure of Robinson Crusoe imagining himself as a spider, or in the image of the city as an anthill, a distant prefiguration of a concentration camp.

What remains in this pile of rubble? The voice of a thirty-year-old writing these superb essays: calm, unyieldingly inquisitive, focused on his task, renouncing easy exultation. It is the voice of a witness as defined by Giorgio Agamben, and therefore someone for whom his experience weighs so much that he cannot limit himself to declaiming brilliant conceptualizations.[18] Miłosz's voice in these essays can be best described as that of a "poor man," a phrase which appears in a cycle of poems written shortly after *Legends of Modernity*. "Poor" means here threatened by annihilation, but full of persistence (i.e. not becoming a "Muselmann")[19] and most importantly – bringing before the tribunal of his own judgment the whole European civilization of the time. Unlike the authors of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, that "poor man," the inhabitant of "bloodlands,"[20] formulated a proposal that was positive after all. In the final essay on Witkacy, Miłosz outlines his project of "poetic reason" which is in contrast to "dialectical reason" – the latter being an affirmation of negativity, a perpetual negation of negation. He refuses to accept the alternative between the "pure poetry" of Mallarmé, Paul Valéry or Father Brémond – praising the *ineffable* and, after Hegel, freed of all that is "finite and particular" – and the "practical poetry" of Tolstoy and Zhdanov – both in the service of practical ideology. This refusal has its origins not only in aesthetic taste, but also in the impulse to defend literature's, or more broadly – art's claim to truth. According to Miłosz, poetry should be able to "dance, laugh, and weep in answer to arguments" because it "lives precisely by what is finite, particular, real, animal, fleeting, and transitory. Brightness and knowledge destroy it. Ignorance, darkness,

[15] See: *Legends of Modernity.* "Letter Essays of Jerzy Andrzejewski and Czesław Miłosz," p. 176.
[16] Ibid.
[17] *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, pp. 193-194.
[18] G. Agamben, "The Witness." *Remnants of Auschwitz. The Witness and the Archive.* Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen. New York, 1999. pp. 15-39.
[19] See: "The *Muselmann*." *Remnants of Auschwitz. The Witness and the Archive*, pp. 41-86.
[20] T. Snyder, *Bloodlands. Europe Between Hitler and Stalin*. New York, 2010.

fables, and mystery nourish it."[21] And it should be allowed to continue this way, because "The civilizing form that emerges from a line of verse (...) awakens hope, averts doubt."[22] The legend of poetry is perhaps the only myth of modernity that Miłosz wholeheartedly defends. Which is where his vision most radically departs from that of Adorno's. In *Minima Moralia*, written simultaneously with *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno states: "The idea that after this war life will continue »normally« or even that culture might be »rebuilt« – as if the rebuilding of culture were not already its negation – is idiotic."[23] In *Dialectic of Enlightenment* he adds that "All post-Auschwitz culture, including its urgent critique, is garbage."[24] Here I would put my trust in the calm voice of the eyewitness – the "poor man," searching through the ruins of the Staszic Palace for charred remains of books, and composing his "naïve poems" for "poor men."

* * *

Fate treated *Legends of Modernity* unfairly. Some essays appeared after the war on several occasions, but the whole that reveals Miłosz's impressive intellectual project did not appear for more than fifty years. And what does this book mean today? Is it a curiosity? A monument? A contribution to intellectual biography? We have far too much to lose to treat it as such. If Miłosz returned in the 1970s to his wartime reflections on modernity (its mature fruit being *The Land of Urlo*), perhaps we should also return to that special period in Polish literature – when it knew how to formulate thoughts in a sovereign way; thoughts that were new, revealing, touching upon the most important human experience of the twentieth century. These essays were written by a "pre-war man" who could not yet come to terms with the annihilation of the old world. It was probably the "pre-war," "hesitating" tone of these essays, their "silences, blank spots, question marks," that influenced Miłosz's decision not to publish the book at a time when he already experienced a radical breakthrough and thus acknowledged the superiority of historical necessity and the prevalence of facts over thinking (the breakthrough was largely influenced by Tadeusz Kroński). Our interaction with texts which derive their vitality from this clash of "pre-war" sensitivity and the cataclysm of the German and Soviet occupation, seems to be the prerequisite for describing the intellectual condition of today. Therefore I place *Legends of Modernity* alongside the first concentration camp stories by Tadeusz Borowski, Kazimierz Wyka's *Życie na niby* [*A Make-Believe Life*], Andrzej Bobkowski's *Szkice piórkiem* [*Sketches in Pen and Ink*], or the slightly later ones – Gustaw Herling-Grudziński's *World Apart* or Józef Mackiewcz's *Road to Nowhere*.

[21] *Legends of Modernity.* "The Boundries of Art (Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz from the Perspective of Wartime Changes)", p. 138.
[22] Ibid., p. 143.
[23] T.W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life.* Trans. E. F. N. Jephcott. London – New York, 2005, p. 55.
[24] T.W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics.* Trans. E. B. Ashton. New York, 2005, p. 367.

Andrzej Wawrzynowicz

AUGUST CIESZKOWSKI'S HISTORIOSOPHICAL HOLISM

The present study is an attempt to examine August Cieszkowski's (1814-1894) philosophy of history in the context of its holistic theoretical assumptions. The historiosophical proposal put forth by the leading representative of Polish nineteenth-century thought of the inter-uprising period, originally formulated in the *Prolegomena to a Historiosophy*[1], postulates that to adequately express the essence of the historical process one needs to adopt a radically holistic approach.[2] The meaning of this wholeness and, what follows, the adequate general sense of history is not, according to this view, a given. It emerges only at a certain stage of history and from this perspective appears rather as a peculiar task to fulfill – an ideal project carried out in the course of the objective development of the human spirit. According to Cieszkowski, not only the historical events themselves, i.e. the specific facts, are subject to change over time, but also the fundamental conceptual interpretation of these facts. Thus, what is perceived by Hegel as a definite independence of world history's objective dynamics from subjective human will, and what he treats as the absolute limit of philosophical understanding in this area, for Cieszkowski is not a constant parameter of history but a transitory feature of the evolution of human historical self-knowledge, subject to fundamental transformations and relative in its importance to a specific period. According to the Polish philosopher, Hegel's definition of historical dynamics as "the progress of the consciousness of freedom" reveals a fractional and imperfect understanding of the nature of the historical process.[3] It indicates that Hegelianism at some point encounters the impassable limits of its own discourse, unwarrantably extrapolates them and redefines them as the objective boundaries of human knowledge in general. Cieszkowski believes that Hegel's philosophy of history leads to two possible conclusions: either the full historical self-knowledge of philosophy, i.e. a complete comprehension of the historical dialectic, is impossible, in which case Hegel's speculative philosophy of history is a mystification, or an adequate understanding of this totality is

[1] A. Cieszkowski, *Prolegomena do historiozofii*, trans. A. Cieszkowski junior, in: idem, *Prolegomena do historiozofii. Bóg i palingeneza oraz mniejsze pisma filozoficzne z lat 1838-1842*, ed. J. Garewicz, A. Walicki. Warsaw 1972, pp. 1-105.

[2] Cf. ibid., p. 4; A. Cieszkowski, *Ojcze nasz*, vol. I, Poznań 1922, p. 118 and following.

[3] The peculiarity of the Hegelian view of philosophy as "a speculative system" is discussed by Światosław F. Nowicki – cf. Ś. F. Nowicki, *Przedmowa tłumacza*, in: G.W.F. Hegel, *Encyklopedia nauk filozoficznych*, trans. Ś. F. Nowicki, Warsaw 1990, p. XXI and following.

still out of theoretical reach for Hegel's system itself. In both cases panlogistic aspirations of Hegelianism appear to be unfounded. The Polish philosopher eventually opts for the latter supposition, justifying it at length in his largely competitive historiosophic project, implicitly applying Hegel's speculative logic for his purpose. Thus, he undertakes an attempt, unprecedented in the history of philosophy, to overcome Hege's philosophy from within by positively developing its own assumptions.

The initial idea of "historiosophy" as a philosophical perspective capturing the dialectic entirety of history[4] represents an aspect of Cieszkowski's thought that has not suffered, it seems, any substantial injury in the course of the final ideological erosion of Marxism, as diagnosed by the Western history of ideas within the last quarter of the twentieth century.[5] However, due to certain factors this may not be said about the key features of Cieszkowski's philosophical activism. His entire project of philosophy of action belongs to that movement in European thought which, though originally quite diverse, represents the broadly understood paradigm of practical philosophy. Its classic representatives can be found both in nineteenth-century German thought, including the leftist members of the Hegelian school, as well as within the circle of French thought, especially among the utopian socialists. The historical trend of practical philosophy in nineteenth-century European thought may, however, be also treated as a relatively uniform developmental sequence, especially when we take into account, for instance, Cieszkowski's influence (and through him, the impact of French utopian socialism) on Marx (exerted through such thinkers as M. Hess), which is the view most Western historians of Marxist philosophy appear to take in the works published in the second half of the twentieth century.[6] However, this leads to a number of oversimplifications.[7] A large number of theoretical affiliations and a wide range of receptive attitudes to historical materialism in twentieth-century Western thought have a peculiar negative effect: these approaches inevitably relegate any alternative concepts of practical philosophy to the margins of philosophical reflection. Thus, indirectly (and even more strongly than through its direct impact), Marxism has absorbed to some extent the theoretical content of these approaches, thus limiting their importance to the role of non-autonomous, secondary elements in its own genesis. Such a fate has also befallen Cieszkowski's ideas which, considered as one of the historical forms of practical philosophy, commonly function in Western theoretical studies as merely a transitional link in the evolution of European thought leading from Hegel to Marx.

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[4] Cf. A. Cieszkowski, *Prolegomena do historiozofii*, op. cit., pp. 13-15.

[5] Cf. L. Kołakowski, *Główne nurty marksizmu. Powstanie – rozwój – rozkład*, London 1988, p. 789 and following.

[6] Cf. A. Cornu, *Karol Marks i Fryderyk Engels. Życie i dzieło*, v. 1, *1818/1820-1842*, trans. and ed. M. Żurawski, Warsaw 1958, p. 137-139, 221; G. Lichtheim, *Marxism: an Historical and Critical Study,* New York 1961, p. 7; N. Lobkowicz, *Theory and Practice. History of a Concept from Aristotle to Marx*, Notre Dame – London 1967, p. 193-206; S. Avineri, *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx*, Cambridge 1968, p. 124-131; D. McLellan, *The Young Hegelians and Karl Marx*, London 1969, p. 9-11; G. Lichtheim, *From Marx to Hegel*, New York 1971, p. 8, 10-12; W. Breckman, *Marx, the Young Hegelians, and the Origins of Radical Social Theory: Dethroning the Self*,Cambridge 1999, pp. 184-187.

[7] Certain myths regarding the author of *Prolegomena* contained in the mentioned above study by Auguste Cornu, are revealed in the relatively extensive analysis of Cieszkowski's thought by Horst Stuke – cf. H. Stuke, *Philosophie der Tat: Studien zur Verwirklichung der Philosophie bei den Junghegelianern und den Wahren Sozialisten*, Stuttgart 1963, p. 86 and following.

An attempt to perceive Cieszkowski as an independent thinker was first made by Andrzej Walicki in the early seventies. Of crucial importance in this respect are the following essays: "French Inspirations behind August Cieszkowski's Philosophical and Religious Thought"[8] and "The Philosophy and Messianism. Studies in the History of Philosophy and the Social and Religious Thought of Polish Romanticism."[9] These studies also play an important polemical role in exposing the unilateral form in which the Hegelian interpretative tendency, common in the pre-war works of philosophical historians, is continued in post-war Polish Hegelian Marxism, especially in the views of Tadeusz Kroński.[10] Kroński projects the extremely negative image of Cieszkowski as a representative of "the national-Catholic reaction" which supposedly separated Polish nineteenth-century philosophy from the influence of progressive European thought, shutting it within the hermetic boundaries of political and religious irrationalism or even obscurantism.[11] The weaknesses of Kroński's view become apparent when Walicki places the philosophy of the author of *Our Father* in a broader ideological context, displaying the influence of nineteenth-century French thought on Cieszkowski's views.[12] Kroński ignores historical studies already present in pre-war literature of the subject[13] and overlooks the fact that the system created by the author of *Our Father* was strongly influenced both by classical German philosophy and French social thought.

Multiple direct and indirect references to the concepts of Saint-Simon and his followers, to the ideas of Fourier and P. Leroux, as well as evidence of the intellectual connections and of the works read and studied by Cieszkowski, documented in his private notes[14], make it impossible to marginalize the French influences on Cieszkowski's ideas. Walicki also postulates that this context is crucial for the proper understanding of the causes that make it difficult to unequivocally place Cieszkowski's concepts on one or the other side of the ongoing disputes between the left and the right over Hegel's philosophical legacy.[15]

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[8] A. Walicki, "Francuskie inspiracje myśli filozoficzno-religijnej Augusta Cieszkowskiego", *Archiwum Historii Filozofii i Myśli Społecznej,* 16 (1970): pp. 127-171.

[9] A. Walicki, *Filozofia a mesjanizm. Studia z dziejów filozofii i myśli społeczno-religijnej romantyzmu polskiego,* Warsaw 1970.

[10] Cf. T. Kroński, "Koncepcje filozoficzne mesjanistów polskich w połowie XIX wieku", *Archiwum Historii Filozofii i Myśli Społecznej* 2 (1957): pp. 81-123; idem, "Reakcja mesjanistyczna i katolicka w Polsce połowy XIX w.", in: *Z dziejów polskiej myśli filozoficznej i społecznej*, vol. 3, eds. B. Baczko, N. Assorodobraj, Warsaw 1957, p. 271-304.

[11] T. Kroński, "Filozofia mesjanistyczna i katolicka w Polsce połowy XIX wieku", in: idem, *Rozważania wokół Hegla*, Warsaw 1960, p. 161, 200, 203. See also: B. Baczko, "Niektóre węzłowe problemy rozwoju polskiej myśli społeczno-politycznej i filozoficznej XIX w. (do lat siedemdziesiątych)", in: *Z dziejów polskiej myśli filozoficznej i społecznej*, vol. 3, op. cit., p. 10; A. Śladkowska, "Stosunek polskiej filozofii połowy XIX wieku do klasycznej filozofii niemieckiej", *Myśl Filozoficzna*, 4:14 (1954): pp. 111-113.

[12] Walicki refers directly to Kronksi's views in his text written in 1972, stating his own opinion on the question of Cieszkowski's place in the disputes on Hegel's intellectual inheritance, criticizing the interpretative one-sidedness of both Cornu and Kroński – cf. A. Walicki, "Pisma filozoficzne Cieszkowskiego z lat 1838-1842 w kontekstach intelektualnych epoki", in: A. Cieszkowski, *Prolegomena do historiozofii,* op. cit., p. XXV.

[13] Extensive analysis of Cieszkowski's connections with the nineteenth-century French thought may be found, for instance, in: A. Roszkowski, *Poglądy społeczne i ekonomiczne Augusta Cieszkowskiego.* Poznań 1923.

[14] Cf. *Papiery Augusta Cieszkowskiego*, Manuscript nr 153.IV/1 and 153.IV/2, University Library in Poznan.

[15] Cf. A. Walicki, "Pisma filozoficzne Cieszkowskiego..." op. cit., p. XXVIII-XXXVI. See also: J. Garewicz, "August Cieszkowski w oczach Niemców w latach trzydziestych-czterdziestych XIX wieku", in: *Polskie spory o Hegla 1830-1860*, Warsaw 1966, p. 209 and following; R. Panasiuk, *Lewica heglowska*, Warsaw 1969, p. 61; idem,

However, this does not change the fact that the "holistic" aspect of Cieszkowski's historiosophy[16] discussed in this study, closely connected with the issue of philosophical method, has its roots primarily in Hegelian idealism.[17] Thus, for Cieszkowski, the main point of reference is not Hegel's philosophy of the objective spirit – the constitutive elements of which are, on the one hand, the philosophy of the state and law, and on the other the philosophy of history – but speculative logic.[18] Walicki seems to share to some extent the conviction of Hegel's significant influence on the development of Cieszkowski's philosophical method:

> Władysław Tatarkiewicz in his general characterization of the Polish idealist philosophy of the forties has expressed the view that Hegel's influence had some impact on its "form and philosophical method," but "in its general attitude, atmosphere and aspirations, Polish philosophy had taken more from France." This generalization cannot, in my opinion, be applied to Trentowski or to Libelt, but is entirely correct in Cieszkowski's case.[19]

Walicki's analyses of the key components of the origins of Cieszkowski's philosophy are more balanced than those which we find in pre-war Polish history of philosophy or in the works of post-war Marxists. Despite being clearly dedicated to the study of "French" context, Walicki's texts finally restore the right proportions in the assessment of the actual

"Cieszkowski i lewica heglowska", in: *Przyroda, człowiek, polityka. Z dziejów filozofii niemieckiej XVIII/XIX wieku*, Warsaw 2002, pp. 198-212; Z. Kuderowicz, *Hegel i jego uczniowie*, Warsaw 1984, pp. 205-209; K. L. Michelet, "Szkoła heglowska i jej zróżnicowanie", trans. J. Prokopiuk, in: Z. Kuderowicz, *Hegel i jego uczniowie,* op. cit., p. 322.

[16] I have outlined the basic overview of this issue in: A. Wawrzynowicz, "Elementy holizmu historiozoficznego w filozofii Augusta Cieszkowskiego", *Zeszyty Filozoficzne IF UAM*, 12-13 (2006): pp. 157-162. Marek. N. Jakubowski has earlier indicated the holistic aspect of Cieszkowski's historiosophical proposal – cf. M.N. Jakubowski, "Krytyka rzeczywistości i ideał społeczny w twórczości Augusta Cieszkowskiego", in: *Studia z dziejów polskiej myśli politycznej: II – Polska myśl polityczna w dzielnicy pruskiej w XIX w.*, ed. S. Kalembka, Toruń 1990, pp. 125-126. Zbigniew Kuderowicz discusses in more detail the question of the holistic nature of the theoretical solutions of the problems of historical accuracy in contemporary thought, as well as the well-known polemic with these approaches undertaken in the twentieth century by Karl R. Popper – see Z. Kuderowicz, "Prawidłowości historyczne", in: J. Skoczyński, Koneczny, *Teoria cywilizacji*, Warsaw 2003, p. 225-242. See also: K. R. Popper, *Nędza historycyzmu*, ed. S. Amsterdamski, Warsaw 1999, pp. 9-12, 28-33, 76-96, 156-157; idem, *Społeczeństwo otwarte i jego wrogowie: (2) Wysoka fala proroctw: Hegel, Marks i następstwa,* trans. H. Krahelska, Warsaw 1993, pp. 272-293.

[17] Cf. H. Schnädelbach, *Filozofia w Niemczech 1831-1933,* trans. K. Krzemieniowa, Warszawa 1992, p. 80; J. Topolski, *Metodologia historii*, Warsaw 1973, p. 100. Jerzy Szacki presents Hegel's entire social philosophy as an example of "radically holistic" concept, defining holism in the social theory as "an assumption that to be able to understand anything in the social life one must approach it as a totality, in which one may see various "aspects" or "moments", yet one must not assign to any of these an ability to autonomous existence" – J. Szacki, *Historia myśli socjologicznej* (New edition), Warsaw 2005, p. 208. See also K. Mannheim, *Essays on Sociology and Social Psychology,* London 1953, p. 188.

[18] H. Schnädelbach writes that Hegel does not construct any bridge connecting the pre-philosophical approach with the speculative (and thus, properly philosophical), because Hegelian philosophy is founded on the "holistic concept of consciousness" – cf. H. Schnädelbach, *Hegel. Wprowadzenie*, trans. A.J. Noras, Warsaw 2006, p. 161, 167. A. Synowiecki emphasizes the ontological and methodological nature of Hegelian holism, indicating its origins precisely in Hegel's logic, in the concept of dialectical unity of being and thinking – cf. A. Synowiecki, *Byt i myślenie: U źródeł marksistowskiej ontologii i logiki dialektycznej,* Warsaw 1980, p. 74, 134, 164.

[19] A. Walicki, "Francuskie inspiracje myśli filozoficzno-religijnej Augusta Cieszkowskiego", op. cit., v. 16, p. 129.

extent of the German and French influences on the final shape of Cieszkowski's philosophical standpoint.[20] Cieszkowski builds his philosophical theory in the middle ground "between" Berlin and Paris, and the intensity of these influences is changing over time. The German aspect, dominant in the initial stage of the development of Cieszkowski's system, gradually loses its importance, giving way to a stronger French influence. Even as early as the *Prolegomena*, while forming the idea of "historiosophy," Cieszkowski refers to the French inspirations mainly to explode the rigid framework of orthodox Hegelianism, because he is primarily interested in the philosophical "method" and "means." We may trace how, during the ten years separating the respective publications of the *Prolegomena* and the first volume of *Our Father*, this initial priority of the method (i.e. Hegelian dialectic) in Cieszkowski's philosophy gives way to a peculiar priority of the philosophical "purpose." It is worth noting that these two dimensions were never clearly separate for the Polish philosopher (in accord with the general intention of Hegel's dialectical method). In the late forties of the nineteenth century the belief that the goals of philosophy determine its methods, and not *vice versa*, clearly gains precedence in Cieszkowski's thought. It seems that this aspect ultimately determined his formal separation from the Hegelian philosophical method, as well as his final subordination of it (in *Our Father*) to the perspective of religious philosophy.[21]

Direct postulates of Hegel's political philosophy, pronounced in the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*[22], as well as the basic method of employing these postulates in Hegel's reflections on universal history, do not provide Cieszkowski with an effective philosophical apparatus for describing the present situation. Hegel's historiosophical reflection presented in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*[23] certainly does not allow for a theoretical problematization of the issue of national aspirations of political communities, such as Poles in the nineteenth century, deprived of sovereign statehood.[24] For instance, Hegel's history of philosophy sets a framework which, on the one hand, supports the historical consciousness of the Polish national community. This framework enables Polish intellectuals of the period to go beyond the ("irrational") hopes of national revival grounded in religion and supported by the Messianic message of Romantic literature. Hegelian historiosophical thought, with its central idea of historical logic, in this case paradoxically reinforces faith in the "rationality" of the historical process. On the other hand, however, Hegel first of all limits the scope of the historical rationale to a narrow circle of historical

[20] It is worth noting the difference of the publishing location (corresponding to the difference in the "target" audience) of Cieszkowski's most important philosophical works, quite symbolic in this context: – *Prolegomena do historiozofii* was originally published in Berlin, in German (cf. A. Cieszkowski, *Prolegomena zur Historiosophie*, Berlin 1838), while the first volume of *Our Father*, the only one published during the author's life, was released ten years later in Paris, in Polish (cf. A. Cieszkowski, *Ojcze-Nasz*, v. I., Paris 1848).

[21] However, this is in no way a "break up" from Hegel. Walter Kühne, who studied Cieszkowski's private library containing ca. 40 000 volumes, writes that in the collections made available to him French literature, though plentiful, was not as well represented as the German literature. Cieszkowski owned the full works of Hegel (in multiple copies) in each of his properties in Poland. See W. Kühne, "Die Bibliothek des Grafen August Cieszkowski, " *Zentralblatt für Bibliothekswesen* 1933:415-416.

[22] G.W.F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right,* trans. H. B. Nisbet, ed. A. W. Wood, Cambridge 1991.

[23] G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History,* trans. R. Alvarado, Aalten 2011.

[24] Cf. M. N. Jakubowski, *Historiozofia jako filozofia praktyczna: Hegel a polska filozofia czynu*, Bydgoszcz 1991, p. 208.

nations, from which the Slavs (Cieszkowski's main interest) are excluded, and secondly he presents universal history as a closed process, thus excluding not only the possibility of learning the future, but in a sense also the very possibility of a future history as such, namely – a historical future as a process that might bring to the current dynamics of the human spirit new creative ideas.[25] In fact, further historical progress may be considered, in the orthodox Hegelian perspective, only as a progress into infinity, contributing nothing essentially creative to the former development. In this sense, the Hegelian view of history can be seen as a prefiguration of the idea of "post-history" promoted by the postmodernists of the late twentieth century.[26] Even though the latter usually try in their official standpoints to locate themselves on the antipodes of Hegelianism, the case of Francis Fukuyama, who builds a kind of philosophical bridge between postmodernism and Hegelianism, indicates that there is a deep-seated ideological point of contact between these seemingly opposing visions of reality.[27] This connecting point is the idea of "the end of history."

This issue is complex and ambiguous already in Hegelianism itself. If we read Hegel's historiosophical statement as faithfully as possible, i.e. according to the declarations of its author, we must perceive it not only as a diagnosis of the end of history of philosophy, supposedly fulfilled by the establishment of the system of absolute idealism, but also as the end of political history, after which there may only be (in contemporary terms) a "post-history" – a mechanical repetition of the past in various configurations, a replication of whatever has already (creatively) taken place in the past. In this sense, Hegel's postmodern critics should be, paradoxically, counted among the advocates of a more orthodox interpretation of his philosophy of history. In contrast, Cieszkowski's "historiosophy" represents a clearly heterodox approach to Hegel's conception of history.[28] From this point of view it is of particular interest today and – given the lack of a wider historical theoretical response to this proposal at the time of its creation in the first half of the nineteenth century – seems quite innovative. Shlomo Avineri, one of the leading representatives of contemporary political philosophy, wrote the following about Cieszkowski in the introduction to the Polish edition of his classic book *Hegel's Theory of the Modern State*[29]:

> Count August Cieszkowski was one of the first Polish interpreters of Hegel's thought. His two *opera magna – Prolegomena zur Historiosophie* (1938) and *Our Father* (1848) – while very different in their political and religious orientations, make a very original use of Hegelian metaphysics, surpassing the limitations of Hegelian philosophy of history. In the *Prolegomena* we find for the first time a criticism of Hegel's anti-futurological attitude,

[25] Cf. M. N. Jakubowski, *Narodowe i uniwersalne: Cztery studia o polskiej filozofii politycznej doby romantyzmu*, Toruń 2002, p. 26 and following.
[26] Cf. T. Buksiński, "Postmodernistyczna historia, czyli koniec rozumu i wolności", in: *Wolność a racjonalność*, ed. T. Buksiński, Poznań 1993, p. 69-98.
[27] Cf. ibidem, p. 96. See also: E. Angehrn, *Filozofia dziejów*, trans. J. Marzęcki, Kęty 2007, p. 176.
[28] Cf. M. N. Jakubowski, *Narodowe i uniwersalne: Cztery studia o polskiej filozofii politycznej doby romantyzmu*, op. cit., p. 15.
[29] S. Avineri, *Hegel's Theory of the Modern State*, Cambridge 1972.

> as well as a project of philosophy which goes beyond the limitations of its own time, leading humanity towards a society that would be based on social solidarity of non-alienated individuals. In *Our Father* – a much later work – Cieszkowski turns to philosophical mysticism, future-oriented, yet at the same time rooted in Catholicism and faith in the historic mission of the regenerated Polish nation. In both of these books Cieszkowski attempts a kind of Copernican revolution, dialectically removing the conservative aspects of Hegelian philosophy of history and politics.[30]

The major prewar monographs devoted to the concepts developed by the author of *Our Father*, starting with Adam Żółtowski's *Graf August Cieszkowski's "Philosophie der Tat"*[31], through Walter Kühne's *Graf August Cieszkowski – ein Schüler Hegels und des deutschen Geistes*[32], and ending with *Philosophie der Freiheit bei Graf August Cieszkowski* by Albert Wojtaczak[33], all integrally connect Cieszkowski's philosophical project with the religious character of Polish national thought, though at the same time they all maintain a critical distance from any attempt to unilaterally blur the boundary between theological and philosophical interpretations of the system developed by the author of the *Prolegomena*.[34] It seems that one may, even today, defend the "German" line of interpretation in the studies of Cieszkowski's philosophy, avoiding on the one hand the danger of unwarranted alignment with the Catholic-nationalist interpretation of this philosophy, and – on the other – the one-sidedness of the evaluations made from the Marxist point of view (including Hegelian Marxism). However, apart from the question of direct or indirect influences on the genesis of Cieszkowski's ideas (which generates a potentially endless dispute among the historians of ideas on the preeminence of one or another inspiration

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[30] S. Avineri, *Hegla teoria nowoczesnego państwa*, trans.T. Rosiński, Warsaw 2009, p. 14.

[31] A. Żółtowski, *Graf August Cieszkowski's Philosophie der Tat: Die Grundzüge seiner Lehre und der Aufbau seines Systems,* Poznań 1904.

[32] W. Kühne, *Graf August Cieszkowski ein Schüler Hegels und des deutschen Geistes: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des deutschen Geisteseinflusses auf die Polen*, Leipzig 1938.

[33] A. Wojtczak, *Philosophie der Freiheit bei Graf August Cieszkowski: Eine spiritualische Lösung des Freiheitsproblems,* Niepokalanów 1933.

[34] It appears that the tendency to partially eliminate the difference between Cieszkowski's mature philosophy, fully represented in the multi-volume edition of *Our Father*, published posthumously, and the theological position of the Catholic Church, was a peculiar echo of Cieszkowski's intellectual testament, given just before his death to his son, together with the entire legacy of manuscripts. August Cieszkowski junior, the direct executor of the philosopher's spiritual testament who was also the editor of the posthumous edition of *Our Father*, has successfully fulfilled the "task" entrusted to him, which was in fact the result of his father's anxieties about the reaction of the Catholic public opinion in Poland to a publication of the full version of his *opus magnum*. This fact did not escape the attention of some of the scholars who analyze the history of reception of Cieszkowski's thought. In this context André Liebich writes about the myth of Cieszkowski as an impeccable, orthodox Catholic, deliberately sustained by the son of the philosopher, while Walter Kühne in his relation of the visits to Wierzenica in the twenties and his personal contacts with August Cieszkowski junior, casts the philosopher's son as a tragic figure, crushed by the weight of having to execute his father's intellectual testament – cf. A. Liebich, *Between Ideology and Utopia: The Politics and Philosophy of August Cieszkowski*, Dordrecht 1979, p. 6; W. Kühne, *Erlebnisse eines Polonisten: Die Besuche des Slawisten Walter Kühne bei Graf August Cieszkowski dem Jüngeren auf Schloß Wierzenica bei Posen in den Jahren 1924 und 1929: Zur Verständigung der Völker*, hrsg. H. Ehret. Rendsburg 1995, p. 12. See also: E. Likowski, "Pogrzeb śp. Augusta hr. Cieszkowskiego", *Roczniki Towarzystwa Przyjaciół Nauk Poznańskiego* 21 (1895): pp. 471-497.

or connection with certain trends emerging in the historical development of European thought), there remains the question of an adequate account of the philosophical content of the proposal under consideration. This is what is most essential here. An analysis of the differences and similarities between Cieszkowski's ideas and other theoretical projects does not sufficiently explicate the philosophical significance of his conceptions and does not explain why the modern reader should bother himself with the thoughts of the author of *Our Father*.

It is undeniable that Cieszkowski's system did not simply appear out of nowhere, in a historic void; that it was subject to certain external influences and internal changes resulting from its evolution over time. However, the philosophical significance of this system is determined neither exclusively by the number of ideological relationships with other doctrines which may be identified, nor by the lack of such relationships (although this latter aspect may be considered as a mark of originality and even, in some cases, as evidence of the thinker's intellectual genius). The presence of such influences may also be treated as a sign of sterile eclecticism, while the lack of theoretical correspondences with other historical doctrines may in turn indicate pretentiousness and false originality. Thus, when we analyze a given philosophical system, we are first and foremost looking for an adequate interpretative key that will allow us to understand the system in its main structural elements as a meaningful whole – a totality that will turn out to be not only formally consistent, but will also in its general content and meaning appear to be properly philosophical.[35] Therefore, what is important is not solely the fact that in someone's mind, in a given historical moment a certain idea was born, bearing a number of similarities and differences in relation to analogous ideas appearing in a different place and time. The history of philosophy is not limited to the study of a specific philosophical position understood as a set of ideas emerging mechanically over time and assigned to a specific individual or a group of people. The true subject of study is never a given and this concerns both philosophy and the subject of the history of philosophy. Philosophical and historiosophical analysis does not have a distinct field which would determine in advance the essential purpose and the target range of the theoretical exploration of the sources. In each case, the analysis of the sources is rather a means to a synthesis of resource materials. In our case, it is the spiritual factor itself that is the true subject and source, and it is never entirely separated from the spiritual self-knowledge of the scholar. The initial isolation of the object of analysis is therefore purely relative and temporary, and must be abolished in creating the final understanding of the source analyzed as a certain spiritual whole. The unconditional separation of the subject and object of research may in this case be merely a function of the subjective inflexibility of the scholar who persists in remaining in opposition to the source, or in other words – a function of the unbending antagonism to the particular philosophical view which is being examined, and of the inability to cross over to the other side, i.e. to the initial point of view. Thus, the source of the problem is that in philosophical or historiosophical research we are not dealing, in the end, with a fixed object – as we would be in standard scientific research. The object of the study is always the free subjectivity of the philosopher: spiritual creativity revolving within the sphere of autonomous self-knowledge – the active human spirit.

[35] Cf. S. Pieróg, "Rozdroża historii filozofii," *Rocznik Historii Filozofii Polskiej* 1(2008): p. 107 and following.

A purely object-oriented (instrumental) treatment of such an object of research turns out to be a distortion, a violation of the object's freedom and, indirectly, a self-abuse on the part of the scholar. And yet, to cut across the immediate boundaries of one's own self-knowledge in one's analysis of a given attitude, to be able to set oneself in the position of the analyzed philosophical object, i.e. the original self-knowledge of the creator of a system – all this for the historian of philosophy is a necessity and not a matter of random decision. It is, we must conclude, the very condition of reaching the object of study in its undistorted form. The method of analytical research is not a goal in itself in the process of reconstructing a given philosophical doctrine, but it is a means to an end – to a goal that is beyond the immediate boundaries of a purely formal theoretical analysis. That goal is to attain a synthetic unity with the source material on the basis of the historian's own (philosophical) self-knowledge. Therefore, the historian never makes his analysis of the various philosophical concepts in a purely formal (instrumental) way, but always with a specific purpose in mind, because these essential concepts have a specific meaning for him[36]. Thus, he selects them out of a range of other views, leaving these other concepts temporarily or permanently out of his field of vision, or simply ignoring them (as irrelevant), precisely because he himself chooses out of the never-ending variety of historical doctrines which aspire to the status of philosophy those that seem relevant to him. Therefore, it is the philosophical self-knowledge of the historian of philosophy that is decisive in the initial selection and the ultimate sanctioning of that which is considered philosophically substantial. We find this sort of a general attitude to the object of philosophy and history of philosophy already in the earliest works of Cieszkowski, originally written as a doctorate thesis defended in 1838 in Heidelberg and published in 1841 in a revised Polish version under the title *Reflections on Ionian Philosophy as an Introduction to the History of Philosophy*.[37] According to Cieszkowski, there is no definite borderline between the object of philosophy, or the history of philosophy, and the (philosophical) idea of – respectively – philosophy and the history of philosophy.[38] On this conviction (Hegelian in its origin[39]) the author of the *Prolegomena to a Historiosophy* bases his entire conception of history as an evolving (spiritual) whole which at its highest level of generalization turns out to be a process of enacting humanity's self-knowledge.[40] This initial point of view on the nature of the history of philosophy[41] determines the methodology of

[36] Cf. ibid., p. 110.

[37] A. Cieszkowski, "Rzecz o filozofii jońskiej jako wstęp do historyi filozofii," *Biblioteka Warszawska* 1 (1841): pp. 287-306, 536-561; new edition of the text: idem, "Rzecz o filozofii jońskiej jako wstęp do historii filozofii", in: idem, *Prolegomena do historiozofii...* op. cit., pp. 245-290. This work is published in an unfinished form: the exegesis is interrupted on Anaksymander's view. In Walter Kühne's monograph dedicated to Cieszkowski we also find a few pages in German transcribed from the manuscript of Cieszkowski's doctoral dissertation, which is the original version of the discourse on the Ionian philosophy. This passage does not have the full equivalent in Polish edition – cf. [A. Cieszkowski], "S. 9-16 des deutschen Manuskriptes für die Dissertation 'De philosophiae ionicae ingenio, vi, loco'", in: W. Kühne, *Graf August Cieszkowski...* op. cit., pp. 431-440. The full version of the dissertation has been lost – cf. W. Kühne, *Die Polen und die Philosophie Hegels*, in: *Hegel bei den Slaven*, D. Tschižewskij (hrsg.), Darmstadt: 1961, p. 53.

[38] Cf. A. Cieszkowski, "Rzecz o filozofii jońskiej jako wstęp do historii filozofii", op. cit., pp. 247-251.

[39] Cf. T. Buksiński, *Rozumność filozofii i historii filozofii*, in: *Hegel a współczesność*, ed. R. Kozłowski, Poznań 1997, p. 75.

[40] A. Cieszkowski, *Prolegomena do historiozofii*, op. cit., p. 16.

[41] Cf. A. Wawrzynowicz, "Augusta Cieszkowskiego próba eksplikacji heglowskiego pojęcia historii filozofii", *Rocznik Historii Filozofii Polskiej*, I (2008): pp. 121-140.

finding a solution to the problem of the philosophy of history. Cieszkowski manages to go beyond the limitations of Hegelian philosophy of history because he is able to consistently join together those aspects which Hegel ends up separating, i.e. a reflection on the history of philosophy and a reflection on the philosophy of history. And precisely this ability to form a homogeneous view of the social, political and philosophical aspects of the historical process allows Cieszkowski to formulate a general thesis that history is a united whole. Adam Żółtowski in the aforementioned monograph on Cieszkowski already indicated this historical quality of Cieszkowski's historiosophical reflection, although he did not fully explain its theoretical pedigree:

> For Cieszkowski, history in general is not only the sum of human lives and products, experiences and actions, but a homogeneous whole comprising all these aspects, a living organism, a transcendental unity. It is a unity of development and a development of unity; a totality of infinite variety and diversity; an "embodiment of the concept of humanity."[42]

Thus, regardless of the weight assigned by Żółtowski to the idea of "philosophy of action" in his interpretation of Cieszkowski's system, he does not leave out the key role which the speculative idea of "historiosophy" plays in that system. This is confirmed by one of the most important theses of his monographs, namely – that "Cieszkowski's philosophy is basically a philosophy of history."[43] However, this still leaves open the task of substantiating this belief through a comprehensive explication of the philosophical premises of Cieszkowski's historiosophical holism.[44]

[42] A. Żółtowski, *Graf August Cieszkowski's "Philosophie der Tat"...* op. cit., p. 11; in the original version: „Die Weltgeschichte ist also für Cieszkowski nicht bloss die Summe menschlichen Lebens und Webens, menschlicher Erlebnisse und Taten, sondern ihr einheitliches Ganze, ihr, lebendiger Organismus, ihre transcendente Einheit. Sie ist die Einheit der Entwickelung und die Entwickelung der Einheit, sie ist das Ganze der unendlichen Differenzierung und Mannigfaltigkeit, sie ist die »Realisierung des Begriffes der Menschheit«."

[43] Ibid., p. 66; in the original version: "(...) im Grunde die ganze Philosophie Cieszkowskis Geschichtsphilosophie ist (...)". Żółtowski adds a more extensive commentary to his thesis, suggesting the need to clearly distinguish between the perspective of the "philosophy of history" as the groundwork on which Cieszkowski's entire system is based, and the perspective of "futuristic philosophy" initially projected in *Prolegomena to a Historiosophy*, which according to Żółtowski may be most fittingly described using Cieszkowski's own definition of "philosophy of action" from his *Bóg i palingeneza*. The project of this future "philosophy of action" may be considered to be "the highest, most essential and ultimate result" of the philosophical reflection of *Our Father's* author, if we retain the awareness of the key importance in this project of the "philosophy of history". In Żółtowski's opinion, Cieszkowski's thought never quite abandons this foundation – cf. ibid., p. 66-67.

[44] This text is the English translation of the "Introduction", originally published in: A. Wawrzynowicz, *Filozoficzne przesłanki holizmu historiozoficznego w myśli Augusta Cieszkowskiego*, Poznań 2010.

Piotr Nowak

APOCALYPSE AND POLITICS. SOME REMARKS ON THE POLITICAL THEOLOGY OF JACOB TAUBES

Rabbi Ben Levi, on the Sabbath, read
A volume of the Law, in which it said,
"No man shall look upon my face and live."
And as he read, he prayed that God would give
His faithful servant grace with mortal eye
To look upon His face and yet not die.
H.W. Longfellow[1]

Poseur, scribbler, provocateur, seducer, trifler, uncompromising theologian, thinker of such broad scope that the shrewdest rabbis of his time could not follow – these are all masks, costumes in which Jacob Taubes chose to dress up his uninhibited thought, his unique way of being. A little kitschy, always provocative, undoubtedly a genius, he saw everywhere "signs of the approaching End"; at the same time, as one can tell from his chaotic writing, he wanted – like Rabbi Ben Levi – to capture the first moment of the apocalypse, to spot the rising tide and even to outstrip it.

CURRICULUM VITAE

He was born in 1923 in Vienna into a rabbinical family. In 1936 the whole family moved to politically neutral Switzerland where Taubes's father was appointed chief rabbi. He completed his education in Basel and Zurich. In 1947 in Zurich he defended a doctoral thesis on Messianic ideas in Western culture (*Abendländische Eschatologie*), which he then published as a book – the only one published in his lifetime. He became friends with Armin Mohler, the author of the term "conservative revolution," a would-be SS man (they did not want him), later the secretary of Ernst Jünger. At the same time he maintained close intellectual ties with the Protestant theologian Karl Barth and with Hans Urs von Balthasar, the influential Catholic priest and prominent theologian. In 1949 he was employed at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. He attended Leo Strauss's seminar held at

[1] H.W. Longfellow, "The Spanish Jew's Tale. The Legend of Rabbi Ben Levi", in: idem, *The Poetical Works of Longfellow*. London – New York – Toronto: Oxford University Press 1906, p. 358.

the New School for Social Research. While in the States, he also met Hannah Arendt and Paul Tillich. It's a small world.

In 1951 Taubes was awarded the Warburg scholarship and went to work at the university in Jerusalem. He was admitted by the rector of the Hebrew University, Hugo Bergman, who would later describe Taubes's intellectual abilities as "absolutely exceptional," while pointing to his characteristic "disreputable behavior (...) his chutzpah and his verve."[2] The Israeli episode is particularly interesting for it was then that Taubes began his study of the Apostle Paul's epistolography, which brought him posthumous fame when published in 1993 as four lectures on Pauline political theology.[3] His efforts focused on the creative application of some conceptual solutions to biblical issues, as developed by Carl Schmitt and Walter Benjamin. Interpreted anew, Paul, the apostle of the state of emergency is presented as a follower of Isaac, Moses's rival in the creation of a spiritual community *ab ovo*, and finally as an uncompromising enemy of Jews who are "kept in captivity under the law," and hence someone who is both outside and inside the law. It is possible that Taubes saw himself as such a border figure, moving between these two areas: of law and of lawlessness, of convention and of ridiculing all conventions. Suffice it to say that Gershom Scholem, who had invited Taubes to come to Israel, one day told him to pack up and go back where he came from. And the otherwise outstanding student and scholar was bid farewell with a rather unrefined word – *Verräter* (traitor).[4]

In Israel, Taubes became friends with Geulah Cohen, Bergman's M.A. student and activist of the Lechi extremist military organization that strived to actualize by force Jewish Messianic ideas. She later recalled: "When I joined the boys for one of their missions, I felt the spark of primordial fire, the same spark that would burn in me years later on giving birth."[5] And thus the end is the beginning, killing inspires the thought of the birth of a new life, a new world rises from the ruins of the old one. I think that Taubes must have had an extraordinary ear for this kind of radicalism. Taubes's letter addressed to Bergman sheds an interesting light on the relations between himself and Cohen: "Yesterday I postponed my study of ontology and went to see Geulah (so you see I took your advice finally), eventually finding her. We sat together till after midnight, and I came to see that her nationalist thinking is full of truly messianic yearning. I said, »The goal should not be to reach the kingdom [*Malchut*], but first to produce a man worthy of it.« (...) Geulah answered, »The empty vessel is ready to accept the wealth of sacredness [*Shefa Kodesh*]«."[6] Partly a soldier and partly a radio journalist, in her journalistic activity Cohen made use of something that might be called "antinormative messianic discourse" which Taubes greatly admired. Using Schmitt's language, she voiced the rights and interests of the majority of Jewish settlers: "There is no hatred between me and the Palestinians," she would emphasize. "They are the enemy in a legitimate struggle over land."[7] Cohen's opinion was that the legitimacy of the Arab-Jewish confrontation was due to its political-theological

[2] N. Lebovic, "The Jerusalem School: The Theopolitical Hour", in: *New German Critique*, 3-4: 2008, p. 107.
[3] J. Taubes, *The Political Theology of Paul*, trans. D. Hollander. Stanford: Stanford University Press 1993.
[4] B. Babich, "Ad Jacob Taubes", in: *New Nietzsche Studies*, 3-4: 2008, p. vi.
[5] N. Lebovic, "The Jerusalem School", op. cit., p. 110.
[6] Ibid., p. 111.
[7] Ibid.

character. "Cohen is a nonpracticing Jew," to cite Nitzan Lebovic, "and she does not see her messianic perspective as in any way religious. Her politics ascribes sacredness to the Zionist enterprise without appealing to divine law."[8] The very right to free life and the freedom to determine one's own fate seemed "holy" enough.

At the time of its formation Israel was a country in a state of emergency. It struggled for existence and its own substance using all means available and all possible forces. Jews would find some surprisingly good solutions to crisis situations in the writings of Carl Schmitt, which Taubes noted – with considerable amusement – in his famous essay on this German political theologian:

> Not only was Jerusalem a divided city in the 1940s and 1950s, but the Hebrew University had been exiled from Mount Scopus and was located in a monastery in the city center. The great library was locked up on Mount Scopus, where an Israeli guard changed every fortnight under the supervision of the United Nations.
> Contrary to the terms of the official truce, which said that nothing could be taken from Mount Scopus into the city, and nothing from the city to Mount Scopus, the decree was circumvented with the help of members of the guard who, when they came back to the city, filled their trousers and bags with books that the university library had labeled "urgent."
> So it came about that, as a novice, I was to give lectures on the philosophy of the seventeenth century. I went to the library director and told him of my problem. For a lecture on Descartes I needed a historical and philosophical sketch of the term *law* in both its natural scientific and juridico-theological senses.
> The differing conceptions that came together in the term *Gesetz* had to be identified more exactly. The only source that could help me deal with this problem was Carl Schmitt's *Verfassungslehre,* which dealt with the problem of *nomos / lex / Gesetz*.
> The chief librarian listened carefully, but explained that he was powerless to speed the book ordering process. It could take two or three months before I got hold of the book. This was little help, since in three months the semester would be over.
> You can imagine how surprised I was when, three weeks later, just before the beginning of the semester, I was called to the library and was able to pick up a copy of Schmitt's *Verfassungslehre*. The chief librarian quickly explained that I should not get any big ideas; the day after I had put in a request for the *Verfassungslehre* they had received an urgent call from the Ministry of Justice: the minister of justice, Pinchas Rosen (formerly Rosenblüth), needed Schmitt's *Verfassungslehre* so that he could deal with some difficult problems in the drafting of a constitution for the state of Israel. The book was therefore immediately brought from Mount Scopus and had

[8] Ibid.

> now arrived in the library on its return journey, where my urgent request had been kept against an "opportune moment."
> There is a subsequent European and American history to this. I must admit to being more bemused than taken with the idea that the constitution of the State of Israel (a constitution which fortunately still does not exist) would be drafted using Schmitt's *Verfassungslehre* as a guide.
> I wrote about this to my "Swiss" school friend Armin Mohler and added to it a reflection on the problem of the Fascist intelligentsia. I wrote something like: for me, Martin Heidegger and Carl Schmitt are the most significant exponents of German intellect from the later 1920s and early 1930s. That both involved themselves with the Hitler regime presents me with a problem that I cannot resolve by appealing to the inner bastard of Nazism. I mentioned also that both came from a Catholic background, just like Hitler and Goebbels actually.[9]

Martin Buber, Hugo Bergman, Geulah Cohen, Jacob Taubes – these are the four names of the most prominent representatives of Jewish political theology of that time. In that minefield, that reality which was unfavorable to Jews, the contestants' political colors ceased to be of much importance. They shared hostility towards "the world as it is," the world that pushed against them from all sides. But one more thing brought them close together. It was a liking for the books of Carl Schmitt whose theory provided them with a basis for their actions, resulting in very specific political and theological outcomes. They agreed with the German constitutionalist as to the fact that the basic theological concepts and terms became secularized, i.e. misrepresented, thus losing their divine power and sanction, and gaining an impure power, a "devilish," "infernal" one. As Taubes puts it: "Secularization is thus not a positive concept for Schmitt. On the contrary, to him it is the devil."[10] Under the new conditions, God is no longer the source of the supernatural, nor is it Him who suspends the laws of nature for "a certain time." Sovereign is he who decides on the state of exception, who has the authority to determine exceptions. A sovereign decision constitutes all possible relations, including the most important one which defines the difference between an enemy and a friend, between the unfriendly time of the past and the future time that is filled with hope. "The present becomes an unreal boundary between the »no-longer« of the past and the »not-yet« of the future. Time is not the place of life, but contains the pestilential smell of death, and plunges life into the Sheol of the past. Not until the End Time, at the end of time, when transience itself passes away, will eternity triumph over the deadly principle of time. It is the work of magic."[11] Neither of magic, nor of art, but politics, as Taubes would modify his view while in Jerusalem. If, whether one wants it or not, one abides in a place where the substance of time and the substance of eternity, death and life, intersect, one must – for some pious reason, in the name of the "not-yet-existing" God – turn to the means of destruction, the means that are used to carry out a massacre.

[9] J. Taubes, "Carl Schmitt: Apocalyptic Prophet of the Counterrevolution", in: idem, *To Carl Schmitt. Letters and* Reflections, trans. K. Tribe. New York: Columbia University Press 2013, pp. 9-11.
[10] J. Taubes, *The Political Theology of Paul*, op. cit., p. 66.
[11] J. Taubes, *Occidental* Eschatology, trans. D. Ratmoko. Stanford: Stanford University Press 2009, p. 8.

"God," Taubes writes, "will annihilate the world and then appear in his might. (...) If the demonic, destructive element is missing, the petrified order, the prevailing positivity of the world cannot be overcome."[12] (I will return to this issue later on.)

The above quoted words seemed to Geulah Cohen to theologically support the fight against the Arabs, while both Hugo Bergman and Martin Buber, in their political calculations, regarded Zionism as "a mistake": "I have a bad feeling," Buber wrote to Bergman in 1927, "because we came here without asking permission from those populating the land."[13] Taubes's attitude to Zionism was also critical, but out of different, not quite sentimental reasons. He believed that the attempt to transform the movement into political messianism ended in complete failure. Israel was created in the shape and likeness of a nineteenth-century nation-state. Thus, the cardinal and most significant sin of Zionism was its "negation of Jewish avant-garde" – Jewish spirituality was reduced by the Zionists to "normal existence."[14]

Having returned to the United States from Isreal, Taubes found a job at Beacon Press, where he was asked to supervise a series on "radical philosophy." And thus he commissioned books from Schmitt and Buber. The former refused politely, the latter published his famous *Paths in Utopia*.[15]

Starting in 1949, Taubes lectured in philosophy of religion in New York, then in Jerusalem between 1951-1953, and then, by a symptomatic stroke of luck, at Harvard, Princeton and Columbia University. In 1996 he became professor at the Freie Universität in Berlin. Almost everybody in Germany agreed with Gadamer when he said that Taubes was "a wastrel of his talents."[16]

Taubes's first wife, Susan (*primo voto* Feldman, 1928-1969), the writer and cultural anthropologist, described the nightmare of their relationship in her novel titled *Divorcing*. Their toxic entanglements are best illustrated in a passage at the beginning of the novel in which Sophie (Susan) vivisects the confrontational personality of her husband Ezra (Taubes):

> Ezra began with a very small point. So small that Sophie didn't realize at all that he was starting a quarrel. A little thing that can be settled in a minute, she thought, or a little thing there's nothing to be done about that can be dismissed in a minute. Then as Ezra went on developing his point for an immoderately long time, it dawned on Sophie that the issue wasn't simply a particular tie he couldn't locate and blamed her for failing to pack, or her having failed to pack other items on other occasions, or her disregard for his appearance, or for her own appearance – her disregard for appearances

[12] Ibid., p. 10.
[13] N. Lebovic, "The Jerusalem School", op. cit., p. 114.
[14] An undated letter from Jacob Taubes to Hugo Bergman (early 1952), in: N. Lebovic, "The Jerusalem School", op. cit., p. 117.
[15] From Taubes's letter to Schmitt, dated August 2, 1955, it can be inferred that the book in question is *The Conservative Tradition*, an anthology of texts by authors such as Schmitt, Bonald, Donoso Cortes, and even Pope Pius IX.
[16] B. Babich, "Ad Jacob Taubes", op. cit., p. viii.

> in general. The issue was really all the consequences this had on their lives and would continue to accumulate. The issue was enormous.[17]

She committed suicide when she discovered that Taubes had left her and their two children for Margherita von Brentano, the Kant specialist at Freie Universität. The presumption is, though, that the reason behind Taubes's second marriage was other than love. "Von Brentano," as Taubes would always address his new wife, was to him the embodiment of the highest virtues and values of the German spirit, which is possibly why he decided to marry her, thus breaking the law that had been in force in Germany thirty years earlier[18].

Jacob Taubes was a great womanizer, a fact which in itself would not be worth dwelling on were it not that he himself, like a Don Juan, was keen on communicating his sexual conquests to a broad audience. "If you sleep with the same woman twice, you've joined the establishment," he liked to repeat the famous 1960s slogan. Whenever he went to Rome with Ingeborg Bachmann, he would always assume a false identity, in case someone was following in his footsteps.

He was famous for his lack of tact and his untidiness. He always wore black, did not change his clothes for weeks. He was a messy eater. He was always in a hurry. He made free use of other people's belongings (his writings are mostly made up of cryptoquotations, verging on plagiarism) and attributed to others that which was his (he considered his thoughts to be some foreign secretion which he must get rid of as soon as possible). I will now try to relate one more scene (after Babette Babich whose memoir I am relying on here), a very revealing one in which they both took part.

When in Paris, Taubes took her to a synagogue. It was shrouded in darkness. Being a woman, Babich could only take her seat in the balcony, nowhere else. Taubes sat below, in the immediate vicinity of the sanctuary. She looked at him as if he contained within himself the entire history of the Jewish nation. She saw in him at once a man and a prophet. Next to her, was an old Jewish woman, focused on her prayer, the mother of a little girl who was carelessly running around the balcony. The exalted mood was suddenly interrupted by Taubes's monotonous snore. But it was not only the synagogue's dead silence that would put him in the mood for an afternoon nap; he was in the habit of falling asleep almost everywhere – at countless conferences he attended in his lifetime, or even during his own seminars. "The contrast between the dark balcony above and the dull daylight of the sanctuary below wrenched in my throat and I found my face wet with tears. Surprised because I was not sure whether I was crying for my own lack, for the beauty of her faith or else for the contrast between the worlds of prayer, above and below."[19]

It was February 1986. Despite his advanced disease, Taubes continued teaching, in a lying position, his last seminar on the political theology of the Apostle Paul. He died seven weeks later.

[17] S. Taubes, *Divorcing.* New York: Random House 1969, p. 12.
[18] B. Babich, "Ad Jacob Taubes", op. cit., p. viii.
[19] Ibid., pp. ix-x.

THE THEOLOGY OF PAUL OF TARSUS

The main intention of Taubes's lectures on Paul, and their central meaning, was "gathering the heretic back into the fold," that is – returning Paul to the Jewish community. The Christianity of the Apostle Paul corresponded with the Jewish apocalyptic experience. The universalism of this religious movement, which today is so eagerly pointed to,[20] was conceived not only as a means of incorporating the Gentiles into the circle of the Jewish perception of the world, but rather as a means of converting the Jews to the right path to salvation – a path which they either abandoned themselves or were coerced to abandon. The dramatic circumstances on his way to Damascus made Paul break with the Old Faith, with the Law, with the Mosaic religion, and establish a new people and a new faith based on a new kind of covenant, focused around a new center – similarly to Moses who had formed an entirely new nation of the faithful. The critical point, namely – that which makes it possible to distinguish the new chosen ones from the usurpers, is neither a hastily enacted law, nor any rule that is of this world and that aims to organize it anew, but the death and resurrection of the Crucified One. "It isn't *nomos* but rather the one who was nailed to the cross by *nomos* who is the imperator!"[21] From now on it is spiritual kinship ("by way of faith"), and not corporeal kinship, that constitutes the foundation of the community of believers. "For they *are* not all Israel, which are of Israel" – this means that salvation is to be salvation "according to the promise" and not "according to the blood."[22] Salvation will depend upon whether one is a member of the new community. The old people of God are to immerse, to "dissolve" in a newly engendered people of God.[23] Taubes suggests that the relationship of Jews and early Christians (even though they did not call themselves so[24]) before A.D. 70 (the destruction of the Second Temple) should be contrasted with what happened later. In other words, the strictly apostolic period should be contrasted with the folly of Christian proselytism, every manifestation of which resulted in anti-Semitism.[25] It would be a mistake to see Paul as an irreconcilable enemy of the Synagogue, or to see the Synagogue as a generalized enemy of Judeo-Christians or the Judeo-Christian spirit. Everything was intertwined and quite muddled in the fluid reality of the Roman Empire. Christians were spiritually restless Jews, Jewish antinomians who from time to time radicalized the vapid message of the Torah. Therefore, as Paul intuited, the most interesting questions were born not in the Synagogue, but in the course of contact with the external environment – with the Gentiles converted to Christianity

[20] A. Badiou, *Saint Paul. The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. R. Brassier. Stanford: Stanford University Press 2003.

[21] J. Taubes, *The Political Theology of Paul*, op. cit., p. 24.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid., p. 19.

[25] There is nothing surprising in it, argues Carl Schmitt. Anti-Semitism, or rather anti-Judaism, is intrinsic to the new situation from the outset. It is either we, Christians, or you, Jews, who are right as to final matters. There is no room for deliberating, one needs to take a stand, make a decision of fundamental importance (to salvation). This world is thus organized, Taubes echoes Schmitt – it is filled with either Jews or Christians, and no conciliatory gestures will ever change it. "You" *versus* "we" is the true face of political theology. In other words, there is no room for neutrality in the theological-political argument. In the reality contemporary to Paul, it was a matter of decision whether one was a Jew or not. And though it was not possible to become a Jew, one could stop being a Jew or remain so.

(proto-Judaism!). What determined their inclusion in the economy of salvation was not law – any law – but their belief in Christ's resurrection. Questions would arise as to what it really meant to be a Jew in those conditions. Does it make any sense to destabilize the fragile political balance based on respect for positive law? And finally – what is positive law when confronted with messianic hope? Taubes argues that in order to grasp the meaning of these questions more fully one has to bear in mind the fact that early Christians ("new Jews") were possessed by the eschatological longing for the Second Coming which was "at hand"; that their faith was fueled by visions of an imminent apocalypse. Thus, Paul's theology seems to express the collective longings; his politico-theological calculations are oriented towards legitimizing a political community and do not focus on the inner life of its members. For Jews always consider faith – *emuna* – to reach far beyond the horizon of individual experience; it constitutes the basis of the whole nation's existence and creates its history.

Apocalypse is a miracle of humanity's deliverance from the slavery of death – through death – as well as from the oppression of necessity, from the cycle of natural transformation. "Consequently, Taubes argues that apocalypse must guard against its own destructive impulses without relinquishing its antagonism towards profane authority"[26]. Its impetus is directed against the law which glues together the loosened structures of temporal reality (the structures of meaning and power). On the one hand, there is the apocalyptic understanding of time as delay – as a respite or reprieve ("everything has its end"); on the other – in case the former vision is negated, there is simple metabolism, an endless and senseless natural repetition.[27] Therefore, if man wants to break away from the inhuman rhythm of experiencing the world, to grow independent of the pulse of biological transformation ("the pulse of life"), he must be prepared, at any time, to confront the dark, unknown, uncontrollable and untamable forces. This precisely is history. It is a field of action for some undefined powers, but also an arena where man's character is being forged, a place of humanization and – at the end of time – of deification ("to look upon His face and yet not die"). Nature poses a natural threat to this type of vocation due to its dehumanizing force and its gradual naturalization of all symptoms of human life. Faced with this breach – between the order created by man and the chaos which he yields to, between history and nature – man must decide what is closer to him: he himself or the murmur of a stream and the flight of birds. "Endless infinity," Taubes writes, "characterizes indifferent happening [*das gleich-gültige Geschehen*] that does not call for decision. History separates itself from this indifferent happening by placing one into the decision for truth."[28] Apocalypse, that unhistorical element of history, abolishes chronology, undermines the concept of progress and even of evolution: everything advances towards its end that gives meaning to history. By posing the question of the Eschaton, history surpasses its limitations, it becomes visible and sensible to itself. However, for the naturalized *hyletics* there is always "time" to decide; they are not in any hurry. For cyclicality changes decision into an empty gesture. Immersed in the natural sequence of events (Thursday-weekend- Monday), they are

[26] J.R. Gold, "Jacob Taubes: »Apocalypse From Below«", in: *Telos*, 134: 2006, p. 142.

[27] This is Alexandre Kojève's post-historical vision of the world, criticized by Taubes in his essay "Asthetisierung der Wahrheit im Posthistoire".

[28] J. Taubes, *Occidental* Eschatology, op. cit., p. 5.

completely indifferent as to the act of decision and as to history. They do not – in a sense, it is not even possible – take responsibility for anything. Ethics is replaced with law that tells them what one must not do and what goes unpunished. In this seemingly living, restless world everybody is at once dead and rejected by death. "Creation," to cite Taubes again, is "decay (...) without hope."[29] Those, in turn, who feel the course of human history, are urged for decision by every historical occurrence, including the final and most important one. So haste is very advisable. Historical time is running out and coming to an end, as opposed to the barren μεταβολή; the need to decide is growing more and more urgent day by day: be as little children no longer! As Taubes once noted of apocalypse: "Whether one knows it or not is entirely irrelevant, whether one takes it for fancy or sees it as dangerous is completely uninteresting in view of the intellectual breakthrough and experience of time as respite (...). There is no eternal return, time does not enable nonchalance; rather, it is distress"[30]. And further on in the interview: "But from a Christian perspective one has no time, because God's Kingdom is at hand. It is not important for me what God's Kingdom expresses in the assumption »God's Kingdom is at hand«. What matters is the plausibility of its being close [Nah-Sein]. Whoever presumes to think in a Christian way, but refuses to think of respite, is mentally deficient."[31] Law of whatever kind: positive, given (to Jews) by God, or natural – law as κατέχον – turns out to be faulty in the context of a "reprieve"; something groundless, arbitrary and inoperative. "This is the secret knowledge promised by apocalyptic thought that worldly authority would prefer to pass over in silence."[32] Taubes sees apocalypse as the abolition of all law, including the natural one: the world ends, death ceases to exist (or only it "exists"). "Paul defines the time between the death of Jesus and the Parousia of Christ as the kairos, which is characterized by the crossing over of the still natural and the already supernatural states of the world. With the death and resurrection of Jesus, the turning point [*Wende*] is reached: the fashion [*das Wesen*] of this world will pass away."[33] Since it always arrives from the future, apocalypse is an empty, unwritten "story" – an event devoid of any traces or memories whatsoever. Its unstoppable, destructive movement, its progression towards the catastrophe of the world – pregnant with memories and full of traces of past events – is due to the emptiness that draws everything in. At the moment of catastrophe, impatience interweaves with the hope that the apocalyptic fire, though it engulfs everything, does not incinerate everything; that it contains within itself "the time that remains." As in César Vallejo's poem about a house that is brimming with absence:

> – No one lives in the house anymore – you tell me –; all have gone. The living room, the bedroom, the patio, are deserted. No one remains any longer, since everyone has departed.

[29] J.R. Gold, "Jacob Taubes: »Apocalypse From Below«", op. cit., p. 155.

[30] Interview with Jacob Taubes, in: *Denken, das an der Zeit ist*, ed. F. Roetzer. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1987, qtd. in: J. Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, op. cit., p. xiii.

[31] Interview with Jacob Taubes, in: *Denken, das an der Zeit ist*, op. cit., p. 318. Unless otherwise stated, the citations are given in a translation prepared for the purpose of this publication.

[32] J.R. Gold, "Jacob Taubes: »Apocalypse From Below«", op. cit., p. 156.

[33] J. Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, op. cit., p.68. If there is no hope for love, then the last sentence of this passage has very little to do with common sense and becomes somewhat nihilistic in its tone. (See also: J.R. Gold, "Jacob Taubes: »Apocalypse From Below«", op. cit., p. 156; and: J. Taubes, *The Political Theology of Paul*, op. cit., p. 72.)

> And I say to you: When someone leaves, someone remains. The point through which a man passed, is no longer empty. The only place that is empty, with human solitude, is that through which no man has passed. New houses are deader than old ones, for their walls are of stone or steel, but not of men. A house comes into the world, not when people finish building it, but when they begin to inhabit it. A house lives only off men, like a tomb. That is why there is an irresistible resemblance between a house and a tomb. Except that the house is nourished by the life of man, while the tomb is nourished by the death of man. That is why the first is standing, while the second is laid out.
>
> Everyone has departed from the house, in reality, but all have remained in truth. And it is not their memory that remains, but they themselves. Nor is it that they remain in the house, but that they continue about the house. Functions and acts leave the house by train or by plane or on horseback, walking or crawling. What continues in the house is the organ, the agent in gerund and in circle. The steps have left, the kisses, the pardons, the crimes. What continues in the house are the foot, the lips, the eyes, the heart. Negations and affirmations, good and evil, have dispersed. What continues in the house, is the subject of the act.[34]

MARCION, OUR CONTEMPORARY

Over two thousand years have passed since the Lord promised man the Second Coming, and he has not kept his promise. Jews, who have already had many messiahs, such as Jesus or Sabbatai Zevi, have been awaiting salvation even longer. One might ask, what is it that has made them wait – in vain, or so it seems. Perhaps the messianic idea itself has been misread from the start? Perhaps the message containing the idea of the parousia has been intentionally misinterpreted – by conservative rabbinic Judaism on the one side, and by Christian orthodoxy on the other? All the sources have been distorted and thus, when reading them, one should reverse the perspective – as Overbeck suggests.[35]

The first to venture to do this was Marcion. He came to Rome from Asia Minor when the last members of the Bar Kokhba revolt were being executed. Marcion – the self-appointed successor of the Apostle Paul – followed the spirit of the time and began purging the Christian canon of Jewish traces and influences. First, he threw out the Old Testament, a useless thing, then purged the New Testament of the Gospels, except for Luke (from which he still cut out the first chapters devoted to the childhood of Jesus), and finally he got rid of the letters (three out of thirteen) he considered to be Jewish "interpolations."[36]

At the root of his religious doctrine was the crisis of the Messianic idea. It influenced the early Christians' will to escape from the mainstream of history, which was connected with their interiorization of the hope for the coming of the Messiah, who,

[34] C. Vallejo, "No One Lives in the House Anymore...", in: idem, *The Complete Posthumous Poetry*, trans. C. Eshleman, J.R. Barcia. Berkeley: University of California Press 1980, pp. 26-27.

[35] J. Taubes, *The Political Theology of Paul*, op. cit., p. 20.

[36] *Apokryfy Nowego Testamentu. Ewangelie apokryficzne* [*The Apocrypha of the New Testament. Apocryphal Gospels*]. Vol. 1, ed. M. Starowieyski. Kraków: Wydawnictwo WAM 2003, p. 125.

this time, was to come – if he comes at all – from the inside, from within, and not, as it was expected, from the outside world. They assumed that the temporal world is ruled by a Demiurge who is just but who knows no pity. This God is just as imperfect as the world he had created. He knows neither love nor compassion – the Messiah cannot reveal himself in such conditions, and if he does, he will perish as Christ did. At the antipodes of the Creator-God is the *Deus alienus*, "the alien God." He has no direct contact with his creation, with life. He is the "black sun" whose light makes all living things wither. He is characterized by infinite, unworldly love and compassion for man. Marcion only presumes him to possess these traits. But he must possess them, just like his Son who was sent to the people as Jesus Christ to tell them about the paradoxical existence of his "non-existent" father.

Marcion's doctrine should not be identified with Gnosticism, as Harnack stresses[37]. Gnosticism teaches the doctrine of two gods in terms of a struggle between good and evil, a battle to the death between two antagonistic principles. According to Marcion, the just Lord of creation does not enter into any relation with the *Deus alienus* – as if they did not know each other. However, both are interested in man who seems to be a curious commodity to "haggle over." In fact, every part of him needs mending – not only the body is bad, but also the soul which is tied to the body. One solution is to destroy both these areas, as postulated by the Encratites (ἐγκρατίται means "abstinent," "renouncing all worldly goods"), or to radically withdraw from the world (ἀναχώρησις is "an ebb," "a shelter," but also "a return"). "Marcion places the redeemed soul on one side and the existing society on the other, and on the improvement of the latter no thought is to be wasted. The Church did not follow Marcion. It knew that by »tearing apart creation and salvation its authority to influence the order of this world would be lost«."[38] However, although it rejected Marcion's theology, the Church "recompensed him" with the celibacy of the priests and the elitism of the Jansenists. By doing so it colluded with him against life.

How is it that twentieth-century culture, so stirred up by life, had so much reverence for Marcion's anti-vitalistic speculation? This can be partly explained by its anti-Judaism which is always in demand.[39] According to Taubes, the main cause of the revival of Marcion's doctrine is to be sought in the belief that something important, some precious knowledge, has been concealed from man, for example that "the sense of the world must be outside the world" (Wittgenstein). What has proved to be of particular value in this respect is the message about the radically transcendent God who sent his Son to the world so that people could be saved through Him. God's voluntary self-degradation, the fact that He humiliated and humbled himself by incarnation, would bring to mind the idea of God who is "weak" and just as powerless as we are in the face of the demonic powers of

[37] K. Rudolph, *Gnosis. The Nature & History of Gnosticism*, trans. R. McL. Wilson. Edinburgh: T&T Clark 1998, p. 313.

[38] J. Taubes, "Das stählerne Gehäuse und der Exodus daraus oder Ein Streit um Marcion, einst und jetzt", in: idem, *Vom Kult zur Kultur: Bausteine zu einer Kritik der historischen Vernunft. Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religions und Geistesgeschichte*. München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag 1996, p. 177.

[39] Hence Buber's remark: "Harnack died in 1930, three years later his thought, the thought of Marcion, was put into action, not by means of thought but through violence and terror. Marcion's gift to Hadrian had passed over to other hands" (ibid.).

history. Despite the vagueness of such images, one can find some consolation in them, some hope for the return to a changed world that will be our common home rather than a cage in which people are imprisoned.

"In the apocalypses no one »acts« but rather everything »happens«,"[40] writes Taubes. One is overwhelmed by passivity. "The drawbridge comes from the other side," so there is no point striving for salvation[41]. But the Marcionic separation of "the alien God" and creation forecloses the possibility of apocalypse: the sacred will not – it is not able to – cope with the profane, justice will triumph over love, the inertia of legalistic structures will withstand the pressure of inertness and the loss of meaning. The Marcionic version of Gnosticism is thus a misguided response to the apocalyptic crisis, to a situation when apocalypse refuses to come, especially if its arrival is not a question of "some indeterminate future but [is] entirely proximate."

CONCLUSION

For the Jews revelation has a public dimension – its arena is human history: God is coming from the direction of their history. Revelation is always connected with that which already came to pass. For Christians, however, it is a spiritual event which wholly belongs to their private, apolitical world. But the Messiah does not come simply in order to change the hearts of individual sinful beings. Revelation does not relate only to the sphere of pure spirit. Its power must encompass the whole sublunary world and cause the miracle of its successful re-creation. The salvation of the visible world is at the same time the end of its previous form – the Parousia occurs in the form of apocalypse. Thus, "every moment must be ready to receive the plenitude of eternity, the furthest distance is that which is expected at the nearest moment."[42] Theology, being an attempt to rationally speak of final matters, interweaves with politics which administers the impermanent form of this world.

The venerable kings, David and Solomon, the biblical prophets, and also one Greek astronomer, placed God at the very top of the hierarchy of being, pictured as a vertical axis of the universe. God, who previously had a sacrificial table and his tent among the people, was deprived of his body and then banished to heaven. He became a subject of faith, a "symbol," that is – someone who is believed in (πείθω, πίστις), but who is not trusted. For hierarchies weaken religious instinct and openness. Aristarchus of Samos, the first "heliocentrist," tried to change this, but it was only Copernicus who managed to refute the bipolar reality of the Ptolemaic cave. In his view, the temporal order is no longer an emanation of heaven's perfection, because there is no heaven. There is – which in fact is good news – no hell either (in its place we have the nightmare of history). Strictly speaking, one is confused as to what is above, what is below, what revolves around what (allegedly the Sun is in the center, but how much longer?). Modern cosmology has destroyed not only the prevailing hierarchical system, but any possibility of any hierarchy, including the difference between what is natural and what is supernatural. Ethics and her younger (and uglier) sister, political correctness, are perched on the peg of the historical moment;

[40] J. Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, op. cit., p. 34. (See also: J.R. Gold, "Jacob Taubes: »Apocalypse From Below«", op. cit., p. 148.)

[41] J. Taubes, *The Political Theology of Paul*, op. cit., p. 76.

[42] F. Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. B.E. Galli. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press 2005, p. 245.

they constitute a desacralized form of religion, they are temporary and to a great extent – revocable. In his letter to Armin Mohler, Taubes asks: "How does a system of law [*Recht*] look, given that atheism is our fate?"[43] Thus, ethics and law, along with the whole sphere of contemporary politics, might have, and indeed do have, only so much to do with religion that they are its degenerate, late forms. While relying solely on their own efforts, they do not believe in "ghosts" or "miracles" and thus capitulate before any state of emergency any thought they find "unthinkable" and can neither interpret nor make lucid. A planetary ban on political power is being introduced, the legitimacy of its acts is being revoked. The world is ruled by foppish lookalikes. Yet no one seems to mind, for it makes no difference.

The Copernican revolution caused yet another "salutary" effect. Cast down from heaven, "the Lord" found himself among people again, though no one noticed it. "His" presence today can be felt by the effects of "a transcendental dynamic discharge," as Oskar Goldberg claimed at the beginning of the last century**.** We know neither who nor where "He" is; we cannot tell the course that he is set for. Surely he is not Marcion's *Deus alienus* as there is no such God, or at least – he is beyond any possible, human experience. Even the Son, whom he sent to save mankind, did not die because he had never lived. His "body" was fashioned out of foam, out of something "phantasmal," hallucinatory (δόξα derives from δοκείν – "to appear," "to seem"), some pseudo-matter in which he had to clothe himself so that he could seem to suffer. Man is thus to take comfort from God who does not exist, from meaning which does not exist either, and from novelty that does not have to justify itself: its advantage over traditional values consists in the fact that it is fresh, brand-new. Success proves the usefulness of novelty; it is its legitimacy. What is venerable is not taken into account, but simply destroyed. In other words, tradition is not even hostile, it is not to be combated; it simply is not taken into account in discussing the future shape of the human world.[44]

In the twentieth century we experienced the presence of "the other god." Everywhere around the world "He" manifested himself in spasmodic convulsions, in "His" successive, though gradually less and less successful incarnations. The Shoah, world wars, global dehumanization, Tutsi-Hutu – all this is "Yahweh's" delirious dance. In "His" song he promises: "This is the final struggle" – it is in fact a promise of an apocalypse which will not be followed by any other struggle, because there will be no world worth fighting for, not even a cracked shell of it. Ultimately, sociology and political science provide no explanations, so one needs to dig deeper, into theology – political theology.

If called by the right name, "He" will supposedly come, although it is not certain as whom: an enemy or a friend. Perhaps it would be better not to summon "God" at all. Yet this is impossible, argues Taubes, for today every gesture, even the least spectacular one, turns out to be theology, "invoking" God, summoning Him.[45] "On such a day the Messiah advances to the edge of the horizon and looks down on the earth. And when He

[43] J. Taubes, *The Political Theology of Paul*, op. cit., p. 109.

[44] M. Terpstra, "»God's Love for his Enemies« Jacob Taubes' Conversation with Carl Schmitt on Paul", in: *International Journal in Philosophy and Theology*, 70: 2009, p. 202.

[45] "Taubes is right: today everything is theology, with the exception of what the theologians talk about..." C. Schmitt, "Four Passages From Letters of Carl Schmitt to Armin Mohler", in: J. Taubes, *To Carl Schmitt. Letters and Reflections*, op. cit., p. 26.

sees it, white, silent, surrounded by azure and contemplation, He may lose sight of the boundary of clouds that arrange themselves into a passage, and, not knowing what He is doing, He may descend upon earth. And in its reverie the earth won't even notice Him, who has descended onto its roads, and people will wake up from their afternoon nap remembering nothing. The whole event will be rubbed out, and everything will be as it has been for centuries, as it was before history began."[46]

[46] B. Schulz, *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*, trans. C. Wieniewska. New York: Walker 1978, p. 21.

Rafał Kuczyński

DEMONIC CENSORSHIP

Censorship is a terrible word. It is rough and crude. It cuts like a sharp-edged stone thrown at a blasphemer. It suffocates with its burden even the most durable individuals. It echoes with the clinging of chains, reeks with the damp stone walls of a dungeon, penetrates with the chill of sterile prison cells, or burns with the unbearable heat of stake flames. Censorship is often, too often, soaked in man's blood. It isolates with a barbed wire of prohibitions and purges with a burning acid of "editorial amendments." It breaks lives, it breaks characters, it breaks peoples' souls. In its less violent instances it limits individuals by means of legal regulations, or even by less explicit but equally, if not more, effective tools of authorities, hierarchies, traditions, habits and customs, since to prevent is its main aim. Its oppressive character, however, fosters opposition. In its cruel image an individual sees himself in an inverted reflection. He becomes terribly aware of himself, because as himself, and not anyone else, he is being limited. He realizes that he is being limited in his choices, in his words and in his actions and suddenly he faces the most horrid conclusion – that each and every of the limiting acts of the censor is an attempt on his fundamental trait as a human being, on his freedom. Realizing that, as soon as he manages to repulse immediate danger, he undertakes a vehement counterattack, tracking, hunting and disabling any potential threat – the more hidden and inexplicit, the more dangerous it is. A peculiar witch-hunt begins, for the witches, self-conscious and eager to do battle, fight the inquisition, their former oppressors joined in an unwritten alliance with new ones. The fight is difficult, because only the ghosts of the ancient enemies remain on the battlefield and the new ones are camouflaged. But the fight is crucial, for it provides foundations, however shaky, of the identities of both sides of the conflict, of the rulers and the ruled. A vicious circle has been set in motion. Constant tension, self-perpetuating tragic conflict binds opponents in an unbreakable bond of mutual interdependence. Censorship is a truly demonic device. It seems that once we acknowledge this eternal conflict, all is left for us to do is to put censorship under the microscope of theoretical investigation in order to reveal and analyze its nature as a phenomenon, if not for the sake of knowledge itself, then at least in order to provide us with some understanding of it that would enable us to control the conflict within a certain framework that will keep us away from violence.

There are a number of examples that we could look into, but there is one exceptionally interesting, namely – the trial of Socrates, the account of which we are given in Plato's *Apology.* The unique character of the ancient Greek *polis,* which did not distinguish between social, political and religious spheres, makes Socrates' case almost a paradigmatic instance of a censorship trial, where religious accusations of Socrates for impiety intertwine with allegations of him causing social disruption by corrupting the youth, and meet

in the court of law of the democratic legal system of Athens which, by means of a public accusation, proposes the most extreme censoring measure – capital punishment. But the most extraordinary element of that trial is the form of Socrates' defense speech which does not follow the customary path of legal disputes. We can hear that in the very first words of his speech when Socrates admits that he was almost persuaded by persecution that he is not who he thought he was and expresses his fear that many might indeed be seduced by virulent tongues of preceding speakers, but not him. He refuses to accept the label that the censor wished to mark him with. Moreover, he rejects the language that his accusers tried to impose, saying that he is not acquainted with such a manner of talking. And when we notice here who his accusers are – Anytus, attacking Socrates on behalf of politicians and artisans, Meletus, who joined the accusation on behalf of poets, and Lycon, who represented the rhetoricians – we realize the gravity of Socrates' refutation. He does not do this just because of some personal inconvenience forced on him by the circumstances of the lawsuit he is facing, he rejects the language of his contemporary wizards of arguments, virtuosos of words and architects of speech, and he does that, as he admits, to be able to speak in the language of truth. In fact, he entreaties his judges to treat him as a guest from a different city, a foreigner, just as if truth was foreign to his accusers' language. Socrates refused to take hold of the eristic line of arguments that his persecutors wrapped around his neck. It did not save his life, but it surely saved his speech. One might be tempted to see Socrates as a victim of the system, a lonely martyr crushed under the collective force of the *polis.* And his refusal to speak the language of the city-makers might confirm this temptation, but it is rather doubtful that Socrates himself considered his *polis* as a factio in this confrontation, for we would have to disregard true respect and devotion that Socrates presented throughout his life, which, as Xenophon says in his version of Socrates' apology, stands alone as proof of his innocence. Socrates wasn't afraid of the death sentence just as he wasn't afraid of death when he fought his city's wars, shoulder to shoulder with his Athenian brethren, as he called his fellow citizens. We would also have to ignore the fact that if Socrates urged anyone to do anything, it was to consider the city's interests before their own. And it is highly doubtful that these words are Socrates' attempt to cajole the judges, for his speech contains a fair amount of criticism of the Athenian *polis,* both under its democratic as well as oligarchic governments. Socrates does not contradict his *polis.* He obeys its laws and fulfills its commands, to say the least, for he understood the importance of the city and political matters better than any of his contemporaries.

Moreover, he understood that his trial was not a case concerning transgression of certain religious and social rules, as the prosecutors tried to present it. For him it was a judgment of malice and anger over the noblest of pursuits, the pursuit of wisdom and truth. This anger and this malice was a result of the prosecutors' contradiction in their allegation of Socrates' impiety, and of their ignorance with regards to what is good and what is bad for the Athenian youth. Or rather, to be more precise, the anger and malice were the result of Socrates laying bare their ignorance, just as he was in the habit of doing whenever he met anyone who claimed any pretense to wisdom.

And this struggle, with truth as its ultimate goal, was the reason why Socrates not only could, but felt compelled to dismiss his accusation altogether as false and did not engage in a rhetorical battle of persuasion, for adopting his accusers' manner of

argumentation would mean, as he points out, admitting that he in fact does not believe in gods, which was untrue. Socrates did not undermine the authority of his *polis.* He proved his loyalty on many occasions, serving his citizens in the best way he thought possible. He disagreed to acknowledge the authority of his accusers whom he thought ignorant. Socrates acknowledged a different authority more valid, an authority that he listened to with a pious reverence. It was an authority which never told him what to do or to say, but resounded in his head every time he was about to do or say something wrong, it was his inner voice, his inner censor, his *daimonion*. Socrates mentions the importance of this divine being throughout his life several times during his speech. Once, recalling how he was close to death at the hands of his fellow citizens when, while holding a public office in Athens, he obeyed his inner voice and opposed an unjust sentence that the majority was about to give. The second time he mentions his *daimonion* is when he refers to his own defense speech saying that the voice remained silent, just as if it preferred him to die rather than to preserve his life at the price of dishonoring himself with a false account.

These Demons which occupy the middle ground between gods and humans play the role of messengers, as we learn from Plato's *Symposium,* carrying human prayers to the gods and the gods' commands to men. The *daimonion*, receiving the knowledge of the good directly from the gods, prevents Socrates from doing or saying anything bad. Thus, demonic intervention depends on the knowledge of good, the aim of a Socratic philosopher. Since this knowledge is reserved to the gods, Socrates depends on the *daimonion* when good and bad deeds, good and bad speeches are to be recognized. It is significant that both vicious acts and bad words are being censored. Just as not everything that can be done is good, not everything that can possibly be uttered, should be. Some things are unworthy to be spoken, like persuading orations and cries and pleas for mercy in the case of Socrates during his trial. As he said, lack of words was not the reason of his condemnation. But the words that Socrates refuses to speak are the words of falsehood. And the obligation that he feels is great. Nobody, not even by a threat of death, could force him to say things which the demon disapproved of. Paradoxically, seen in this light, Socrates' censorship trial seems like an attempt to make Socrates break the obligation, a test of his endurance and persistence in obeying his inner censor. And the obligation might be seen as a specific kind of right, a peculiar understanding of freedom of speech, namely – the ultimate right to keep silent about things that are not true, a right that Socrates considered more valuable than life, for, as he says, the difficulty is not to preserve your life, but to live a righteously.

A censor prevents and guards. The demonic censor keeps guard at the borders of the human realm, reminding Socrates that only gods are wise, that he is nothing but a man and that acting in the world with claims to wisdom is to challenge the gods, it is to commit *hubris*. Yet, the *daimonion* cannot stop anybody from trespassing, and to listen to him is Socrates' own choice, and he does not make it not because of the fear of divine wrath that might follow, but because he believed that saving his life by doing injustice is much worse than being unjustly condemned to death. One might avoid the wrath of gods, but one cannot escape his own, inner judgment.

Yet, the injustice has to be recognized in the first place. Socrates is warned by his *daimonion* who helps him and warns about the danger. But what if we are not as lucky as he was and we do not have a demonic inner voice? It is a wrong question to ask, for it implies

that we may know that it is possible not to have it. But we cannot come to such a conclusion simply because we do not hear the *daimonion*'s voice. It is a question of belief, and Socrates, as we know, did believe. But even if we do not believe now, we surely used to, for all children believe. Perhaps then, just like Socrates whose *daimonion* began to speak to him when he was a child, we still have a vague memory of a demonic voice that resounded within us a long time ago. And perhaps our inner voice still speaks within us, though we might hear less distinctly, or not hear it at all, when we grow up and when our ears are filled with the noise of arguments around us – a noise so great that we can't hear our own thoughts. However that might be, in this respect Socrates, being able to hear his *daimonion*, seems to be luckier not only than we are, but also luckier than his contemporaries. Indeed, he was blessed with divine voices, for he claimed to have heard one more – the voice of the Delphic oracle. And her words might spark some hope also in our less fortunate souls. The oracle, when asked by Socrates' friend, whether there was anyone wiser than Socrates, replied that there was no one. Her words perplexed Socrates greatly because he did not think himself wise. This oracle was the cause of his main occupation – the search for a man who would be wiser than him. By keeping the oracle's words in mind, Socrates invoked the gods to bear witness to his efforts. Thus, Socrates was constantly accompanied by divine forces – when they did not appear by themselves, he recalled them in his mind. "Where is the spark?" – one might ask, for it seems that since being less fortunate then Socrates and not hearing the voice of our *daimonion*, the path to wisdom is closed off from us. But if we treat the oracle like a riddle, which it is, and – in the manner of treasure hunters standing at the mysterious gates that block their way to great riches – try to decipher her words, we might finally discover the spell opening the sealed portal, and we just might see that the oracle does not limit wisdom to Socrates by saying that there is no one wiser than him. There is nothing that can possibly prevent us from being as wise as Socrates. And Socrates seems to be aware of that as well, for he admits that even though only gods can be truly wise, he might be as wise as a man – that is to say: any man – can, because he acknowledges the impossibility of bringing true wisdom from the heavens down to earth. Nevertheless, whoever considers himself wise simply because he knows this, must be ignorant. There is no short-cut to wisdom. A true friend of wisdom, like a real, passionate treasure hunter, never stops in his quest, for the quest can never be complete.

Censorship is bound up with knowledge and ignorance. When misused by usurpers of wisdom and aimed at those whom they perceive as ignorant, it becomes a violent form of persuasion and coercion; an attempt to teach others to think. As a result, those who represent other opinions will fight back because they feel oppressed. Yet, they might easily get trapped in a vicious circle, unwillingly joining the battle on their opponent's terms, actually inheriting their techniques of persuasion. Demonic censorship is driven by a different motivation. It is guided by truth and in the human realm manifests itself through our choices to restrain oneself from doing wrong, from challenging the gods while being merely a man.

Grzegorz Czemiel

REMEMBERING BEING. A PHILOSOPHICAL READING OF CIARAN CARSON'S *ON THE NIGHT WATCH*

Enlarge art? No. On the contrary, take art with you into your innermost narrowness. And set yourself free.

Paul Celan

He who, having entered the first night, seeks intrepidly to go toward its profoundest intimacy, toward the essential, hears at a certain moment the other night – hears himself, hears the eternally reverberating echo of his own step, a step toward silence, toward the void. But the echo sends this step back to him as the whispering immensity, and the void is now a presence coming toward him.

Maurice Blanchot

What does it mean to be "on the night watch"? It might be conceived of as a patient and diligent meditation that leads toward the question of temporality. The small hours are a time when the night itself takes over, not the night of sleep and oblivion, but the "other night" – to use Maurice Blanchot's term – the arid desert of death and impotence where the clocks begin to behave in a strange way and time plays tricks on us, opening up an abyss of loneliness and discomfort. As Blanchot puts it "it is repetition that will not leave off, satiety that has nothing, the sparkle of something baseless and without depth."[1] Thus, it may be explained as the uncomplaining observation of how all forms dissolve, including perhaps one's own sense of subjectivity, whose emergence certain philosophers align with the appearance of a sense of time. The moment when subjectivity is liquefied, however, has also been considered as the instant when literature is born.

In her article on Maurice Blanchot, Agata Bielik-Robson remarks that literature is conscious of the fact that its deathly space allows words to become material, freeing them from their meaning. However, as she wittingly points out, we cannot claim that

[1] M. Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, trans. A. Smock. Lincoln 1989, p. 167.

words live their life in that sphere, but that they all die their own death. To each word its own death.[2] The same goes for the shifter "I," which signifies the melting of all identity in language. The fear of an anonymous death by drowning in the ocean of dead words provokes a strange game that is played in language. The "I" drives round that forbidden place, the void that would swallow it, postponing each sentence and withholding – for some time at least – death by writhing, slithering, i.e. weaving round that empty hole, un-weaving oneself into nothing.[3]

There is no knowledge of death without words, but the darkness obliterates them and unravels our textual labyrinths. I would claim that only certain linguistic constructs are able to put up a resistance against that process and defer it, making it perceptible for us – these are poems whose materiality resists the absolution in non-being. Hanging on a rope over the abyss is what poetry offers – a dangerous jaunt on top of a mountain made from words. Swinging on the line of the poem is thus elevated to the position of a central metaphor which captures the movement of life on the thread of the story. In this way, the poetic line is the tie with which man "ties himself tight to his death with a tie of which he is the judge. He makes his death; he makes himself mortal and in this way gives himself the power of a maker and gives to what he makes its meaning and its truth."[4] The poetic line is also what links the writer's pen to the paper, making him the "master of his pen," but this mastery serves only one purpose: "keeping him in contact with the fundamental passivity where the word, no longer anything but its appearance – the shadow of a word – can never be mastered or even grasped."[5]

"Write to be able to die," explains Blanchot, "die to be able to write."[6] Writing is a risky business for it lures us into a territory where words take over and death reigns supreme, erasing and overwriting our stories. Still, we have to produce our narrative in order to survive, just like Scheherazade did. According to Blanchot, the author's aim is not only to postpone death, or secure immortal fame, but also to

> make *perceptible* (...) the uninterrupted affirmation, the giant murmuring upon which language opens and thus becomes image, becomes imaginary, becomes a speaking depth, an indistinct plenitude which is empty.[7]

The acknowledging of the nothingness which breeds all possibility and the imaginary reckoning of that giant murmuring is at the same time an introspective travel and a probing of the boundaries of humanity. This is the highest work of self-consciousness, which thus becomes able to confront the interminable flow of language, the dark spring of time and subjectivity. This is both a way forward towards death, accepting it, and a road back along the linguistic steps of the words that have shaped us into what we are.

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[2] A. Bielik-Robson, "*Faux-pas* albo błąd życia: Blanchot między Heideggerem a Freudem", in: *Maurice Blanchot. Literatura ekstremalna*, ed. P. Mościcki. Warsaw 2007, pp. 146-147.

[3] Ibid., pp. 147-14

[4] M. Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, op. cit., p. 95.

[5] Ibid., p. 24.

[6] Ibid., p. 93.

[7] Ibid., p. 26.

Emmanuel Lévinas, a friend to Maurice Blanchot, observed that literature allows putting into the foreground that ceaseless tolling of the bell which calls what is no longer the world, but the being of being. It finds fulfilment in presenting its disappearing.[8] By negating the world, poetic language allows that infinite murmur to emerge, bringing us closer to death, because this is what it ultimately entails; the poem allows the murmur to echo in its lines.[9] In this sense, literature does not hide anything inside, for it is constitutes radical exteriority and expulsion.[10] This diminishing and retracting turns out to be the necessary step in order to make space – via the poem – for "the neutral, indistinct word which is speaking's being."[11] According to Lévinas, this step is taken by way of addressing and advancing towards "you" – the other. This "you" is a cipher, as is the case with Paul Celan's poems, because the implied person can be interpreted as consciousness come back on itself, a process wherein a certain satisfaction is found by locating "in extreme negativity – in death become possibility, project, and time – the measure of the absolutely positive."[12] This is the self-knowledge achieved by subordinating to the "you" and answering to its call. It is not only the high point in an auto-poetic philosophical venture and an ethical turn, but also a distinguished artistic achievement. This is where, as Blanchot claims, being, art and desire converge, for "[u]nder a name that hides *her* and a veil that covers *her*, *she* is the profoundly obscure point toward which art and desire, death and night, seem to tend."[13] The figure of a woman looming in Blanchot's argument may be interpreted as a metaphorical, liminal figure, like Eurydice, who is sought by the poet. They cannot meet, at least not in the poem or song, but Ciaran Carson – a remarkable Northern Irish poet – has proved to be able to uncover ever deeper layers of that mythical narrative. He turns that journey toward his lover into a quest during which he reveals the non-language that serves as the basis for all possible languages. It is a void that hums, or the murmur of Being as it unfolds itself in flashes of insight. This is what he has been listening to while being "on the night watch," measuring out the time during the small hours. He stepped into the night and found within it, as Orpheus did, the *other* night, where the *other* language reveals itself in the space of the poem.

*

Ciaran Carson was born in 1948 in Belfast, where he lives to this day. He is a poet, musician, novelist, columnist, translator and Professor at Queen's University Belfast, where he is also the Director of The Seamus Heaney Centre for Poetry. His diverse *oeuvre* is marked by a significant, unique turn. Although his first poetry collection *New Estate* (1976) was well-received, he remained silent until 1987, when he published the ground-breaking book *The Irish for No*. This unusual period of quietude is all the more extraordinary because the latter collection brought about a radical change in his poetic diction and thus constituted

[8] E. Lévinas, "Spojrzenie poety", trans. M.P. Markowski, in: *Literatura na Świecie* 10 (1996), p. 72.
[9] Ibid., p. 73.
[10] Ibid., p. 74
[11] M. Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, op. cit., p. 180.
[12] Ibid., p. 90.
[13] Ibid., p. 170, emphasis added.

a "second debut." This pregnant silence was a period during which Carson became – to employ his own phrase – "dissatisfied with poetry for some time."[14]

From this first silence emerges a poet who is pregnant with ideas and is ready to reinvent himself, as if awakened by the breath of a muse. However, after *For All We Know* (2008), he came to another halt. At this second turning point another great shift began, leading him towards the questions of being and death, which he openly confronts in *On The Night Watch* (2009), a book of scarce, condensed and stripped poems that are composed of terse couplets and display an unusually short number of words per line: usually no more than three or four. What also draws immediate attention is the deceptive simplicity of their language. The poems, usually conjured out of thirty or forty words, do not go far as to the choice of their vocabulary, relying primarily on the most basic verbs and nouns, giving at the same time a good amount of space for prepositions and articles. The smallest particles are in this way elevated to the level of independent poetic devices, as Carson plays with their positioning, exploiting their often ambiguous semantic character. He seems to explore the innermost basic units or building blocks of language. This intuition remains in accord with the general idea of the book, since it can be read as a kind of an egological contraction or a purification of the self. One could risk a claim that it is a kind of a linguistic *epoché* – a phenomenological reduction of all contextual matters, so as to grant access to the workings of the pure transcendental ego.

Carson begins his new poetic venture from a zero-degree level. It might seem that adding simple words to each other, like adding the basic natural numbers, cannot lead to a serious aesthetic deliberation and should eventually lack evocative power. However, Carson picks up the little pieces and tries to examine how they fit with other linguistic shreds, which is reminiscent of assembling a puzzle or stained glass which had been broken into a myriad of smithereens. In the speech delivered upon receiving the Georg Büchner Prize, Paul Celan alluded to an "absolute poem" which certainly cannot exist. However, he claims that "in every real poem (...) there is this ineluctable question, this exorbitant claim."[15] Carson's shattered, fragmented poems can be regarded as pieces of that impossible great work – fragments that are arranged in a cubist manner, an idea reinforced by the Georges Braque painting on the cover of *On The Night Watch*. Its title – *Woman Reading* – can be thus read as a suggestion that it is not only the poetic work but also the interpretative act that is in pieces, implying the impossibility of any discursive totality. Timothy Clark argues in his book on Martin Heidegger that such a poetic dispersion is one way "to bring the power of language itself to word," which should not be perceived in purely nihilistic terms as "an infinite regress but something as elusive and yet fundamental as trying to see, not any thing, but sight itself."[16] Heidegger himself defends such procedures – in "Letter on Humanism" – as phenomenologically valid, because a poetics that enacts an epistemological reduction of this kind achieves the task of a "liberation of language from grammar into a more original essential framework" which is traditionally "reserved for thought and poetic creation."[17]

[14] F. Ormsby interviews Ciaran Carson, in: *Linen Hall Review* (April 1991) (available online).
[15] P. Celan, "Meridian", in: *Collected Prose*, trans. R. Waldrop. New York 2003, p. 51.
[16] T. Clark, *Martin Heidegger (Routledge Critical Thinkers).* New York 2002, p. 107.
[17] M. Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism", trans. F. A. Capuzzi & J. G. Gray, in: *Basic Writings: from Being and Time (1927) to The Task of Thinking (1964)*, ed. D. F. Krell. New York 1977, p. 194.

The dregs and leftovers Carson employs in his poems seem to be remains of a lost civilization, or archaeological excavations from a different era. Such an approach might also be a symptom of a serious traumatic experience, a premonition of which can be found in the work of such poets as Paul Celan or Tadeusz Różewicz, both of whom seem to loom somewhere in the background. There is a strong sense of discontinuation, or distrust of a language that we find in pieces. Carson assumes the position of a careful and patient philosopher, who sifts the plethora of dictionaries to find "what will suffice." In Heidegger's terms, this undertaking is an attempt at rethinking Being itself. "As the destiny that sends truth," the philosopher writes, "Being remains concealed. But the world's destiny is heralded in poetry, without yet becoming manifest as the history of Being."[18] In this sense, poetry is an original way of rethinking Being.

The final effect is a rubble of wrecked words, arranged into sonnet-like piles. Carson is reminiscent of a Kabbalist who is gathering broken vessels – *Klippot* – and putting them carefully back together, so as to restore "God's grandeur" in the deepest recesses of the material world, where the light of the divine being does no longer reach. From such a perspective, the slim 14-line-long poems resemble Jacob's ladders, propped up against the blank of the page, which symbolizes the open but also frighteningly unguided ocean of possibilities that makes up human life. Of course, a strictly religious interpretation would only point toward a metaphysical or theological reading of the collection, but I would argue in favour of an interpretation venturing far into the basic tenets of human existence, probing the relationship between – on the one hand – writing and language, and on the other – Being and death. The eternal task of poetry and serious thought is to return to this relationship and make sense of it from our limited, historical perspective. "To bring to language ever and again this advent of Being which remains, and in its remaining waits for man," claims Heidegger, "is the sole matter of thinking."[19] This is an arduous and humble task – one that brings to mind associations with works by Samuel Beckett. Terry Eagleton aptly remarked that "Beckett's works take a few sparse elements and permutate them with Irish-scholastic ingenuity into slightly altered patterns." In this way, "[c]omplete dramas are conjured out of reshuffled arrangements of the same few scraps and leavings."[20] Carson seems to follow suit; he has also learned the lesson of "scrupulous meanness" and achieved a "secret compact with failure."[21]

The narrow stanzas of *On The Night Watch* wind their way down the page in *versus*, finally dissolving in the blankness of white space – the silence of the poem's ending. In this way, poetry offers special insight: "a «poetic» knowing that brings nearer but by allowing distance, joins together by acknowledging separateness and «understands» in yet holding a reserve of the non-intelligible."[22] Thus, we constantly "tra-*verse*" ourselves in our reaching beyond, both as humans who locate their goals in the future and orient themselves always by what is in view, and as readers who are looking over to the next

[18] Ibid., p. 219.
[19] Ibid., p. 241.
[20] T. Eagleton, "Determinacy Kills" (review of *Theodor Adorno: One Last Genius* by Detlev Claussen), in: *London Review of Books* 12 (19 June 2008), pp. 9-10.
[21] Ibid.
[22] T. Clark, *Martin Heidegger*, op. cit., p. 106.

line to find the meaning of the previous. Notably, this effect, which it might be fruitful to read alongside Edmund Husserl's analysis of the structure of time, is underlined and strengthened by the way Carson built his poems. His enjambments frequently require a meticulous analysis of both the coming and preceding lines, locking the reader in stasis, playing with the way we form expectations of meaning and arrive at our understanding of the poem on the basis of what we have already read. This syntactic labyrinth, elegantly phrased in the dynamic form of a sonnet, produces a meaning effect that both exposes the finitude (death aspect) of poetry and life, and puts to work the transitoriness (time aspect) of the poetic line and our winding passage through the world. This, I would argue, is the ultimate meaning of being "on the nightwatch."

THE LANGUAGE OF BEING

When Heidegger comments on Georg Trakl's poetry in the essay "Language," he underlines the close relation between pain and threshold – a place where pure light explodes and we are reminded of what and how we are:

> What is pain? Pain rends. It is the rift. But it does not tear apart into dispersive fragments. Pain indeed tears asunder, it separates, yet so that at the same time it draws everything to itself, gathers it to itself. Its rending, as a separating that gathers, is at the same time that drawing which, like the pen-drawing of a plan or sketch, draws and joins together what is held apart in separation. (...) The joining is the threshold.[23]

The motif of a threshold, or aperture, runs strongly throughout Carson's book. In "Between," this theme returns as "an aperture / of silence" (ONW 16), in "Were I to Add" as the "steps between / the cracks" (ONW 18) and in "Beware" as "the slip // betwixt this / split chink // & the next" (ONW 19).[24] These excerpts suggest that being on the verge, on the threshold itself, is a painful experience that beckons us and seems to reveal something of great importance.

The poem "Come In" extends this subject, positioning the reader again in front of a door which reveals "from behind / a crack // of light in / the blackout" – there is "someone / gesturing beyond // the vestibule / a presence // offering a pact" (ONW 36). The play of light and darkness, the beckoning of the unknown and the desire to look through the door return in "Still Trembling," where "the slits / of each shutter" are "resounding with // divided darkness." "I peep through / to see the outside" (ONW 55), the narrator of the poem says and these words conclude the poem, as if that secret "pact" (or "compact") could be valid only as long as an oath of silence is preserved. Other poems also rely on the metaphor of dwelling on the threshold, such as "Mining," in which "the seam" is visualized as "a deep / vein reached // by shaft or adit," where it is possible to encounter that "which bears what / you seek" (ONW 128). The flickering light that is guiding towards

[23] M. Heidegger, "Language", in: idem, *Poetry, language, thought*, trans. A. Hofstadter. New York 1971, p. 204.
[24] C. Carson, *On The Night Watch*. Loughcrew 2009. Hereinafter referred to in an abbreviated form as ONW with the appropriate page number.

some kind of darkness finally returns in the poem "Bells Sound," where "against the / blinding light // I look into / the absolute // darkness of / an open aperture" (ONW 100). The oscillation between darkness and light is a fundamental metaphor for Heidegger, for whom *Lichtung* – clearing – is the mode in which things are perceived. Every revelation, however, involves a process of covering up, concealing, so whenever we are on the brink of knowing what stands before us, it flickers away into the darkness which bred it. The task assigned to the one who is "on the night watch" rests in the probing of the emptiness into which everything recedes. The disappearance of the subject back into the white page turns out to be the deathly condition of writing and knowledge. Thus, as much as *On The Night Watch* is about death, it is also about revelations of Being, with language, especially poetic one, transporting us deeper into the home of Being, a place we inhabit but are not always aware of, as we are constantly reminded by the fact that the history of our Being is at the same time the history of forgetfulness.

In the poem "It Is" we learn that it is the "small hours" that especially inspire such recollections of Being. This part of the night is the period when hours "grow / into decades // measuring / eternity" (ONW 15). Time stretches both ways – it almost comes to a standstill, but only to procure a void in which the whole past and future can be contained in a single stroke of thought. Waiting is a meditation on aperture: a "chink" of light or the "chink / of the first bird." The dialectical movement of time, similar to breathing or some grand cosmic movement – contraction and expansion – finally opens up a space where a ray of light may shine through, or a bird (traditionally associated with a muse-like quality) can accentuate its presence. Then, the poems enter into silence, a space of in-betweenness, where the wandering mind is haunted by an "afterthought" marked by the "blue / of night // becoming morning" (ONW 16). It often gives the poems an anxious ending, evoking a primordial fear of nothingness, a dread of the terrible void that is heralded by sudden breaks with which many poems end: "beware," "what now," "on what," "another &," "trembling," etc., to quote only some examples. However, as Heidegger reminds us in "Language," where he discusses Trakl's threshold, such a seeming destruction is an essential expansion of this aperture, as it allows the true light to shine through. This is a moment when things receive their full names and become harmonious, while the fugue of their "final fitting-in" is pain. As Paul Celan put it in "Meridian," this "[p]ain, which is not exactly suffering, affects and touches man's «heart»; it is what is most intimate in him; the extreme interior where, in his almost absolute singularity, man – and not the subject – is pure waiting-for-an-other."[25] This pain, however, demands a revision of our attitude towards language.

Carson consequently codes those small hours in a language that could be called, to use his own expression from "Beware," "Braille / or Morse" (ONW 19). Indeed, the short line and regularity of these poems evokes a sense of a coded cipher, the short words being the dots and long ones the dashes. These sonnets are thus silently "crackling on" in the darkness, their long and slender shapes reminding of "the ticker tape / punched out" on the white page. Obviously, there is no hermetic message contained in those poems. On the contrary, their slow, stubborn movement is drawing our attention to their materiality.

[25] P. Celan, "Meridian", op. cit., p. 31.

Words become ticks of the clock, or drops falling on the parapet, as "the rain beats / on the rain // noise beats on noise" (ONW 51). Reading them is like "listening to the drip / drip // measuring / the silence" (ONW 23).

The last phrase comes from a notable poem "Remembering Being." Although its title is a run-on-line and is interlocked meaningfully with the first lines of the poem, inviting a reading that would form a syntactical unit "remembering being hunkered under the sink," it also invites a special reading – one that would stress the importance of the poem's title on its own. Such an interpretation would turn this particular sonnet into an interesting instance of those Heideggerian overtones I wish to emphasize here. The intimate relationship between being and time forms the foundation of Heidegger's account of human subjectivity, which he reformulates as *Dasein*. The act of "remembering being" can be equalled with the gesture of "measuring / the silence." The final rhetorical question with which the poem ends: "how many times / (...) have I / remembered this" reverberates with echoes of anxiety about our humanism. Its ambiguity is related to the dialectics of revealing and covering, which shrouds the fundamental question of Being, inscribing the effort of memory and inevitable loss into the space of literature, where the existential drama of our humanity is staged in the most acute manner.

This poem is also a good exponent of the type of inhale-exhale dynamics mentioned earlier. It is a meditation that begins with an image taken from childhood. However, after this timeless contraction ("whatever age / I was") into the flickering dot of subjectivity ("encloistered / in myself"), it expands by means of time ("how many times") into a myriad of past selves, perhaps as many as sixty of them ("in three score / years"). Such a dispersion of identity into time-parcelled selves is evident throughout the whole collection. What makes these distinct instances of subjectivity feel like an individual being? It is narration – the modest thread of story that we weave from our experiences. Accordingly, in the poem "I Looked Into That" the lyrical subject sees "within / your death // unfold / your life // untold as yet" (ONW 48).

However, it seems that this life story cannot be rendered in terms of traditional mimetic literature, which remains locked within the paradigm of "being" – the ontic realm – and does not allow the light of Being to shine through. Carson seems to struggle with the mimetic tradition in poetry so as to rediscover, or recall to memory what might be called true Being. As Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe remarks in *Poetry as Experience*, the "[p]oetic act consists of perceiving, not representing."[26] In order to achieve this, Carson metaphorically strips his poems of all usual content, rejecting the image-ridden vein of lyrical poetry. In its place he institutes what could be called a "Braille or Morse" poetics. This type of a poem, whose pattern is repeated steadily and invariably throughout the collection, lets the words lose their primary meaning and become something like stones thrown into the depths of a well: "stone // upon stone / dropped // soundlessly" (ONW 41) in order "to plumb // what was / immeasurable" (ONW 53). Such rhythmic patterns resemble the dripping of rain, or the delicate (or even almost unheard) splashes of stones thrown into a well. Other metaphorical instances of such poetics are the beep of a radar – a "blip & echo" (ONW 22) – or "a blip (...) shown / by the scan" (ONW 118) on an uncanny medical

[26] P. Lacoue-Labarthe, *Poetry as Experience*, trans. A. Tarnowski. Stanford 1999, p. 67.

apparatus. The poem becomes in this way something like a "display panel" (ONW 25) on which appearing words are joined as part of a meticulous, patient process of laying down line after line until "a beam / of intermittent // light flits / across // the window" (ONW 50). What is thus articulated, or "broadcast" is "a beam / in phased array // entering the mind / as arrows" (ONW 25). Thus, the poem is like a searchlight that is sweeping the dark regions ("minefield"), looking for something, or someone, until the lyrical "I" is "[t]ransfixed // by the searchlight / of your word" (ONW 110). The counterpart to this is a flickering of light, something that escapes our direct gaze or reading – the "beam" of the reader's eye. Such moments occur in-between, or in the spaces that separate the words, on the edge of our gaze, as in the painterly technique of anamorphosis – a "looking awry" that is demanded by the optical illusion to reveal the full contents of the artwork.

The poem "As arrows" offers an illuminating commentary on this. The title simile refers to the way people perceive their lives. We, as humans, are hung somewhere between the "finger posts" of future and past, and "we / speed onwards / always looking // back at what / our destination // might have been / *except for this* // *except for this* / but still" (ONW 28, emphasis added). What is of primary importance here is the space in-between, signalled by the strange aperture of the stanza break ("an aperture / of silence"). This gap, or stretch, is the place where transcendence seems made possible. In this light, the intimate meditation on being takes place during the "small hours," when time is not counted in purely technological terms, but by the internal sense of our personal time, the one dictated by the intimate *Dasein*, i.e. our mortality, measuring "one & two // & three / & more" and "calculating / incremental // steps between / the cracks" (ONW 18). The cracks are openings, crevices left out in the poems, moments when we leave ourselves to come back to our most intimate, "forgotten" Being. They invite us, although it seems *unheimlich*, i.e. strangely familiar yet evoking anxiety. This motif finds proper formulation in the poem "Come In," which offers an invitation to look behind the poem, or rather look through the *Sprachgitter* (the title of Celan's famous poem) – the bars of language or "the bars / of a cot // thumb / in mouth" (ONW 60) – at what may be looming behind and what is left out of the picture when we focus only on the mimetic meaning. It is an invitation to search for a deeper meaning, albeit not a secretive one, but a truth that is contained in the very gesture of inviting, or Celan's beckoning to a handshake, which is contained in all poetry.

POETIC DWELLING

Carson, for example, invites us in the poem "The Floor" to enter a new landscape – "the absolute / ground whereon // you stand (...) beyond the threshold / in the middle // of a meadow" (ONW 97). Giving us a strong sense of having entered upon a clearing, this "ground" is the firm basis on which thought can rest. It is not a heavenly sanctuary, for "[p]oetry does not fly above and surmount the earth in order to escape it and hover over it," as Heidegger claims; on the contrary, it "is what first brings man onto the earth, making him belong to it, and thus brings him into dwelling."[27] "There was Earth in them," we read in a poem by Celan, "and / they dug."[28] The grounding or rooting of the poem is a matter of

[27] M. Heidegger, "... Poetically man dwells...", in: *Poetry, language, thought*, op. cit., p. 218.
[28] P. Celan, "There Was Earth", in: *25 Poems*, trans. A. S. Kline (available online).

utmost importance for both Celan and Heidegger, who constantly reuse such metaphors, e.g. when the former claims that "the poem holds its *ground* on its own margin"[29] and the meridian is "immaterial as language, yet *earthly*, *terrestial*,"[30] or when the latter says that "[i]n poetry there takes place what all measuring is in the *ground* of its being."[31] This leads us to the question of dwelling and inhabiting, which are central to both thinkers and form an interesting outlook on language by subverting some of the traditional approaches to the human's mastery of words and meanings.

Poetry's task becomes clearer in this context, for literature means employing a language whose self-referentiality brings us closer back to Being. This theme is picked up in the poem "Day In Day Out" which reiterates the meditation on the material world and words, exposing again the hard work of putting the right words together with a view to building a house, a home in language, or – in other words – a poem. Heidegger directly compares poems to buildings by saying that "[p]oetic creation, which lets us dwell, is a kind of building."[32] This poem is itself a certain metaphor of such a house as well as of the difficulty in laying strong foundations: "I lay stone / upon stone (...) I wrested from / the stony field (...) to build this / wall around myself // with no cement / but chinks of light" (ONW 115). This poem, with its steady pace as well as careful use of words and line breaks, brings to the fore the existential truth about the hardship of everyday life in building a sense of homeliness, i.e. a proper dwelling place. This process resembles the building of a poem – both have at their stake a certain intimate contact with Being, for "poetry, as the authentic gauging of the dimension of dwelling, is the primal form of building."[33] The bricks of the house and the word-bricks of the poem have to be carefully arranged so that no cement is necessary. It is the rhythm – in the sense of careful measuring – that provides the necessary mortar. The steady pace of the poems and their drip-drop measuring of time – "darkness / on darkness // echoing / a soundless track" (ONW 20) with "each step // extrapolated / to within // an inch of time" (ONW 38) – is the essence of Heideggerian measuring. Its meaning is architectonic in both the literal and poetic senses of providing shelter, since the "taking of measure is what is poetic in dwelling. Poetry is measuring. (...) a high and special kind of measuring."[34] The true binding material is "light": the see-through pulses of revelations in which Being shows through. "Poetry builds up the very nature of dwelling," Heidegger concludes, "poetry and dwelling belong together, each calling for the other."[35]

Language, as the locus of Being, is not always a self-explanatory means of coming in contact with reality. It has to be used, like a tool, or intellectually pierced by the poem. Words should be put to use for the purpose of "fathoming the deep / of a well" (ONW 116) and sometimes even turned against themselves. In his discussion of Celan's poetry, Hans Georg Gadamer observes that language acts as a roof under which we all live and shelter

[29] P. Celan, "Meridian", op cit., p. 49.
[30] Ibid., p. 55 (emphasis added).
[31] M. Heidegger, "... Poetically man dwells...", op. cit., p. 221 (emphasis added).
[32] Ibid., p. 215.
[33] Ibid., p. 227.
[34] Ibid., p. 221.
[35] Ibid., p. 227.

ourselves. However, it frequently gains on weigh and becomes muddy, obscuring the light from above. This means that we sometimes need to pierce it, dismantling this cover in order to look the darkness above in the eye in a sublime moment of transcendence.[36] This, notes Gadamer, is the task of the poet: to undo the web of stifling meanings and remove further deadening layers of everyday mannerisms and clichés.[37] The battle with those used-up, covering elements in language is exactly the task of poetry. In the course of that struggle, it turns out that words can act like building blocks, which have been used and will be re-used for much more than a single life span. In this context the question arises whether language is not primordial in relation to being. Heidegger argues that this is exactly the case and man is mistaken when he "acts as though he were the shaper and master of language, while in fact language remains the master of man."[38] "For strictly," Heidegger continues, "it is language that speaks. Man first speaks when, and only when, he responds to language by listening to its appeal."[39] Language is, but it exists in a different way than man. It serves as the ability to name or address. Without language, we would not be capable of referring to each other and would not differentiate reality. Lacoue-Labarthe claims that "[l]anguage is the other in man; it constitutes him as man *himself*," because without language the otherness, which gives rise to our subjectivity and the bond with the fellow men, would not be possible. Therefore, "language is what is proper to man," meaning that "man is constituted beginning with language."[40] However, because language is what makes us and is still something other than man, our subjectivity slips away from our grasp and has to be located elsewhere, beyond the traditional metaphysics: "language is the essence, the inhuman essence of man; it is his (in)humanity" and "can be considered man's origin."[41] The inhuman origin of humanity, the non-being which founds all being is the paradoxical nature of language. So, if poetry is language in its purified, self-referential state, it is otherness itself, or perhaps even a nothingness that can be offered to the other: a "*gift of nothing* or *present of nothing*,"[42] which is echoed in Celan's "Psalm": "A Nothing / we were, we are, we shall / be still, / flowering: / the Nothing–, the / No-man's-rose."[43] Therefore, language as we know it has to be constantly surveyed and scrutinized, as its roof – though providing shelter – falls victim to the oblivion of humanity's "inhuman" origin. This relationship and the consequent re-formulation of the poet's task are metaphorically alluded to in another poem called "Nooks & Crannies": "the roof itself" is something to which the poet will "put / a stethoscope // to see what ticks within" (ONW 120). A masterful poem is the one which offers to us "the firmament / stripped so bare // the quiet you hear / is the frost" (ONW 126). In order to clear up and strip that firmament, however, one has to travel through language and following its course, return home.

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[36] H.-G. Gadamer, *Gadamer on Celan. "Who Am I and Who Are You?" and Other Essays*, trans. & ed. by R. Heinemann & B. Krajewski. Albany 1997, pp. 80-81.
[37] Ibid., p. 82.
[38] M. Heidegger, "... Poetically man dwells...", op. cit., p. 215.
[39] Ibid., p. 216.
[40] P. Lacoue-Labarthe, *Poetry as Experience*, op. cit., pp. 95-96.
[41] Ibid., p. 96.
[42] Ibid., p. 20.
[43] P. Celan, "Psalm", in: *25 Poems*, op. cit.

HOMECOMING

The frost, a gentle and delicate image, which concluded the above quotation, is a metaphorical crystallization of the passage of time; it exposes the now, frozen for a moment in a sad anti-climax, an anti-revelation, "when now / is forever" (ONW 132). The collection's final poems are full of such images: "the vestibule (...) to founder in / the storm within // to keep at bay // the storm without" in "The Storm Without" (ONW 121), "the now // moonlit road / that fades away // just before it gets to the wood" in "I'm Trying to Remember" (ONW 125) or "the bastion (...) wherein // we drowned / its king" in "Siege Over" (ONW 124). These images remind one of the elegiac or melancholic moods of the Old English poems, such as "The Wanderer" and "The Seafarer," chiefly because of their subtle existentialism. They evoke a sense of passing and a profound inability to achieve the ultimate metaphysical goals.

The motif of a path is exemplary here, as it is picked up in the poem "Often & Often," which is about the search for it: "the path / I had to find // would come / to mind // by half gaps / betweenwhiles" (ONW 131). On the one hand, it could be interpreted as the path of life. However, its end, although obvious, disappears somewhere before the path "gets to the wood" and the focus is shifted to the fact of remembering – the only "pace" which keeps us on the right track: "I'd lean upon / my stick wherever // I might be / remembering // or remembering / remembering" (ONW 131). It is the art of remembering being that allows us to stay focused and conscious in the stream of time as it "flits from / split to split" (ONW 132). What is the role of poetry here? If we assume that language, and especially poetry, is a crucial factor in keeping alive the remembrance of Being, we can just as well imagine our lives as a journey along the shelves in a library, like in the poem "Night after Night." The Sisyphus-like drudge is adequately formulated in its monotonous pace: "in room / after book– / filled room / upon storey // after storey" (ONW 127). We travel along the lines of a library, trying to find the other, and whether we name it God or Library (or Aleph, to borrow another term from Borges), it will remain a structural part of ourselves, as this venture comes down to self exploration: "trying to locate // a volume / lodged at // the back / of my mind." Indeed, as Gadamer reminds us, poems speak about that which drives this tirelessly "digging" creature we call life down the "narrow stairwell" of human existence.[44] Carson asks rhetorically "what do I know / of death" (ONW 136) and remains silent "about what– / ever brought us // here & you there" (ONW 138), for he is no prophet or seer. Still, he reminds us that to "close our eyes // for fear // of seeing // the immortal cell" (ONW 133) is to miss the "eyebright" – "something // to remember / me by" (ONW 137) – and thus to lose oneself, one's sensibility and the ability to feel the world. "[T]o forget is / a common verb," (ONW 139) we read in "What Then," because remembering and forgetting are the most fundamental aspects of our lives. To remember Being is to be located at the exactly balanced spot, in-between: "between two leaves" or "between two doors." To remember is to remember oneself in Being, "to walk with flowers" along the corridor where, as the concluding poem reads, we can "find the one / I'm looking for // between two sheets / you" (ONW 141). These last lines of the whole book mark a profound moment when the circle comes to a close – the

[44] H.-G. Gadamer, *Gadamer on Celan*, op. cit., p. 75.

journey from "I" to "you" ends and the full dialectical swing draws us to something like an *Aufhebung* consuming all oppositions. As Gadamer puts it, we come to learn that the "you" I am for myself becomes apparent when I let myself feel the border of that which is real, brushing against death.[45] This, as I would like to claim, is the ultimate meaning of the encounter that both Carson and Celan have projected into poetry. As the author of the "Meridian" put it:

> Is it on such paths that poems take us when we think of them? Are these paths only detours, detours from you to you? But they are, among many others, the paths on which language becomes voice. They are encounters, paths from a voice to a listening You, natural paths from a voice to a listening You, natural paths, outlines for existence perhaps, for projecting ourselves into the search for ourselves... A kind of homecoming.[46]

This homecoming, a return to the starting point by taking a memory trip, is an overcoming of a certain homelessness, which

> so understood consists in the abandonment of Being by beings. Homelessness is the symptom of oblivion of Being. Because of it the truth of Being remains unthought.[47]

In light of this, the final closing of the circle is not just a reflection of homecoming or the rejoining of lovers. It is that process itself, just as in Heidegger's interpretation of Hölderlin's poem on this subject, which – as Timothy Clark remarks – "is not a poem about homecoming; rather, the elegy, the poetic activity which it is, is the homecoming itself."[48] Poems are essentially dialogic, meaning that they rely on otherness as such, be it the reader or language. Poems provoke encounters, demand attention and listening, thus establishing a date, a unique moment that is an anniversary, celebration: "the words the name / the date the place" (ONW 65). Celan was right in the Brema speech that poems are essentially dialogic and always "keep a course on something," e.g. a place that can be inhabited or a piece of reality that can be named or spoken to. Every poem seeks to be washed on some kind of a shore, for the poem is "lonely" and "*en route*," as Celan argues.[49] "[T]he poem has always hoped (...) to speak also on behalf of the *strange* (...) *on behalf of the other*, who knows, perhaps of an *altogether other*."[50] In order to achieve that task, it has to set out on a journey, a strange venture by way of which the subject has to depart from him- or herself and cross a dangerous territory in order to be able to come back and meet oneself again.

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[45] Ibid., p. 87.
[46] P. Celan, "Meridian", op. cit., p. 53.
[47] M. Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism", op. cit., p. 218.
[48] T. Clark, *Martin Heidegger*, op. cit., p. 106.
[49] P. Celan, "Meridian", p. 49.
[50] Ibid., p. 48.

RADICAL ALTERITY

That ominous territory is the field of the other, which is the leitmotif of the philosophical investigations by Emmanuel Lévinas. The figure of the other is for him the source of all ethics, which – in his radical overturning of traditional philosophical hierarchies – precedes ontology. In *Otherwise Than Being Or Beyond Essence*, Lévinas argues that a response to the other is in itself a fundamental ethical act, which only in turn engenders the thinking of essences, or beings. This elemental response, which he terms "saying," is not a result of an encounter between entities, but makes them possible and prefigures them. Saying, he claims, is not just communication or representation of facts, for it "signifies otherwise than as an apparition presenting essence and entities."[51] Thus, the basic language of a responsive gesture – a response to the other, the "you" – opens up the other as a neighbour, a comrade in being, setting up that figure as the source of responsibility: "relationship with a neighbour, incontestably set up in saying, is a responsibility for the neighbour."[52] Thus, saying means being responsive to another, as it constitutes the opening up to the other, which grants him a meaning that is not exhausted the "said" – the actual content of the enunciation, its secondary effect. The moment of opening up is the moment of exposure, when we grant signifyingness to the other without objectification, or substantialization. In this sense, "[s]aying is communication, to be sure, but as a condition for all communication,"[53] meaning that the act of exposing oneself and responding to the other, who is calling us to responsibility, is the prerequisite for the formation of all identities, or the world of "essences" in general.

Thus, Carson's preoccupation with the "you" or the "other" becomes an argument in favour of the ethical component in poetry. By opening up towards the other, Carson achieves an important ethical end – he renews and warrants a contract with otherness, grounded in an ethical opening, which is free from any content whatsoever, but reinstates an elementary fragility and understanding, piercing through the all obstacles in communication:

> The unblocking of communication, irreducible to the circulation of information which presupposes it, is accomplished in saying. It is not due to the contents that are inscribed in the said and transmitted to the interpretation and decoding done by the other. It is in the risky uncovering of oneself, in sincerity, the breaking up of inwardness and the abandon of all shelter, exposure to traumas, vulnerability.[54]

Carson's lyrical subject is no longer encloistered in a safe haven of some presuppositions about the reality and metaphysical givens. It is a subject "deconstituted" from those beliefs that would safeguard a simpler sense of belonging and truth. Its new coordinates are "vulnerability," "exposure to affection," "sensibility," "passivity," "exposedness," "exposure to expressing," "to saying, thus to giving" – i.e. "the most passive passivity" which

[51] E. Lévinas, *Otherwise Than Being Or Beyond Essence*, trans. A. Lingis. Pittsburgh 2006, p. 46.
[52] Ibid., p. 47.
[53] Ibid., p. 48.
[54] Ibid.

"is inseparable from patience and pain."[55] By encompassing the other with a responsibility, the subject of those poems allows the other to enter him, inhabit his intimacy to provide a ground for mutual responsibility and respect: "you seethe into / my inner ear // the vestibule // wherein we meet // to founder in // the storm within" (ONW 121). This provides a basis on which proper intersubjective relationships can be established, providing firm ground for a truly ethical acceptance and mutual sheltering, ultimately making it possible to find, amidst all struggles, a place of refuge, where "we lean into // one another / whatever wind blows" (ONW 123). In the poem "Syntactical," this joining is described as a syntactical gesture of responsiveness that Lévinas writes about: "a moment / of conjunction // & / communion // (...) an ampersand" (ONW 84). In this sense, Carson proposes a new language, or a new grammar of ethics, which we have to learn in order to create new, stable ethical bonds. Thus, this kind of poetry provides – as Seán Hand put it – "actual means to express responsibility for the other and the precedence of the other, without effectively suppressing them in the process."[56] This also crowns the argument that Ciaran Carson is a poet whose task is not to offer pure innovation, but who tries to rethink certain subjects in poetry, turning himself into a poet-philosopher in a tradition which Heidegger valued so highly. For, as Hand concludes, if what we are dealing with is "an interrogation of, and a seeking for, the Other," then "poetry and philosophy can now be viewed as sharing the same unrealizable ideal."[57] Although it cannot be denied that it is indeed an appropriation of that unattained ideal, the new path and redefined goal are in fact poetry's vital contribution to the discussion over ethics and politics in a country torn by violent conflicts. The task assigned to us by the other is the one of patience and disavowal, or absolution of all identities that might entail harming the other. On the other hand, by offering one's suffering as the ultimate gift, we are freed of deadly affects which are consumed in the "burning for the other." This disinterestedness is possible only when a attentiveness and patience to the call of the other are preserved. Then, we may find out that "[t]he subject is inseparable from this appeal or this election, which cannot be declined."[58] Carson shows in his poems how this encounter is made possible through the work of poetry.

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To recapitulate, in the poetry collection *On The Night Watch* Ciaran Carson embarks on a final journey towards the understanding of death and its intimate relationship with writing. It is only then, at the most difficult point in the evolution of thinking and self-knowledge, that literature is revealed to be the most precise language in which it is possible to shed all external problems and perform an "attack on the border," a hunt which, as a struggle with solitude and language, leads to the furthest boundary of this world, towards the boundary of what is human.[59] This exploration leads Carson towards the conclusion,

[55] Ibid., p. 50.
[56] S. Hand, *Emmanuel Lévinas (Routledge Critical Thinkers)*. New York 2009, p. 53.
[57] Ibid., p. 76.
[58] Ibid., p. 53.
[59] M. Blanchot, "Kafka i literatura", trans. A. Wasilewska, in: *Nienasycenie. Filozofowie o Kafce*, ed. Ł. Musiał & A. Żychliński. Kraków 2011, p. 117.

suggested by Blanchot and Lévinas, that it is only the deepest confrontation with the inhuman abyss, which opens up before any writer, as he or she comes to terms with that "unthought ground of thought," a silent murmur of a proto-language that makes subjectivity possible. It is, as Lévinas claims, a sort of phenomenological reduction, a movement back "to that hither side (...) in which everything shows itself. (...) In it the indescribable is described."[60] This gesture of homecoming, a return to oneself *via* the space of literature, where one has to confront with the ultimate negativity, is embodied in Carson's book, where – by way of facing up to the radical otherness – it is finally possible to see that "saying, before it conjugates a verbal sign, is already an ethical gesture."[61] In this way, Carson goes beyond himself and emerges, like Orpheus, with a new perspective, restoring Being to its primary place and recovering language as the inhuman foundation of humanity, putting it on the right level – somewhere beyond our ability to grasp it, but in contact with the profoundest aspects of human life.

Does the end of that intellectual road annul the space covered in this volume of poems? Certainly not, for it constitutes a meridian, to employ Celan's metaphor, which encompasses human experience and allows one to return home from that odyssey with a deepened outlook on our own humanity and – what is of even greater importance – with a renewed attitude towards otherness. The discovery of an absolute alterity within ourselves – transcendence in immanence, so to speak – is a source of a renewed ethics that forces us to retain an attentive, open attitude. The responsibility for the other – a fundamental tenet for Lévinas – is the only ethical position one can safely assume. The promulgation of such philosophy, derived from experience and reinforced in poetry, is in my opinion the highest literary achievement of Ciaran Carson. His unrelenting search shows that it is possible to experiment and think in literature – a conclusion that is most pertinent when we consider the post-modern quandary of simulacra and radical cutting off from reality in favour of post-historical intellectual games and puzzles that receive much of today's critical attention. Carson proves that a writer's journey, a movement of thought in verse, can be as fascinating, thought-provoking and insightful as life itself, without losing sight of both ethics and aesthetics, the dissolution of which is rightly proclaimed as the downfall of true reflection.

[60] E. Lévinas, *Otherwise Than Being Or Beyond Essence*, op. cit., p. 53.
[61] Ibid., p. 52.

Marta Olesik

WHAT IS THERE TO BE FOUND ON THE HEAP OF HISTORY? – THE EXPERIENCE OF TIME, PARTICULARITY AND NEGATIVITY IN BENJAMIN AND DOCTOROW

A rag as a matrix of history. Or rather histories, small fragments constituting the, so called, *petite histoire*. Or experience of history rather than history itself. We already have plenty of rags, instead of one. This ragged – and not torn apart, as the tragic component is what I wish especially to avoid – nature of the experience of the past will be the subject matter of this essay. Many rags and one at the same time, because this fragmented matrix is still a structure, just like a rag, worn out in some places but still holding together with small threads of felt, the soft material of *petite histoire*, impregnated with its softness against every drama, which demands its protagonists to be incorruptible. This matrix has to produce its own register, its own tensions and negativity on the dialectical antipodes of Greek tragedy. The model of history as a rag is a basic concept of two texts: *Arcades* by Benjamin and *Ragtime* by Doctorow; this is also their model of an individual, because the stake of the vision of the past created in these works is to establish a notion of particularity (encompassing both human and objects) as a rag and examining its potential. Comparing these two authors and then manoeuvring, sometimes meandering between them, I would like to extract this non-dramatic, finite perspective on particularity. Make the best of finitude, without ever overstepping its competences and its modest dominion. Let its weak transcendental status become the source of its autonomy, without ever being too optimistic about it, because optimism is always a lack of wariness, which can be only disastrous for the very particularity we are entrusted with.

The structure of *Arcades* and *Ragtime* is similar, their purpose, however, entirely different. They both construct the past and at the same time collect it (the constructive and story-teller/collector effort form here a dialectical unity) out of the fibers – aphorisms in the first case and short anecdote-like fragments of stories in the second. This fragmented structure does not solely reflect the doing of historic memory, being distanced in time

from the events it tries to grasp; it is first and foremost the nature of the historic material itself. First, it has to be said that there is no real division between the former and the latter, to us historic facts are always dialectically entangled in remembrance and its apprehension mechanisms. Transcendental theory has taught us that there is no sense whatsoever in trying to filter the former from the latter; to *substract*[1] the consciousness from the facts is a misguided idea from the outset, as the consciousness is always present during this substraction. "*To read into the future is difficult, but to see purely into the past is more difficult still. I say purely, that is without involving in this retrospective glance anything that has taken place in the meantime.* The »purity« of the gaze is not just difficult but impossible to attain."[2] Secondly, the fragmentation of historic occurrences and remembrance, its dialectical subjective counterpart, is based on the nature of the medium in which they are both immersed, that is the time. Time, the element of both history and memory, is ragged itself; it is inherently non-homogenous and does not have to wait for occurrence or remembrance to be shred. Both Benjamin and Doctorow adopt the Augustinian vision of time, underlining the non-existence of particular moments, these alleged present, past and future "nows" happening and then pronounced in no(w) time. However, unlike Augustine, while analyzing this phenomenon, they do not adopt the perspective of the universal flow of time but put themselves in the impossible position of its non-existent moments. From this stand, time presents itself as based on null intervals forming a continuum. The latter is paradoxical in its nature, because due to the intervals being null and void it is very simple to surpass them and establish a continuum but, on the other hand, a continuum of nothingnesses is absurd, as it amounts to nothing, not even to a single point in time. Accordingly, Benjamin and Doctorow share the vision of history as waste of these non-existent nows. This heap of history is not being formed out of the things long past, consigned to oblivion, because they were not rational enough and therefore had been overlooked by the Owl of Minerva. The heap of history is what is being formed just now, in the very moment of every occurrence in time. A moment has no(w) time to pass into history, it simply passes away in the very moment of its appearance. "Now", a ultimately abstract concept as analysed by Hegel, is itself this huge heap or rather a container, having no size at all, as it is fit to contain what is non-existent.

However, both Benjamin and Doctorow do not content themselves with this refuse dump they call history. They wish to fill every single "now" with proper content; stretch its non-existence as to form a moment, formally as hyper-fleeting as it was in the writings of Augustine and nevertheless standing on its own (on one, or rather one quarter of foot, but still standing) and tangible for the experiencing subject. The meticulous preparations of this possible content, paradoxical substance of the non-existence is the great task of both *Arcades* and *Ragtime*. Citations/aphorisms collected by Benjamin and stories written by Doctorow are made to fit the non-existence, their *apparently secondary*[3] character is correlating to the latter; the secondary importance is the non-existence on the level of content, just as "now" is the non-existence on the level of form. The aphorisms and stories are

[1] G.W.F. Hegel. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. transl. A.V. Miller. Delhi 1998, p. 47.
[2] W. Benjamin. *The Arcades. Project.* transl. H. Eiland and K. McLaughlin. Cambridge Massachusetts 1999, p. 470.
[3] Ibid., p. 258.

punctiliously weighed out in order for the "now" to be able to retain them and not to stumble under their burden. The Augustinian vision is given a dialectic twist here, as both of the non-existences, the one from the level of content and the one from the level of form, are joined together and thus submitted to the law of double negation which results in their substantiality as a moment, a concrete point in time. "Now" puts on a little weight. Again, this procedure of double negation (non-existence sublated in non-existence) is performed by remembrance (both *Arcades* and *Ragtime* understand themselves as remembrances[4]) rejoining past "nows" with present ones. "It's not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation."[5] The present remembrance is a non-existent echo of a non-existent past and due to this double negation they both gain their own substantiality; they manage to tie a tiny Gordian knot on the structure of time. It is of course an ambiguous operation, as tying a knot necessarily tears the fragile rag even further. "Now" is still its own passing in time; this time, however, its passing comes into history. *En passant*, it leaves behind a tear of a rag, no longer void and anonymous but given some individual features. The montage-technique which Benjamin says to be his principal method[6] consists precisely of turning the non-existence of a frame (a cinematographic term which refers here to the formal character of "now") into a visible image on the screen of history.

The structure of the enterprise of Benjamin and Doctorow is the same, their attention, however, is placed elsewhere. Benjamin is focused on the rags themselves; he strives to fish them out of the relentless timeline and of this enormous rubbish dump called the Parisian National Library where he works on *Arcades*. Benjamin believes, ironically of course (because it is an ironic procedure to flee from one fragment to another), that this collection of oddities, all being the immediate effects of capitalist economy, can be stolen from the latter in the procedure of fragmentation. Deconstruction, the very procedure which the social system uses to gain power over its products, is turned against itself. Benjamin restlessly disassembles the historic matter he deals with, so long as there is nothing left for the further dismantling. He believes that the smaller the fragment is, the bigger chance that it cannot be further deconstructed and, by means of this operation, submitted to the social system. So, when a singular fragment amounts to nothing, it becomes further untouchable by the universality. "*Construction* presupposes *destruction*", writes Benjamin commenting on the methods of historiography.[7] This destruction is necessary precisely to get to the necessary indeconstructible particle. These indeconstructible nothingnesses can be extracted by the subject merely touching upon them, jumping from one to another in a movement that eludes the eye. However, these jumps have to be performed with force necessary to crash the aforementioned time continuum into its moments. The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is

[4] "...history is not simply a science but also and not least a form of remembrance (*Eingedenken*)." (W. Benjamin. *The Arcades. Project.* transl. H. Eiland and K. McLaughlin. Cambridge Massachusetts 1999, p. 471).
[5] W. Benjamin. *The Arcades. Project.* transl. H. Eiland and K. McLaughlin. Cambridge Massachusetts 1999, p. 262.
[6] Ibid., p. 460.
[7] Ibid., p. 470.

never seen again. "In order for the past to be touched by the present instant (*Aktualität*) there must be no continuity between them."[8] Unlike the Romantic ironists, Benjamin claims that the fleeting dealings with the subject matter are not an expression of subjective distrusts towards it, but the only way to grasp its essence, or rather to retrieve and reconstitute it out of the dismembering movement of time. "The truth will not esacpe us" reads one of Keller's epigrams. He thus formulates the concept of truth with which these presentations take issue."[9] *The Arcades* not only break with this stance, by claiming the to be one of the characteristic, but it simply equals truth with it. On the condition that the latter is treated properly, as a series of negations of negations, ironic changeability can be turned into a chain of firm Kierkeggardian leaps establishing the immovable singularity of moments thus deconstructed. What guarantees the inalienable character of the latter is therefore what makes them into rags, perfectly unimportant dust left behind the constant circulation of reality, having the global market for its matrix.

Paradoxically, this production of garbage, this inopportune waste performs the task of accumulation, although, the latter goes against the accumulation as it functions in capitalist economy. The accumulated waste do not bring profit through accumulation, it does not become fit for trading. The accumulation of historic material here is not amassing, where it is the capital, the collected totality that is the goal. Of course, relations are being established through this process, but it is not the corpus they form that is important, but its ability to react reflexively with its singular moments, to whom it is submitted dialectically. The relation is not substantial itself, it is just an empty background, consisting solely of negation. As a background it has its purpose not in itself, but in letting the foreground, that is the individual moments, resonate. Therefore, the relation establishes the autonomy of its elements in the aforementioned movement of negation of the negation, which is not double anymore but, thanks to the all-encompassing quasi-ironic movement of the historian, forms a whole net of particulars. The latter is called by Benjamin a *dialectical image*[10] or a *constellation*.[11] The more rags the merrier, the tighter is the bulwark of double negation. It prevents the systemic negation from creeping in and taking possession of the garbage, reappropriating it into the eternal recurrence of the market. Accumulation is waste and sheer uselessness here, as autonomy of the particular moment form the point of view of the system is precisely its uselessness. This is how memory works, how it should work, if it would really work, and not just go with the flow of memories, substituting one with another with no particular order and of course no duration. History is the work which makes the past occurrences come into being, occur for the first time, not seized by the system in their non-existence, not manipulated into disappearing. Benjamin is the master of accumulation thus understood. He interweaves the past into a strange, ragged tapestry of the *Arcades*, undoing the work of Cloto, the weaver whose weaving is made to unweave according to the laws of timeline discovered by St. Augustine.

So, Benjamin undoes the timeline into fragments and what is he aiming at next is to give them a really good publicity. The text of *Arcades*, being extremely difficult,

[8] Ibid., p. 470.
[9] Ibid., p. 463.
[10] Ibid., p. 464.
[11] W. Benjamin. *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. transl. J. Osoborne. London 2003, p. 34.

is at the same pop-cultural in its very core, because it is rags that it deals with, just as pop-culture does and, precisely as pop-culture, it tries to make them attractive. The aforementioned montage-technique anticipates pop-culture, or rather keeps pace with its first wobbly steps. However, Benjamin as the PR-specialist attempts to turn the advertising techniques against themselves, substituting the exchange value of an object for its ultimate non-interchangeable particularity. It is advertising done from the perspective of the second formulation of the categorical imperative. Benjamin is a paradoxical trendsetter of the past, turning the notion of consumption upside down, as he lances, along the patterns frequently used in the advertising industry, the object which has already underwent consumption and is therefore past interest and only a waste. *Arcades* are pop-cultural in exploring the realm of superstructure, indulging in its most superficial layers; they are also pop-cultural in trying to prove that there is an autonomy to it, although Benjamin aims at the real autonomy, not the one suggesting itself for the client in order to attract him-her and make him-her buy the product.

We might risk saying that Benjamin is seriously, or truly pop-cultural, as he sees in pop-culture – in its rags just as they are, with no dialectical sublimation or metaphorisation – the truth that it can never see for itself. He treats it as the ultimate phenomenon, it can never be in itself. Being perfectly aware of the dependence of the superstructure on the social system, he searches for the level of minuscule, being at the same time the level of absurd, where the former no longer performs the function of social veil of Maya obfuscating the reality of exploitation. "With the vitation of their use value," Benjamin cites Adorno, "the alienated things are hollowed out and, as ciphers, they draw in meaning."[12] Properly deconstructed, this fact of being hollowed out forms a promise of ultimate unimportance, which is, as I have already said, a negative way of stating the absolutely positive phenomenon of the autonomous existence of an object or person. Just as in the aforementioned categorical imperative. "The technique of telescoping past trough present"[13] proceeds exactly in the manner that we are now discussing; it is the maximal enlargement through maximal diminution, as if one were to look through both lenses of the telescope at the same time. The present diminishes the past, as in its optic the latter is precisely the past, something which is worn-out, ragged, and therefore, belongs with the heap of history, but this way it can be seen magnified, as it is finally put out of the context, that is the constant circulation of the market whose part every rag had been when it belonged to the non-existent present. Now, it becomes its own goal, to cut the long story short, cutting off all the threads which linked the science of history to the work of Cloto.

The line of thought adopted by Benjamin here is a subtle discussion with the Nietzschean vision of history. Benjamin is in agreement that it is only what is actual that matters, but what is actual for him is what is a historic blind alley, the most unlikely, or rather absurd things to be remembered, as there is no possibility whatsoever for these structures to come in useful in the present. "...the eternal, in any case, is far more the ruffle on a dress [which necessarily has to be an outmoded one] than some idea."[14] The

[12] W. Benjamin. *The Arcades. Project.* transl. H. Eiland and K. McLaughlin. Cambridge Massachusetts 1999, p. 466.
[13] Ibid., p. 470.
[14] Ibid., p. 463.

thesis of Benjamin that there are no *periods of decline*[15] does not mean simply that there is something worth considering in every one of them. There is much more to it, as it is precisely the emptiest ones that are the most actual and therefore determine the pattern for interpreting the others, the ones that proved more fruitful in their own times. Benjamin is keen on the "proposal of a gradation of the superstructure."[16] However, what he proposes is to reverse the current order, by placing what is least important on the top. As it is precisely the fruitfulness that is the death of the particular, following the example of these abortive times and recognizing the conditions of possibility of their abortiveness, we have to perform a great task of disarming all the historic productivity. "Overcoming the concept of "progress" and overcoming the concept of "period of decline" are two sides of one and the same thing." (Benajmin 1999: 460) Only upon understanding this we arrive at the actuality in the Nietzschean sense.

This leads us to the problem of the possible subject of this disarmament and of the history-writing. Benjamin writes about the necessity of continuing this procedure "... *ad infinitum*, until the entire past is brought to the present in a historical apocatastasis."[17] This of course requires an infinite subject who could perform the task of deconstructing the timeline from the very point where it started into a series of rags tiny enough not to be further deconstructed. This impossible requirement activates the theological dimension of *Arcades*, referring us to the concept of Pascalian God as the only one to see at the same time the infinitely great and the infinitely small (the timeline as a whole and its single moment, respectively). The promotion techniques Benjamin uses, and this is of course another moment where the laws governing the advertising industry are being turned upside down, do not target anybody, an everyman from the street. They address the Absolute subject, which is understood here not as a concrete person but in the Hegelian manner as an intricate structure of considerable capability of negation. It is the Absolute that has to be seduced by this amazing commercial which *Arcades* constitute from start to finish. Because it is solely this transcendent and not just transcendental I who can redeem "now" and ultimately rise its non-existence through the ranks of history to become the eternity of singularity.

However, what is of primary importance is not the One who redeems, but the very possibility of being redeemed on the part of a rag. It is being reached at in the deconstruction process analysed above. Benjamin translates the latter into a unique dialectics of dream and awakening. The Parisian arcades are the dream of the bourgeois society entering into the process of decadence. In order to make this process work for the particular, and not against it, to make it actual according to the definition of historical actuality provided above, we have to go through the "...awakening from the nineteenth century."[18] This waking up, however, should not be understood in terms of classical rationalism as destroying the illusory character of ideology and finally being able to tell the existent from the dream. Crude facts are certainly not the best friends of Walter Benjamin, nor is he prone to view the rational thinking as a remedy to the aforementioned decadence. The

[15] Ibid., p. 458.
[16] Ibid., p. 465.
[17] Ibid., p. 459.
[18] Ibid., p. 464.

awakening, very different from the state of being already woken up, is a dialectical process having both ideology and decadence as its integral parts. It is the unraveling of a dream described in the famous beginning of *In Search of the Lost Time*, to which Benjamin refers in the text of *The Arcades*.[19] This individual experience is translated by Benjamin into an universal one, that is into the unknotting of a given superstructure, its decadence in time. Benjamin writes about "the perceptual worlds [that] break up."[20] The historian deliberately provokes and repeats this process. S/he indulges into a chaotic parade of images it produces in order to pin the latter down, stabilise their particularity, without ever putting them together into a new totality.

Unlike Benjamin, Doctorow who uses the very same techniques, does not understand their effect as redemptive. There is nothing indeconstructible to the rags torn away from the timeline. Doctorow indeed uses them as subjects for his history, but not in the sense of them being autonomous. They are subjects only as being subjected to the universal processes. Without these particular carriers the movement of the capitalist social system would be uninhibited, as they are also the sources of relative friction to it. This way, its infinite fastness would equate absolute stillness, as it is relative friction that is necessary to keep the movement moving, preventing it from returning to its beginning in no time. The Augustinian vision of time claimed to be the first linear and therefore Christian one, assuming no friction, is in fact circular and equates eternity. The rags, in *Ragtime*, are meant to provide the movement of history with its difference, shown by Hegel to be its indispensable part. *Phenomenology of Spirit* demonstrates that the truth of movement is the exact opposite of the Zenonian paradox; the intervals do not contradict it, but are its essential conditions. The rags are there for the movement, as having nothing else to devour, it would have to devour itself, as the great spideress Ungoliant did in *Silmarillion*. In other words, the *Zeitgeist*, understood in Lacanian way as the malicious demon, would have no fun.

Operating on rags, Doctorow does not search their way out of the system. According to his vision, there is nothing small enough to be indeconstructible, not even the human suffering. The latter is perfectly usable as the mainspring of commerce; it perpetuates the movement as in the meaningful scene of tram-journey, propelled by the suffering of Tateh and Evelyn and ending (of course the categories of beginning and end are to be treated relatively here) with building the power of the film industry. Human suffering here possesses no evocative power of Levinasian *face*. Justice is not indeconstructible, as Derrida wants to have it[21] and there are no unforgettable lives and moments, as Benjamin claims.[22] Willing or not, everyone "point his life along the lines of flow of American energy".[23] Although Doctorow is not a historian of a *period of decline*, on the contrary, he deals with one of the most productive and significant ones in the modern history, he makes it appear as utterly insignificant, by showing its reverse, that is its representation in the lives of particular subjects thrown into it and perpetuated by it into perfect nonsense. This specific view makes the beginning of the 20th century appear as the parade of oddities. The times

[19] Ibid., p. 464.
[20] Ibid., p. 462.
[21] J. Derrida. *Spectres de Marx. L'État de la dette, le travail du deuil et la nouvelle internationale*. Paris 1993, p. 15.
[22] W. Benjamin. *Illuminations*. transl. H. Zohn. New York 1969, p. 70.
[23] E. L. Doctorow. *Ragtime*. London 1985, p. 102.

are productive, every event proliferates into hundreds of others. However, this multiplication does not make any sense and therefore cannot be called significant. "Those who saw Houdini's performances in this period of his career say they surpassed anything he had ever done. He brought masons onstage who built a brick wall ten feet high which he then walked through. He made a full-sized elephant disappear with a clap of hands. Coins poured from his fingers. Doves flew from his ears. He stepped into a packing case previously examined by the audience. It was nailed shut and tied with a stout rope. No drape was set up in front of the packing case. It was pried open. It was empty. A collective gasp went up from the audience as Houdini was seen running into the theater from the lobby. He leaped onstage. His eyes seemed to gleam the color of blue diamonds. Slowly he lifted his arms. His feet rose from the floor. He stood six inches above the floor. Woman panted. Suddenly he collapsed in a heap. There were exclamations of disbelief followed by prolonged applause. His assistants helped him to a chair. Houdini asked for a glass of wine to restore his strength. He held the wine up in the spotlight. It turned colorless. He drank it. The wineglass disappeared from his hand."[24] Superstructure, pure and simple; the quotation above is the best possible exemplification and metaphor of its idiosyncratic and idiotic structure.

It is agreed that these manifold tricks flying from the ears of Houdini: the particular subjects, heroes and heroines of *Ragtime* are waste. However, being waste, a non-existent part of the heap of history does not protect you from being used by the social system. Claiming the latter, Benjamin forgets of recycling, the procedure which the modern society invented to deal with its garbage and its human resources. The recycling enable the capitalist society to get back its share of everything which was previously used. This process is unending, its movement being not just a secondary procedure but the vehicle of the system. *Ragtime* shows the reality driven by the repetition compulsion, applied first and foremost to its particular subjects/carriers. We see Evelyn Nesbith, Harry Houdini, Tateh or Mother being constantly reinvented; their new characters being reuses of one body, treated by the system like a recyclable container for an equally recyclable content. *Ragtime* proceeds according to the dialectical movement of sublation of these small gaps and intervals, which we have seen to be necessary for the movement, precisely as being submitted to sublation. There is no hope for the dialectical negation of dialectics, no possibility of autonomy gained by means of deconstructing the social deconstruction, taking it to its limits. Time is constant process of recycling the non-existent "nows". This is why they never exist, because they are always everything else than themselves; this is why they do exist, because they do repeat incessantly in the course of time.

For the protagonists of *Ragtime*, the revival power of double negation stops to be a blessing and becomes a torture. This is valid for both types of double negation: the one linking form with content (for Doctorow these would be the structure of the society and its particular content, respectively) and the historic one, linking past and present. "Today, nearly fifty years since his [Harry Houdini's] death, the audience for escapes is even larger"[25] – this is the link Doctorow establishes between past and present. Today, double negation works even faster than in the beginning of the 20th century, thus the

[24] Ibid., p. 153.
[25] Ibid., p. 15.

increased requirement for escapes which became all the more impossible. One of the possible directions of these escapes is always the past, treated with nostalgia and turned into a retrospective utopia. Doctorow critically cuts off this source of self-delusion. First, the past itself was not a virgin land, it already imposed a killing pace on its non-existent moments; second, the past is not autonomous, the present sucks it into its vortex, perpetuating the relation of double negation between them and urging it to quicken its step. According to the Nietzschean vision of history, there is no past beside the present. Doctorow adopts this view and gives it a postmodern twist. His literary style being not just a portrayal but realization of the process of drawing the past into the circulation of the present, the latter rushing faster than ever and being all the more destructive. The aim of his pursuits is the exact reverse of the one adopted by Benjamin. Despite his critical stand, he does not wish for a change, or rather does not believe in its possibility. Therefore, he brings the compulsive movement of the social system into light and makes it the proper hero of his book. His critical slogan being "Nothing to be done"[26] he perpetuates and invigorates the movement in a conscious attempt to make his critique virtually undistinguishable from the blind obedience to the dull necessity of the universal laws. Despite his sympathies for the socialist and emancipatory movements, the cases of Coalhouse Walker, Tateh or Emma Goldman are just a part of the all-consuming mess formed by the capitalist superstructure.

The superstructure works full steam ahead and everything is meticulously *distributed* [27], as to come in handy for the relevant part of the base. Egyptian wallpapers, or paper cut outs, capitalism embraces every single trash until death (of the latter of course, never of the former) do them part. Therefore, everything singular in the system form the heap of history, as it is considered of no value or status of its own. It can never align with itself, find its proper position, like (the chair of) broken Theodor Dreiser.[28] At the same time, however, there is no such thing as the heap of history where singularity could be safe from further exploitation. A singular person or object can never toe the line; like that God-forsaken chair, he/she/it is always as stupidly out of place as Houdini invited to the party given by Mrs. Fish. However, this unhappy non-alignment is what the situation is form the point of view of the chair, its owner, Harry Houdini and every other individual; this is only their subjective situation. The objective social forces encounter no obstacles whatsoever to the exact alignment of the position of these singularities in the totality of the system. However uncomfortable they, themselves might feel about it, they all form together a merry and very practical gathering, just like the one in Mrs. Fisher corridor. The striking absurdity of superstructure, which is so clear in the situation just mentioned and which so often rises to the surface of *Ragtime* in general, is by no means an antithesis of rational systemic character of the base. They complement each other, because absurd is not an independent element here; it is just that its rationality and rational functioning are external to it, alienated from it to be managed by the system.

[26] S. Beckett. *Waiting for Godot*. Chatham 1965, p. 1.
[27] M. Foucault. *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison*. transl. A. Sheridan. New York 1995, p. 141.
[28] E. L. Doctorow. *Ragtime*. London 1985, p. 28.

Despite perceptible fondness Doctorow has for his heroes and heroines, he cherishes no illusions about them and the historic trash bin they found themselves thrown into. The patriotic accessories produced by Dad[29], being garbage and at the same time a very well selling product, are a perfect representation of the position of the individual subject of history. It is pushed forward on the assembly line, falling straight into the trash bin and instantly retrieved from there only to be pushed forward and thrown away again and again. The style of Doctorow mockingly follows this production machine. Not only the anecdotal stories of Doctorow as certain totalities, but every single phrase of this book – short but not condensed, on the contrary, concentrating on secondary details and chaotically mixing them together – is like a chocolate-bar package thrown away on the street, just to be picked up for further reuse. To show the eternal recurrence of recycling is the purpose of the literary method of joining together separate plots, much-overused nowadays, but perfectly appropriate for *Ragtime*. It is to show the social system being made from a scratch, or should I say, from a rag. Everything is useful: thousands of millions of sublated scratches on the surface of the movement, the latter shining like a new Ford T, thousand of millions of rags being tied together and thousands of millions chewing gums spit out and then successfully glued into the intimidating palace of capitalism designed by Stanford White & CO.[30] The book with its telegraphic style seems like a strange assembly line, spitting out garbage, one sentence after the other, and then weaving it into an impressive tapestry. The latter is so similar to the one of *Arcades* and yet completely disenchanted and having, in fact, nothing to do with its twin. The motif of the flying carpet, so important to the advertising imagery of Parisian arcades, is dear to Benjamin for whom it means the possibility of breaking off and smuggling all the absurd wonders of the 19th century in the very texture of the carpet. For Doctorow, if he had used it as a metaphor for the construction of his book and the manifest fantasticality of its action, the flying carpet would have meant only the craze of the world represented in the novel. Indeed, *Ragtime* takes us to a different and somewhat wondrous universe; nevertheless, the absurd does not enjoy freedom from the oppression of the rational instrumentality. As we have already said, it is not the opposite of the latter but its dependent and calculated effect.

Doctorow functions, therefore, as a Hegelian valet for the modern post-secular philosophy and the notion of individual which is its foundation stone. The latter, precisely as in Benjamin, is the notion of indeconstructible and therefore perfectly singular entity, its major characteristic being negativity. It inherently opposes itself to the totality of the system, which cannot in any way access it or seize power over it. Just like a valet for Napoleon, Doctorow restlessly deconstructs individuality thus understood, by turning the notion of absolute singularity into the notion of finitude, the latter suggesting lack in place of completeness, dependence and helplessness in place of autonomy. The rags are not singular; they are torn apart, indeed, but with all their threads still leading to the cloth of the system, like the roads leading inevitably to Rome. They can do nothing about it, neither free themselves, nor adapt fully to their situation, as to gain some control over

[29] Ibid., p. 11.
[30] Ibid., p. 20.

it from within. They can do nothing on their own; their finitude and raggedness, being a weakness and not an asset, is dialectically contingent upon the system and confined to it. It is disposed (and disposed of) smoothly in the recycling cycles of the latter. The superstructure of capitalist world-system is built on the sands of finitude and not on the rock of an indestructible rest, as Benjamin wants to have it. Therefore, it cannot lay claim to the dialectical independence, it cannot by freed from its source by means of *actualization*.[31] The particular intervals, as immediately sublated in and by the movement, cannot be mistaken for the residue of messianic hope. They cannot give a utopian promise of any kind. Trash is always carefully sorted, placed, posited and *parceled*., no place to be left for the non-place here.

Pointing to the above, Doctorow plays valet not only for the indeconstructible individual but also for the highly-cherished notion of negativity itself. The post-secular dogma says that the absolute alterity of the individual equals negativity. In *Ragtime*, on the contrary, the latter is structurally placed in its entirety on the part of oppressive totality. The negativity as the ability to distance and differ oneself from the universal play of social forces is completely driven out by the negativity as the all-devouring movement of sublation, the former and the latter being two concurring and complementing sides of the notion at least since Hegel. Derrida is wrong in establishing a perfect balance between them, as he tries to do in *Spectres of Marx*. When it comes to power, there can be no comparison between the system and a rug, so there is no common ground to be found for the purposes of counterweighing the former with the latter. Of course, sublation does not mean destruction, this is a well-known fact. Of course, it does not mean destruction. Sublation is recycling. This is the kind of perverse non-destructive treatment we, individuals get from the social system. Recycling, from its very definition, is the very opposite of destruction. It has to be, as system needs its intervals, its difference to sublate and survive. Indeed, universal negation performed by the social system is not destruction, but it is precisely here that we are furthest from the indeconstructible individual. Because it is precisely the indeconstructible that can only be destroyed by the system, as it cannot be submitted to endless mutations, the latter being the effects of sublation. Sublation is not destruction, and so what? Preservation is not a separate moment of *Aufhebung* opposed to the deformation of the sublated moment by negativity, something that the individual can relay for safety. It is the movement of sublation itself which preserves while it consumes and constantly perverts the identity of a given rag. What is preserved than is not the individual core but the transcendental condition of being a carrier of the universal, a non-specific character of being the subject of manipulation, as well as constant subjective non-adjustement and falling behind the universal movement The latter, however, has nothing to do with the objective phenomenon of critique; the duplicity is not a cradle of consciousness being able to distance itself from the pervasive oppression and manipulation. This Enlightenment motif is being deconstructed here, duplicity being nothing more than alienation coupled with defenselessness of the individual being dragged by the hair in any direction where the systems wants to have it

[31] W. Benjamin. *The Arcades. Project.* transl. H. Eiland and K. McLaughlin. Cambridge Massachusetts 1999, p. 260.

Benjamin does not understand rag just as it is – as a rag. He mistakenly lends to it a component of messianic absolute negativity. The latter is being rather alchemical in its nature, as it is produced by means of changing an aphorism into a magic formula. Benjamin deals with words and language, painstakingly manufactures their complete detachment from reality, as he believes this procedure to be the sole guarantee of the autonomous particular. The magical character of these proceedings is quite obvious, with dialectics and historical materialism becoming incantations. Hegel was a magician, his concept of sublation can be traced back to the writings of great alchemists. Benjamin follows him in this vein, as it is certainly a magical practice to distill pure gold of rags. The work of negation should not proceed this way, luring and seducing poor Gretchen, the finite individual and then, upon understanding that it is no philosophical Eliza Doolitlle that could be turned into absolute subject, will contemptuously outcast it as a *popular girl*.[32] The ordinary finite subject unable to reach the required standard is left to itself, while its dialectical hypostasis, no longer in connection with its possible real counterpart, is being perpetuated as a paradisiac panacea to the weaknesses and vices of modernity. This *quid pro quo* is the reason why the famous theological *hunchback* introduced by Benjamin.[33] in is in fact the Cartesian malicious demon. The former seduces particularity with absolute negativity, while the latter did it with the seeming positivity of facts. This strange figure of dialectical anti-valet, being a small and ugly manipulator, no longer symbolizes the inability to recognize greatness, but the shift in negativity from the grandeur of *Zeitgeist* to the messianic rest, allegedly small enough to be prevented from further deconstruction.

Does the argumentative strategy adopted here equals letting the universality have the last word? Not in the slightest. The point that Doctorow makes and his vision of finitude is rather just a starting point in the discussion. It should rebound from its claims, try to turn them upside down and construct a new, more promising perspective on particularity, still having rag for its matrix and patron. Being a particular myself, I find no pleasure whatsoever in triumphing over the illusions of its possible autonomy. I am aware of the dialectical character of the notion of illusion in this context and agree with its positive emancipatory potential, first shown by Schiller in *Letters upon the Aesthetic Education of Man*. We have no choice but to base our hopes for the renewed and reinforced particularity on its necessary illusory character, stemming from the fact that it is lodged in the superstructure. This position is not an inevitable ruin of particularity, but the objective situation of the rag that should be somehow dealt with and worked through. These illusions, however, have to be safeguarded against reality, in order to be sublated in it on their own terms and not on the terms of the latter. In order for the sublation to retain the moment of real and not just fake preservation. Without the legitimacy that only effectiveness can give them, they would be only mirages, parts of the ideological universe, giving the system the alleged absolute singularity on a plate, by obfuscating the real relationship between the former and the latter and therefore inhibiting the possibility of change.

Therefore, our illusion has to be a down-to-earth one. Our rag has to be non-gilded. It should be brought down to its proper level, to the level of refuse, but without being left

[32] T. W. Adorno. *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*. transl. E.F.N. Jephcott. London 2005, p. 58.
[33] W. Benjamin. *Illuminations*. transl. H. Zohn. New York 1969, p. 253.

to itself there. Turning the valet into a figure of negativity is what I am trying to reach at here. As we have already said, the negativity is monopolized by the recycling process, this is precisely the point that the valet is making. Where is his critical potential than which could support particularity? There is none, and this is precisely why the work or rather strife of negation is being done. The individuals are always on the verge of disappearing and this wretched condition is the transcendental condition of their possibility. Particulars are so desperate to keep their position precisely because there is nothing immanent to it that they could fall upon. Particularity slips itself through its own fingers, with no messianic rest to be found. The individual leaves its fleeting mark while disappearing; the former and the latter, the appearance and its careless sublation are the very same moment and movement of the time/recycling/assembly line. They are not separate instances, but the averse and reverse, two different positions in the very same situation. The first is that of the universality, the line itself, which presses forward, while the particular, the second one, tries to push back. In the end, or rather in a second the latter will disappear anyhow, but its minute and momentary difference is non-negligible, like a bubble appearing on the surface is not simply non-existent just because it is gone right away.

Only the valet has the eye to spot this difference, as it is the most finite finitude that is its domain. Only the valet has the eye and patience to follow these finite subjects, as they reside in conventions, the latter being the universality incarnated, the concrete formulae of the above-mentioned immoral social imperative saying that the individual subject is always what it is not. To define the nature of this difference and, earlier still, to simply prove its existence we have to have a narrow escape between Doctorow and Benjamin. Both of them operate on conventions and have a very different take on them. Doctorow builds his characters upon them to emphasise the priority of the system over an individual. Hysterical women gestures, man so manly that it borders on the absurd – they are all utterly conventional, these conventions being in constant recycling process, mixed together without restraint in the social guinea pigs like Evelyn Nesbith. Doctorow examines the beginning of the 20th century because, just like Gombrowicz, he tries to capture the birth of new conventions, the latter being degraded and declassed *values* in the Nietzschean sense of the word. The eclectic absurdity of this nascence, which brings into mind the Christmas shopping madness, is what makes the characters in *Ragtime* so colorful, an awful word to describe a rather pathetic quality. Pathetic, because it is not authenticity that is the core of the colorfulness of Evelyn; it is rather the objectivity itself being so awkward and grotesque that it constitutes such wild and improbable characters and situations which are so integral to *Ragtime* and its charm. All this mayhem, this wildest jungle is just the process of bourgeois socialization. It is the universal boredom of convention deserving to perish and perishing in Anacsymandrean world of capitalism, which „...composed and decomposed itself constantly in an endless process of dissatisfaction."[34] Upon dissecting the behavior and motivations of the protagonists of *Ragtime*, we can see this embarrassing quality of objectivity standing behind them and utterly responsible for them. A perfect example is the scene where the demands of city-traffic and show-business meet in an absurd situation where Harry Houdini visits the severely injured sandhog in the hospital to elicit

[34] E. L. Doctorow. *Ragtime*. London 1985, p. 93.

the ”tricks” that made him survive the catastrophe.[35] Doctorow works here as a valet also for the objectivity itself, shedding on the latter the flickering light of grotesque. His book is thus an excellent example of the notion of comism introduced by Alenka Zupančič: „.in comedy, the universal is on the side of undermining the universal.”[36]

Benjamin also operates on the conventional, however, his method is entirely different. He dissects a conventional phenomenon so long as it finally becomes unique. The fragments he finds are true gems among trash which is precisely what is so amazing about his book; it is a collection of conventional rubbish that become absolutely unparalleled and unusual. This attitude, although absolutely impressive, is in fact deceptive. Deceptive is the structure of an aphorism (as the literary representative of an individual), as it suggest the autonomy of its subject matter, always already deceiving us with the spatial representation of its self-reliance. The layout of an aphoristic book is, therefore, the doing of the malicious demon. Benjamin presents these fragments as separate, whereas in reality they are entangled in the context of the books they were borrowed from and, earlier still, entrapped in the context of social reality. However, his alchemist inclinations and incantations float above the latter, Benjamin, as well as any historian who would approach his/hers subject in this vein, is no God, not even a minor one. A God-like activity of re-creation, the pretense to treat the aphorisms as a dwarfed, but redemptively effective version of paradisiac Names is to leave the interchangeable historic prototypes of the latter to their interchangeability and entanglement.

These prototypes stuck and stored somewhere in between the views of Benjamin and Doctorow, somewhere in their shadow, have to be caught by the hand. Not to be pulled out of the context, deracinated magically and transubstantiated into a paradisiac negativity. This is impossible, as they are inalienably connected to these conventions which alienate them. Therefore, if we are to find any factors which undermine this relationship, we have to search within it. We have to surpass it relatively and bashfully, not by thrusting ourselves outside, but by carefully fingering, point by point, to check whether and where could it be corrupted a little in favour of the subjective identity. Otherwise we will not surpass it at all, only pretend to do so. This is the purpose of this weak duplicity and difference I introduced in the previous paragraph. Let me expand on the notion. There can be found nothing unique to the social rags, nothing unconventional about them, nevertheless, as subjects/carriers they embody these conventions, sign them with their proper names, at the same time, lagging behind them, too slow to keep pace and match them fully. This embodiment-failure, embodiment as a failure, make the individual form – being in itself a mere empty shell, container for universality – internalize and subjectivize the universal content, by marking it with its own insufficiency. It is because these shells are not comprehensive enough, the universal conventions begin to differ slightly within themselves. Not that it disturbs the sublation process; on the contrary, it is this difference, in constant process of being surpassed, that we recognized as the necessary condition of the identity of the system. This time, however, going back to these initial premises, we see them being slightly modified, creating a bit of cramped space for the individual.

[35] Ibid., p. 78.
[36] A. Zupančič, *The Odd One In: On Comedy*. Cambridge Massachusetts 2008, p. 28.

The condition of the perfect balance of the universality with itself *via* the particular is its momentary destabilization in the latter, a slight stumble impersonated by a rag. This impersonation of the movement, forced personal attachment to the convention causes a momentary struggle between the social practice itself, being absolutely dialectically flexible, and its bearer, the ridicule individual body, which tries to cling to it and appropriate it to itself. Once again, the universality of time and production is dependent upon the negligible quantity of the particular. This time however, we recognize the latter reacting to the pressure of time, blocking it, if only for a flash of time, for one single dialectical contraction of muscles. This hopeless battle being fought endlessly recreates its very field, the universal medium where the rags fall apart. However, these unfavourable consequences make it no less a battle. It is just that the conditions of possibility of the system are, at one and the same time, a defensive reaction against it. The recycled trash is nothing more than the process of recycling, but it is no less the trash itself in its dilly-dally, in the momentary reluctance to be sublated. The disregarded "now" responds to the violent current of the universal commotion with the ephemeral passivity, a sort of finite and lightweight heaviness aimed at delaying time in favor of the individual. This is how negation of negation, of the non-existence by the non-existence works, not by proceeding but by failing to proceed. Hegel points to this failure in the end of the second chapter of Phenomenology of Spirit and calls it *sophistry*.[37] Sophistry is the analysis of recycling process, that is approaching it from the perspective of separate moments, failing or maybe refusing to see their totality. An ass of an individual sees the totality of the function as dysfunctional, that is as composed from elements which do not entirely suit their infinite function, simply because of being finite. Although this failure is not just a subjective one, but a necessary element of the movement, Hegel somehow cannot bridle his dissatisfaction and anger with the forgetting consciousness. Why is that, after all he is perfectly aware that to take two steps forward the dialectics has to take one step back, or at least hesitate for a little while? It is because the individual has an agenda of its own; it uses this necessity, inseparable from the movement of the system, and yet contradictory towards it.

Hegel is impatient with the individual subject as a decent bourgeois is with a peddler, the one who comes back to the waste with newly recycled products to negate their productivity, that is their ultimate shapelessness as the subjects of constant interchangeability. The latter is not just external, meaning that every individual can be replaced with the other; it is first and foremost internal, the subject being in itself just a constant exchange of different social functions, with no core that would cover them all. Kant had a disturbing metaphysical inkling when, back in the 18th century, he defined the subject as a function, that is something which has no firm identity in time, the latter being only formal and not related to the subjective content. No more than a single argumentative step is needed here to arrive at the above-mentioned Foucaultian notion of *distribution* as the effective management of these functions by social powers. Peddler collects the rags and mourns them, refusing to perform the work of mourning in order to be able to take the necessary steps forward. He refuses to acknowledge the inevitable changes of function of its object, the latter being complemented by repetition, eternal recurrence of the system as a whole.

[37] G.W.F. Hegel. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. transl. A.V. Miller. Delhi 1998, p. 77.

We might ask, what does s/he mourn, if we agreed on the interchangeability of one function of the subject with any other without rest and with no core binding these changes together. Indeed, there is no such metaphysical instance; there is, however, a phenomenological relation between the subject and the object which produces the peddler-effect. Consciousness, to paraphrase Hegel from the introduction to *Phenomenology of Spirit*, is the fact of lagging behind its object and its movement.[38] It is there, in this retarded experience of an object, in the failure to objectivise on the part of the individual, that the latter creates its proper objects matching its own individuality. These are, simply, the leftovers of every individual experience of universality, stained with finitude. They should not be mistaken for the Benjaminian indeconstructible rest. Just as the subject, having nothing indeconstructible in itself, they are the remnants of their previous systemic functions, heading, of course, to some new assignments, but (in)fallibly lagging behind them. These rags are also shapeless, but in a very different way from the shapelessness that is forced on them by the social system. It is a sort of misshape, that is a lack of clear contour or defined border given to every individual on its way on the assembly line, in order for the sublation to fit it smoothly into the structural social puzzle.

Upon experiencing these misguided objects, the individual attaches itself to them as to wholesome ones. It recycles without recycling, that is s/he relates to the objects and, therefore, uses them, but without submitting to the dialectics. This is the agenda that I mentioned earlier and this is what Hegel finds so irritating, that the individual collaborates with the system only by refusing collaboration. It fails to adapt itself to its situation, make it easier for the system by letting go of these silly leftovers. Progress, the evolution of rationality throughout history is a harsh therapy against this petty sentimentalism. Its purpose is the absolute unification of these two moments, the ragged gap and its sublation, in order for them to pass into one another seamlessly. However, for the time being, there is still a small space between past and present negation where the individual jostles with its pushing cart, an item so often appearing on the margins of Ragtime. I use it now as a transcendental artifact, as silly as the subject using it and, at the same time, as deserving of our attention and philosophical care. It is a figure of gathering, the form of memory which for Hegel would be forgetting, because collecting particular remembrances entails forgetting or rather casting out their future, the dimension of time towards which the Hegelian dialectical past is oriented for the, so called, progress. There is no negativity to this silly jostling and, yet, it is negativity, impure and far from absolute, but stubborn enough to leave a mark while disappearing. Its patron is Don Quixote, a petty idiot and a pre-modern peddler of peddlers (having his tin armor instead of a cart), who fixes on the past as if it never blended with the present. This way, refusing his sensibility, it makes the past itself seem idiotically out of place, because the proper place of the past is with the present and without this link past in itself seems ridiculous. This is, however, what makes her independent. Of course, this cannot stand too long, cannot withstand the test of time. Nevertheless, it is here, now, in front of our

[38] I am paraphrasing here, but at the same time turning this paraphrase upside down, as Hegel actually speaks of consciousness trying to catch up with its object (G.W.F. Hegel. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. transl. A.V. Miller. Delhi 1998, p. 49-50).

eyes. And than again. And again. It is real, no matter that it is just a momentary reality, shattered by a blink of the never-shutting eye of the society.

True, we need to assume that there is a rest of some sort, to be the subject of this struggle and petty obstinacy. There has to be a sort of peddler-cogito underlying these experiences. It is, however, nothing substantial, but purely formal; it is precisely the *cogito*, the Kantian "I". It takes on the form of name, understood as differently as possible from the notion of name in the nominalist tradition. Given at the moment of birth, it has no internal significance, as a new born baby is yet no one. This abstraction and purely formal character is the guarantee of the indeconstructibility of the name, as everything which is in any way definite and defined can be redefined. Yet, there is something missing here, an element of concreteness is lacking, to differentiate my name from the same name given to any other person. *Ragtime*, which is full of such abstract instances, plays on this lack to underline the fact that its seemingly concrete protagonists are just containers of universal chaos. A very simple yet clever tool is used to elicit the status of theirs. It is a small shift in the level of abstraction; the protagonists are not called by their names but by the family roles. This should not suggest that *Ragtime* aims at portraying the so called everyman. The book is very far from this subject, which is in fact a construction expressing deep attachment to the liberal notion of individual, a variation on a theme taken from the good, old credo of classical Enlightenment. Everyman is the effect of a clash between abstractly and ahistorically understood individual and abstractly and ahistorically understood universality, that is Fate. The life of the former is overshadowed by the later, particularity is bearing his/her Fate like Sisyphus of Albert Camus. This unimaginable burden (the everyman is never a happy one) stresses the individuality on which it weighs; by means of contrast and shocking disproportion it emphasizes the non-negligible difference between an individual and its universal fate. Doctorow does not share these existential illusions, as he understands universality as a concrete social and historical phenomenon, which do not clash violently with the individual life but provide it with content. The latter is seemingly particular and enhances identification, which is a part of ideological strategy of assimilating individuals into society. This is the idea Doctorow expresses by using a family role for the purposes of identification of the protagonists. This ID is abstract enough to suggest that we do not deal with an individual, pure and simple, but it is also tangible enough to obtain the effect of mock concreteness. This is the position of the „boy", his „Mother" and „Father", „Mameh" and „Tateh" and, last but not least, "Mother's Younger Brother", in whom the abstraction is made all the more poignant by the ironic play with a seeming designation "younger" which is absolutely empty and invalid as we know nothing about its necessary component, that is the older brother.

As to perform the function of a pushing cart, the transcendental support of our silly pretenses, the name has to have an element of concreteness, otherwise it could refer to anything. It is a paradoxical case, as this concreteness has to be undefined. Otherwise, names would suffer the same fate as any other concrete phenomenon, they could be redefined freely by the system. This contradictory quality is obtained through indication, the proper grammatical mood of the existence of the name. When we turn around in the street because someone called us by our name, it is not because s/he is invoking some nominalistic, purely singular truth about us. Name do not exist in the garden of Eden,

however, this does not mean that we cannot react upon being called, that we do not identify with this sound, although, it is not so very different from all the others. However, had this supposed concreteness of indication not been deconstructed by Hegel in the chapter on *Meaning*? When writing about indication, had he not shown its ultimate abstraction? I believe not, as he forgot to join the "this" which is indeed perfectly abstract with the gesture performed while indicating which is inherent to the meaning of "this", that is it is itself already linguistic, and yet it is also something corporeal lagging behind the purity of abstract sense and therefore providing it with a concrete reference. It is this gesture that is responsible for the indication to have the internal possibility to indicate, that is to always refer to one single object at a given moment of time. It is thanks to this vocative gesture that our names call and pin us down to ourselves. The process of autoidentification functions in a parallel manner; it is this same kind of gesture, making us turn inwards instead of turning around in the street. We call upon ourselves to name the social conventions we are partaking in. It is necessary to affix this gesture to the universality we are subjected to, as individual consciousness, facing constant change, has to be performative and constantly track itself down amidst the conventional mayhem. The capitalist society forces the cogito to pinch itself over and over again in order to check whether the implication *ergo sum* still functions for him or her. This gesture is the rest that survives recycling. Apparently, it is very far from the messianic rest, but in connection with the fact of always lagging behind the system, it is enough to incite the possibility of subject being something more than just a carrier.

For the time being, we made acquaintance with a ragged individual causing the momentary ungainliness of the movement of ideal convention, putting the latter into effect by impeding it. This means that we achieved nothing yet. For the time being, the peddler is just a transcendental figure, or rather figurine, with no concrete strategies to support its case. It is already ahead of us to establish them. To catch an individual moment red-handed, before its too late. To make the momentary imbalance within the movement of sublation attain a sort of uneven balance, permitting the individual to stay on the surface of the dialectics for longer than a moment. Learn this moment to gather its momentum, transposing its passive resistance into active contestation. This is no task for Sofocles, but for a transcendental valet, as the subject here is a peddler and not Oedipus rex (although, it is worth thinking that the latter ends as a peddler). Amidst the eclectic absurdity of conventions, which brings into mind the Christmas shopping madness, there reside a reasonably stubborn particular, nothing more. Nevertheless, it is precisely this rag of a subject that is the reason for the philosophy of today. Mainly because it is real, I dare say. Making it more real, as for the time being it is just the reality of illusion that it enjoys, this is what is worth of critical conceptualization. The latter should not shun from strengthening the peddler with every possible means and at any conceptual price. If it need be, it should make the concept itself into a rag, in order to fit the requirements and "size" of its content. It is worth trying, even if we have every reason to believe that the objective systemic conditions of the operation threaten it to be a complete failure.

Surprisingly, the favor may occur to be mutual. Maybe this seemingly silly subject, so much in need of support, will get the philosophy out of this awkward situation with

which it deals for more than a hundred years. I would like to call it post-colonial, because it is an effect of a failure of the conceptual project of domination of the Enlightenment reason. Instead of being the instrument of freedom, it occurred to be a founding stone for at least some of the historic catastrophes of the 20th century and simply a sad mechanism of functioning of the capitalist society, projected into the realm of ideas. Having a down-to-earth and yet decently transcendental problem to face, philosophy might finally recover from the disappointment and disenchantment which it has gone through. This disappointment have forced some, like Rorty, Sloterdijk or Habermas, although the latter would not admit it too willingly, into the shallow of skeptic relativism, only to avoid the charge of rational imperialism. The others, Benjamin being the most prominent example, having to deal with the compromising of reason and yet not willing to resign from the philosophical project altogether, have begin to construct intricate utopias with conditions of possibility scored so subtly that there is no chance for an ordinary rag to realize them. The project that I wish to propose may find its way between these Scylla and Charybdis of modern philosophy. With a little bit notional help from its friends, the particularity could be strengthened, which would take the odium of imperialism of the notion itself and, on the other hand, prevent form indulging in the impossibilities just because the possible seems out of reach and has lost its rational formula. The objective here is a transcendental vaccine, that is a remedy which stems from the malaise, in this case, form the universality which behaves like a virus carried by its individual subjects/bearers and therefore can only be cured by being turn against itself in proportions. This idea of a vaccine calls for the applied dialectics, something which speculative philosophy aimed at once it understood itself as a phenomenology. Dialectics is the only method that can provide for the particular, as it is the only one able to operate on such minute contradictions, as the one between the universal movement and its particular embodiment/unit. It is the only one that is subtle enough to make this contradiction a firm one, applying the tricks of the trade of negation as to oppose and reverse the vertiginous movement of the system it has itself unleashed. This rewound *Aufhebung* would be the dialectics of a valet, tediously negating, and diffracting the universality, subjecting it to diminution, shifting the balance as to obtain the small change of particularity.

Irena Księżopolska

VISIBLE WORLDS AND THE ART OF NARRATION: CULTIVATION OF UNRELIABILITY THROUGH VISUALIZATION BY VLADIMIR NABOKOV AND ITALO CALVINO

I never say that the knight is unreal. I say that he does not exist. That is very different.

(Calvino 2013, 215)

[reality] is one of the few words which mean nothing without quotes

(Nabokov 1991, 312)

1. LONGING FOR THE PAINTER'S ART

In his introduction to *Our Ancestors* trilogy, Italo Calvino writes: "The tale is born from an image, not from any thesis which I want to demonstrate, and the image is developed in a story according to its own internal logic. The story takes on meanings, or rather, around the image extends a network of meanings that are always a little uncertain, without insisting on an unequivocal, compulsory interpretation" (Calvino 1998, 3). This statement seems to suggest that the visual image has primacy over language, or even over the idea itself. We may easily find a confirmation of this concept in Calvino's other writings – for instance, in his posthumously published *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, where he describes how his early childhood experiences of books constituted entirely of the enjoyment of images in the color illustrations, and when he finally learned to read the words, they had a disappointing effect compared to the potent impulse that the visual stimuli earlier gave to his imagination (Calvino 1993, 93-94). Words, the materials that the writer has at his disposal, seemed pale and ineffectual, because they told a single story, instead of the open sea of narrative possibilities that the illustrations opened before the child's mesmerized vision.

It may be argued that Calvino's own writing is an attempt to break out of the constraints of language into that open sea of visual possibilities: "In the end, what I try to do, the only thing that I would like to be able to teach, is a way of seeing, that is, of being in

the world. Basically, literature cannot teach us anything besides that" (Grundtvig 2007, 171). Thus, to Calvino, seeing equals being in the world – it is the essence of experience. Making the reader see is equivalent to making him/her experience the world of the story: seeing is believing.

Vladimir Nabokov, who loved the visual world with an eagerness that is evident in the unfailing precision of his sensory details (to be caressed by the 'good reader')[1], seems to have had a similar idea in mind when he created one of his wonderfully unreliable narrators. Hermann, the narrating hero of *Despair*, apostrophizes the reader as follows:

> How I long to convince you! And I will, I will convince you! I will force you all, you rogues, to believe... Though I am afraid that words alone, owning to their special nature, are unable to convey visually a likeness of that kind: the two faces should be pictured side by side, by means of real colors, not words, then and only then would the spectator see my point. An author's fondest dream is to turn the reader into a spectator; is this ever attained? The pale organisms of literary heroes feeding under the author's supervision swell gradually with the reader's lifeblood; so that the genius of a writer consists in giving them the faculty to adapt themselves to that – not very appetizing – food and thrive on it, sometimes for centuries. But at the present moment it is not literary methods that I need, but the plain, crude obviousness of the painter's art. (Nabokov 1989, 16)

What Hermann is trying to convey here is the astounding likeness between him and a stranger met one fine day in Prague, whom he will proceed to murder in a sordid insurance swindling scheme, only to find that the likeness existed in his own eyes only. The poor reader, at the mercy of Hermann's delusions, has to solve the problem of the text by carefully analyzing the visions that the narrator paints with his words. So, ironically, Hermann manages better with his medium (words) than the painter would with his (actual images). Crucially, Hermann does succeed in this passage to create an illusion of the "crude obviousness" of the image in his eye that is as irresistible to the reader as the actual painting would have been – that is, the painting of a real double, and not the image of Hermann and his future victim as they really are. And, while he is at it, Hermann takes a stub at the peculiarity of the writer's art: making the inexistent heroes that have no life of their own feed on the lifeblood of the readers, thus gaining a certain corporeality and claiming a kinship with the readers at the same time. In fact, it is this image of the literary heroes as vampires, highly unsavory yet quite effective, that sticks in the reader's memory above all else.

Nabokov here conducts a certain game on the borderlines between the written word and the visual image – transgressing the boundary for the express purpose of subjugating the reader to his devious narrator. In fact, the visual phenomena may be said to be

[1] „In reading, one should notice and fondle the details... We should always remember that the work of art. Is invariably the creation of a new world, so that the first thing we should do is to study that new world as closely as possible, approaching it as something brand new, having no obvious connections with the worlds we already know" (Nabokov 1980, 1).

characterized by a peculiar unreliability: what we believe we see may or may not be reality, and yet we will obstinately believe it to be true precisely because it appears before our eyes. Thus, this double nature of the visual phenomena is the secret source of power for the narrator's unreliability.

This paper will analyze the uses of visualization for the crafting of narrative power. It appears that Calvino and Nabokov develop a very peculiar kind of unreliability due to their employment of word pictures, extremely detailed and tangible descriptions, and other devices that make the words melt into images, while images remain fluid and changeable, eluding the fixity of their material form.

2. THE NONEXISTENT KNIGHT

2.1 THE PARADOX OF INEXISTENCE

In this most delightful novella which ends the trilogy *Our Ancestors*, Calvino indulges in the perverse act of delineating an absence. The protagonist of his text, we are told, does not exist. There is merely a representation of him, accomplishing the mighty deeds of valor on the battlefield and living a perfectly virtuous life – without, it seems, being alive at all.

But how can you visualize something that is not there? How can you prove that something does not exist? Calvino, this most visual of contemporary writers, finds a way to produce the effect he seeks, managing not only to pass off his protagonist as something perfectly believable, if a little unusual, but also to make negation into a spatial presence, tangible to the reader, as it is intangible to the other characters of the text.

To accomplish this remarkable feat, the author begins his game with a scene of a tedious army inspection, in which our invisible protagonist is appropriately the last to be reviewed, and the emperor, far from being intrigued by the paradox of the Nonexistent Knight's existence, simply accepts it as one of those inevitable facts of life, because "he was old and tended to put complicated questions from his mind" (Calvino 1977, 7). While Agilulf presents himself literally as the knight in shining armor, a chivalric ideal, it seems that he is nothing but a construct, with no substance to it, and appears as a visible object without having any actual existence, a "nonexistence endowed with self-awareness and will-power" (Calvino 1962, xvii cited in Weiss 1993, 56). Self-awareness is precisely the aspect of human nature that makes one into an existent, that defines conscious life in a creature which otherwise would represent a dead matter. The author inverts this aspect, giving a playful spin to the Cartesian *cogito:* the material aspect of life is deleted, leaving intact the self-awareness. Thus, the nonexistent Knight does exist in terms of Descartes's formula. The Knight has a purpose and will-power, but nothing to apply it to – he is a pure construct of convention, and the experiment of the tale is to see what happens when conventional narrative of a chivalric romance, with all its key elements, such as a quest, a trial of virtue, a necessity to defend a lady's honor, military conquests, supernatural adventures and duels with semi-magical creatures, is applied against its own essence, constructed as an empty hero, an outline[2] – in short, what happens when a convention is faced with its own codified image.

[2] Cf. Rushing 2010.

This aspect is presented symbolically in Agilulf's coat of arms which contains nothing but a repetition of itself, thus being an epitome of empty convention: "On the shield a coat of arms was painted between two draped sides of a wide cloak, within which opened another cloak on a smaller shield, containing yet another even smaller coat of arms. In faint but clear outline were drawn a series of cloaks opening inside each other, with something in the center that could not be made out, so minutely was it drawn" (5-6). This introduces the *mise en abîme* theme, typical of postmodernist discourse, which is yet slightly ironic in its application: the idea of the device was originally borrowed by literary theory from heraldry.

2.2 VISUALIZING THE INVISIBLE

The full realization of what Agilulf's inexistence implies is revealed in the following sentence: "Agilulf with all his armor was pierced through every chink by gusts of wind, flights of mosquitoes, and the rays of the moon" (Calvino 1977, 13). This phrase forces us to recognize with dramatic intensity the absence that is the paradoxical essence of Agilulf's (in)existence. When the reader is simply told that the armor was empty, the initial impression of amused surprise is quickly replaced by a normative "suspension of disbelief" – if in this world the empty armor can act by the sheer strength of will, so be it. Within the covers of the book, such is the unquestionable, irreducible reality of its world – even if it consists of nonexistents. Soon, perhaps, the reader will replicate the emperor's resigned tendency "to put complicated questions from his mind." But when told that Agilulf's armor was freely penetrated not only by the metaphysical moonbeams and the unfathomable wind (which may easily be understood as symbols, and thus not tangible "presences"), but by the nasty, annoyingly whizzing and blood-sucking insects, whose reality it is impossible to ignore, we begin to both feel the metaphysical discomfort of the poor bodiless creature, protected from dissolution in the world only by the shiny shell of his white armor, and to appreciate his blessed indifference to all the affairs of corporeal nature. Mosquitoes provide the final unignorable touch of reality to the word picture Calvino's narrator paints. The flights of mosquitoes that we are forced to track through the emptiness of armor cross Agilulf out, negate his presence. Thus, instead of describing the void, the narrator makes the reader see the absence by tracking the quick trajectories of the flying insects straight through the space that should have been filled with warm-blooded, if a little unsavory flesh of the old warrior. Negative space, indeed.

The story relies on visualization in a degree far beyond the usual "picturesque" quality of a literary text. One could even argue, that the words derive their meaning from the images, and not *vice versa*. So, for instance, a person born blind would not be able to understand the language of the novel, even though s/he could well comprehend the linguistic value of the words on the page. The words remain abstract, until they are embedded into a visual reality. This, of course, corresponds to Calvino's concept of the primacy of visuality over the abstraction of language.

2.3 PROTEAN NARRATOR

But let us examine the mysterious figure of the narrator. One of the most important qualities of the voice we hear from the first pages of the novel is its changeability. In *The Nonexistent Knight* the identity of the narrator remains covert and is subject to the suspicion of deceitfully withholding the information necessary to our understanding of the story:

> In Italo Calvino's Il cavaliere inesistente, on the other hand, the reader is given strong clues that the teller of the tale is a certain type of narrator and then as soon as the reader attempts to identify him, the rules are broken and the reader is forced to reassemble the pieces hastily and to construct a new and different narrator. This throws into confusion many of the reader's early perceptions of the characters in the work, which are based (at least in part) on the assumption, which later turns out to be false, that the narrator has stood in a certain relation to them." (Barrett 1992, 57)

As Barrett notes, up to Chapter 4 we assume the narrator to be omniscient. Clearly, this narrator enjoys full access to the minds of the characters, and also possesses the knowledge of their apparent and hidden motives. On the other hand, this assumption is constantly put under the pressure of doubt. When we learn of the emperor's review of the army, Charlemagne seems to meet Agilulf for the first time, even though it is noted that "by now every word, every gesture was foreseeable, as all else in that war which had lasted so many years" (5). Yet in further chapters it is obvious that Agilulf has been there for quite a while, regularly participating in all the activities of the army, including the feasts, at which it must have been rather hard to ignore the knight encased in full armor, with his visor down, in the midst of all the other messily feasting warriors (certainly, not wearing armor). Thus, the narrative seems to turn around, now assuming that the nonexistent knight was not at all a stranger to the emperor and his company. At the same time, the way the tale is being told suggests that the narrator has no concern for the inconsistencies in the story.

This situation is repeated in many instances, without causing any uneasiness to the narrator, who makes no effort at all to revise and correct the inconsistencies or at least to explain them in some way to the reader. For example, in chapter 4 the narrator seems to place herself (this is where we learn that the story is being written by a nun in a convent as some kind of penance) outside the time frame of the evens described: "World conditions were still confused in the era when this took place" (34), yet it is later revealed that the time of narration is only slightly removed from the time of action, and, in fact, the nun herself participated in the battles as an amazon-knight, Bradamante[3]. Curiously, when we first learn of Bradamante's existence, we see her naked from the waist down and in the act of peeing, a curious and rather mischievous way for the narrator to introduce herself to her audience. It almost seems that at that moment the narrator had no awareness of having any other identity beyond that of the storyteller. Other examples of such problems may be found almost on every page.

Thus, the narrator who evolves in the tale is very peculiar. Of course, we are dealing with unreliability, which becomes apparent long before it is revealed that our

[3] Sister Theodora sometimes seems to indicate that her temporal position is much closer to our own time, than to the story time: she mentions that she is "following a tale told in an ancient almost illegible chronicle" (105). At another instance, however, she states: "I am writing in a convent, from old unearthed papers or talk heard in our parlor, or a few rare accounts by people who were actually present" (34), thus indicating that there are still living witnesses of the events described. In fact, her position in a convent seems to grant her a certain a-temporal status, and from this position even contemporary events seem ancient, while what happened a long time ago seems quite recent and fresh.

3rd person omniscient storyteller is actually a 1st person character, who, moreover, is one of the principle figures in the tale itself. But what kind of unreliability? Let us examine some of the key moments in which the narrator makes use of unusual devices or when the ambivalence of the storyteller's position is brought to the foreground.

2.4 THE GROTESQUE AND THE REAL

Take, for instance, the first representation of the battle. The narrator begins by a disclaimer, stating that she knows nothing about war, "apart from religious ceremonies, triduums, novenas, gardening, harvesting, vintaging, whippings, slavery, incest, fires, hangings, invasion, sacking, rape and pestilence" (34). Of course, this very disclaimer coyly contradicts itself: what is war but fires, invasion, sacking, rape and pestilence? The implicit irony of this statement is somewhat camouflaged because the list of the acts violence is prefixed by a list of peaceful and even tedious-sounding practices (novenas, gardening, etc.). But something in the narrator's tone makes us suspect that she herself is oblivious of the irony. There is a naïve, pleading intonation that sounds authentic: "We nuns have few occasions to speak with soldiers, so what I don't know I try to imagine. How else could I do it? Not all of the story is clear to me yet. I must crave indulgence" (34). This voice is quite convincing, even while it contradicts everything we have deduced about the narrator from the earlier chapters. It seems that the narrator simply meandered from one mode of storytelling (convent, tedium of uneventful life) to another (danger, violence, death).

Thus we have both a knowledgeable and a naïve narrator, who switches between these states at will. Perhaps this is why her descriptions seem simultaneously grotesquely fantastic and grippingly realistic. When she describes the conventions of the battle, there is a number of amusing details, so incongruously fantastic, that they make us forget that what is described is in fact quite horrific. For instance, "coughing was the signal that the battle had started... the whole Imperial army coughed and shook in its armor, quivering and shaking as it raced towards the Infidel dust, hearing more coughing getting nearer and nearer" (35). The pathos of what is supposed to be a heroic epic is completely diffused through this ridiculous and rather realistic image – yellow dust, paladins shaking in unmanageable fits of coughing, met by reverberating sounds of more coughing from the enemy side. Next, the initial approach of the opposing warriors is followed by a stage of mutual cursing, in which the exact weight of each expletive needs to be properly registered and responded to, for which purpose the services of an army of translators are required. Again, this is a picture at once comic and somehow completely believable: taking into account the medieval love of complex conventions, it is quite possible that the exact score of the grievances inflicted in the battle would be kept by the army administrators, with all the consequences.[4]

Our narrating nun, sister Theodora, freely admits that "what I don't know I try to imagine... Not all of the story is clear to me yet." (34). The reluctant reader has a choice of options: s/he may choose to dismiss the fantastic descriptions as the product of the

[4] The comedy of this representation properly brings into balance the macabre imagery of the initial chapter of *The Cloven Viscount*. There, as we are being introduced to the hero, we have to face the horror of war, with the full impact of an image just as fantastic and realistic at once: bones and wings mixed together, birds of carrion poisoned by the rotting bodies, storks and flamingos feeding on the dead, the disemboweled horses, the fingers cut off by marauders, etc.

nun's inexperience, and/or simply a creation of her active imagination, but s/he may also suspect her to be divulging the strange truths of her world. And when in the last chapters these readers find that the "nun" was also the amazon, one of the most active participants of the battle, the normal reaction would be a sort of frustration at having been misled by the narrator's suppression of that key piece of information. The excuse of inexperience now appears a ruse to smuggle in a piece of forbidden reality, something that perhaps might be censored as inappropriate in a chivalric romance. Now that Sister Theodora has merged with the knight Bradamante, we seem to get an explanation of that protean quality she exhibited throughout the story – the knowledge of war came from her identity as a warrior, the innocence – from her identity as a nun.

And yet again, the nun who is also a warrior and a lover into the bargain is a highly dubious figure – each identity cancels out the other. In fact, on rereading it appears that the narrator considers adopting various identities in the course of her story. This issue is analyzed in detail by Barrett, who indicates that the reader is led to suspect that the story is being told by each character in turn. It seems a very interesting suggestion: various developments in the plot may appear to be controlled by the voices of Raimbaut (romantic excitement), Sophronia (mystery and withdrawal), Torrismund (misanthropic uncertainty), and even Gurduloo (protean to the core – uncertain of his own existence despite possessing a material body), and from time to time Sister Theodora asserts her own identity of a nun bent over the empty page in word-seeking penance. "Bradamante" is only the last, and perhaps most fitting identity. We may even risk saying that the idea of merging with Bradamante has entered the narrator's head as she was seeking for a conclusion to her narrative – it seems both fitting and unexpected. And this impression persists even on repeated readings.

The narrator's admission that "not all of the story is clear to me yet" should have forewarned the reader that she too was trailing the fantastic images appearing before her eyes, meandering after the pictures and the ideas that follow in their train. By deciding to merge with one of her characters as a means of finding a suitable ending for her story, the narrator playfully underscores the nature of her narrative – it is merely a story, an inexistent world with inexistent characters, who yet exist because of the reality of the words on the page, the tangibility of the book in our hands and the visibility of the images, flashing their iridescent feathers on the screen of our imagination. Heroes and kings, beautiful maidens and noble knights, the rotten business of war and the tricky business of love is a pattern of a fairytale that, like a book for small children, is drawn rather than written.

2.5 MAPPING, DRAWING, FABULATING: THE MEANDERING NARRATOR

The narrator's penchant for visualization reveals itself when she, quite like Hermann in *Despair*, longs for the painter's tools instead of her writing ones:

> To tell it as I would like, this blank page would have to bristle with reddish rocks, flake with pebbly sand, spout sparse juniper trees. In the midst of a twisting ill-marked track, I would set Agilulf, passing erect on his saddle, lance at rest. But this page would have to be not only a rocky slope but the

> dome of sky above, slung so low that there is room only for a flight of cawing rooks in between. With my pen I should also trace faint dents in the paper to represent the slither of an invisible snake through the grass or a hare stopping, sniffing around through its short whiskers, then vanishing again. (106)

From that point on, the narrator keeps playfully switching between the storytelling modes, using words within which images are inscribed, holding yet another curl of words within them. She draws on her paper a map, which gradually becomes so crowded with information that it becomes a structuralist diagram of plot developments and, at the same time, a symbolic representation of chivalric adventures (with wavy lines, drawings of whales, arrows, ships, crosses, etc.). Once again, the narrator's innocence and craftiness are combined in this act: the map resembles nothing as much as a child's drawing, and yet it has the complexity of a project by a puzzle-maker who masterminds multiple levels of discourse. Moreover, the reader does not have direct access to the map/drawing. Inscribing her story by drawing lines and pictures (which remain, however, invisible to the reader otherwise than through the moderation of the words on the page), the narrator makes the story recede from reality into the realm of a symbolic narrative, a myth, a fable.

Sister Theodora herself seems prone to lose her way in reading her own map: "I can't think what this line is doing passing the same place; by now my paper is such a mess of lines going in all directions" (114). This, of course, is parallel to the developments of the plot, which seem to entangle messily, until the final resolution cuts through the fanciful knots, at which point we feel that what seemed to be chaotic has in fact been deliberately plotted. Yet, on rereading several problems crop up: it seems that the narrator experiences spells of boredom or even writer's block, during which she casts about for some new idea, new inspiration. The tale at times becomes unfocused, turns back on itself, seeks a way of escape from the convention ("convent") that it has chosen, to suddenly exclaim ecstatically:

> A page is good only when we turn it and find life urging along, confusing every page in the book. The pen rushes on, urged by the same joy that makes me course the open road. A chapter started when one doesn't know which tale to tell is like a corner turned on leaving a convent, when one might come face to face with a dragon, a Saracen gang, an enchanted isle or a new love. (140)

Thus, our storyteller is not the regular unreliable narrator, whose inconsistencies are caused by some flaw or motivated by some hidden purpose. The tone is that of a myth-maker, or a folk storyteller, someone who speaks in images that drift into his/her brain, the impact of which is quite beyond the speaker's control. We are witnessing an improvisation, complex and wonderfully involuted, with the improviser unsure of his/her next move and quite unembarrassed about it. It is not a malicious purpose, personality issues, hidden motives, inexperience or inability to properly interpret facts that mars the story. In fact, it is not marred by the unreliability at all – it is all part of the enchantment. We are following a magic lantern, by whose light we see incredibly vivid images of unimaginable things – and if the light reveals at one instance a knight, and at another a virgin in his place, and

yet at another – a whale, well, we are in the realm of a fairytale where metamorphoses are only to be expected. We may call this type of narrator a meandering narrator – someone whose tale wanders through space and time propelled by its own fictionality and nothing else, no specific moral or practical purpose, only the self-impelling dynamic of the story that continuously forms and re-forms itself.[5]

And this peculiar unreliability is sustained through the visibility of the narrative. Every reader would rebel against being told things which are in constant disagreement with each other, refusing to suspend his disbelief – and yet, through the magic stream of images, the reader is hypnotized into submission. The tale has its own logic, precarious and inimitable, but when the absence can be made tangible, when the pure air of fiction is mixed with realism which is quite extraordinary in its morbid details – when these things happen, the invented world becomes irresistible.

3. DESPAIR

3.1 UNRELIABILITY IS ANNOUNCED

Just as Calvino weaves his imagery into a flighty, changeable narrative, so does Nabokov in *Despair* create a narrative that is devilishly uncertain, and yet "succeeds largely because of its old-fashioned virtue: the creation of a concretely realized world of intriguing interest" (Carroll 1982, 82).

This concretely realized world is, however, dangerously unstable. Hermann takes pains to announce himself to be a "spectacularly unreliable narrator" (Carroll 1982, 83). Like Calvino's nun, he refuses to correct inconsistencies in his story, to rewrite the obviously flawed passages, rejecting any tendency to subject his manuscript to any editing or revision whatsoever: "I could, of course, have crossed it out, but I purposely leave it there as a sample of one of my essential traits: my light-hearted, inspired lying" (4). In fact, he seems to celebrate his own fabulating, throwing it into the reader's face, enjoying the reader's confusion (amply imagined by him), reveling in the reader's misunderstandings and misreadings caused by the multiple traps in the text set by this malicious narrator. And the only clues that may help to unravel the questionable reality of the tale are contained in the visual images inscribed within the text: thus, Hermann uses the visibility of his world both to trap and to offer a way of welcome release to his "victims."

[5] Curiously, in a letter to Giovani Falaschi dated 4th November 1972, Calvino admits that the ploy of making the nun and Bradamante merge in the final chapter "came to me at the end, at the point when I was writing the conclusion" (Calvino 2013, 417-418). This off-hand statement creates the impression that the author has not thought through this device and has not written the novel with it in mind. Moreover, the tone in which the writer speaks in the letter about *Our Ancestors* suggests that he treated the trilogy merely as warming-up exercises before writing his more substantial fiction. However, Calvino is hardly the author whose straight-forward statements should be explicitly trusted (within or without his fictions). It is well known that he devoted particular attention to the formal aspects of each of his books and developed a series of constraints beforehand, which provided boundaries and, to some extent, formed a skeleton to his fictions. The convention of the narrator is far too important to form as an afterthought. Moreover, the fairytale convention chosen by the writer is perfectly in line with the narrator's mode, and Calvino knew far too much about the folk tales, having edited an anthology (Calvino 1956), to be unaware of this fact. His statement may be interpreted as a slyly oblique explanation of the nature of the *narrator*, and not the author of the story: it is narrator, whose mind runs on with the story without revising it, dreaming up new images and new solutions in the course of the telling.

Thus, perhaps unlike Calvino's narrator, Hermann in *Despair* seems to know from the very beginning what he is after, even though his text has a quality of immediacy that is enforced by the narrator's position as a criminal (a murderer) fleeing from justice and just about to be captured. His style, his language and frequent changes introduced into the flow of narrative all indicate that he clearly intends to fool the reader – or to make an April fool of him: "And a damn fool I have made of someone. Who is he? Gentle reader, look at yourself in the mirror, as you seem to like the mirrors so much" (24). However, what exactly is the nature of the hoax is subject to interpretation: Hermann's inversion of the convention of the double or, perhaps, his clever simulation of insanity which might help him avoid capital punishment after his eventual capture. Hermann's outrageously unreliable narrative attempts to put into brackets everything the reader intuits about his world: it often seems that the only safe procedure of reading is to always invert whatever the narrator states in his story.

Yet, of course, this is hardly helpful. Unreliability may be said to work in a literary text only when there are clear boundaries to it, when the reader understands that, though many aspects may be doubtful, there is a certain world in which the heroes move, act and suffer, and establishing this world by unraveling the corruptions of unreliability is the whole purpose of reading. Most crucially, the truth about this world exists. With Hermann, we have no such luck. His world, it is true, seems tangible enough: he is a failed businessman, living in a flat in Berlin and sometimes going to the countryside for a holiday in his blue car, with a not very bright and gleefully unfaithful wife, encumbered in addition by the wife's cousin-lover, an alcoholic and an unsuccessful painter. Hermann's adventures and experiences have a clearly visual quality: he often describes in meticulous detail scenes, faces, interiors. And yet, Hermann crafts his depiction of "reality" in such a way as to place the reader in the position of forever doubting his bearings in this topsy-turvy world – and even doubting the possibility of ever decoding it, if not the very existence of this world.

3.2 HERMANN'S WORLD AND THE GAME OF MARBLES

Hermann's favourite device is to concoct a very concrete, highly detailed description of a particular scene which is marred by a peculiar defect, and which he himself carefully points out to the reader:

> On coming back from Prague to Berlin, I found Lydia in the kitchen engaged in beating an egg in a glass – "goggle-moggle," we called it. (...) She started to turn the spoon in the thick yellow stuff, grains of sugar crunched slightly, it was still clammy, the spoon did not move smoothly with the velvety ovality that was required. (...) "Well – had a good trip?" asked Lydia as she went on energetically turning the handle, with the box-part held firm between her knees. The coffee beans crackled, richly odorous; the mill was still working with a rumbling and creaking effort; then came an easing, a yielding; gone all resistance; empty. I have got muddled somehow. As in a dream. She was making that goggle-moggle – not coffee. (30-31)

What is going on in this scene? Hermann seems to be relating a humdrum incident of his married life, to all appearances of no importance to the plot of the novel. And yet

something very strange is happening here: the scene, with its delicious synaesthetic detail (spoon moving "smoothly with the velvety ovality", "richly odorous" crackling) is combined out of two distinct episodes, melted together. The first, egg-beating episode, takes place when Hermann for the first time sees his wife after meeting Felix (the presumed double); the second scene with the coffee-beans is borrowed from the future, when Hermann sees his wife for the last time, trying to instruct her about the insurance scheme. Thus, the snake of time is made to bite its own tail: the beginning is merged with the end. Synaesthesia, the confusion of senses, is used to introduce the confusion of events, or, more precisely, a temporal loop. What is significant here is not the temporal conflation itself, but the way Hermann crafts it: "I have got muddled somehow. As in a dream." He is instructing the reader on how to interpret the scene: it is a dream-sequence, soon to be continued, and in a dream world slightly different rules apply.

And this is merely the first of the series of such conflations of events. It is very easy to take this as a symptom of Hermann's madness – William C. Carroll tantalizingly calls it "memoria interrupta" (93) – yet there is more to this ploy than a mind raging outside its bounds: Hermann's dating of events in his narrative is meticulously exact, which proves that he is perfectly aware of the chronological aspects of his tale and is in full control of his memory. Temporal "muddling" is a device he uses, on the one hand, to convince the reader of his presumed insanity, and, more importantly, to melt concrete reality into something fluid and unpredictable which is supposed to make a very specific effect on the reader.

Hermann breaks the mould of time on at least two more occasions: when he describes his first visit to what will become the scene of his crime, and when he sends Felix his covert "invitation to a murder." The location of the (future) crime is central to the novel, peppered as it is with symbols of doubles and bifurcations of fate.[6] Hermann works very hard on inducing a sense of eeriness in the reader even before it becomes clear what exactly will happen in this quite ordinary patch of the forest:

> "What a creepy spot," said Lydia. "Really, I'd be afraid to stay here all by myself. One could get robbed, murdered – anything..."
> A lonely spot, quite so! The pines soughed gently, snow lay about, with bald patches of soil showing black. What nonsense! How could there be snow in June? Ought to be crossed out, were it not wicked to erase; for the real author is not I, but my impatient memory. Understand it just as you please; it is none of *my* business. And the yellow post had a skullcap of snow too. Thus the future shimmers through the past. But enough, let that summer day be in focus again: spotty sunlight; shadows of branches across the blue car; a pine cone upon the footboard, where some day the most unexpected of objects will stand; a shaving brush. (37-38)

[6] Hermann murders Felix near a lake, where "a Y-stemmed couple of inseparable birches grew... (or a couple of couples, if you counted their reflections)" (33). Y-sign may be interpreted in various ways: as a sign of a double, or as a sign of the bi-furcation of fate – which, in Nabokov's works, always stands for the author, or as a pointer to a homonymous question "why?" – cf. Ksiezopolska 2012, 180. Note also the proposition that the actual narrator of the tale is not Hermann, but Felix, briefly outlined in the monograph, which deserves to be examined more directly.

Lydia, an avid reader of detective novels, is allowed to provide a fitting introduction, ushering the reader into the "creepy" atmosphere. Hermann next makes a cinematic montage of the visual scenery: instead of the summer day we see the black-and-white picture of a March wood, which is suspended in mid-air, while the narrator unhurriedly contemplates it, throwing hints of significance to the reader (note the ominous "skullcap" on the exclamation mark of the signpost), while the scene grows transparent; the camera cuts to the shot of the sunshine-suffused present, only to shift back to the bleak future with the incongruous object in the foreground (the pinecone turning into the shaving brush). That object will be among the various "murder weapons" – Hermann will dutifully shave and groom Felix before shooting him, to make his victim appear more like himself. On first reading, we have no way of knowing the function of the brush, and the narrator succeeds in mystifying us. This concrete object is the finishing touch in the rather well-executed picture (Hermann's literary output is very uneven): it draws attention to itself, it gives just the right feeling of strangeness and, because it is both mundane and mysterious, it appears menacingly sinister. On second reading, with the hindsight of Hermann's crime and folly we read this scene with a feeling akin to the experience of *déjà vu* – we not only remember the scene, but remember remembering it. This precisely reflects Hermann's state of mind:

> A pleasant summer day and a peaceful countryside; a good-natured fool of an artist and a roadside post... That yellow post... that particular landmark subsequently became a fixed idea with me. Cut out clearly in yellow, amid a diffuse landscape, it stood up in my dreams. By its position my fancies found their bearings. All my thoughts reverted to it. It shone, a faithful beacon, in the darkness of my speculations. I have the feeling today that I recognized it, when seeing it for the first time: familiar to me as a thing of the future... Yes, that's it, now I am getting it clear – I certainly did have that queer sensation; it has not been added as an afterthought. And that yellow post... How meaningly it looked at me, when I glanced back... (35)[7]

Hermann is making us notice, study, memorize and (falsely) recognize that absurd yellow post, "cut out", as if superimposed on the quiet landscape by a picture-book maker, who uses it to point to something highly important. Hermann needs to convince us it has a meaning, that it is relevant – and he is trying too hard. The first, cinematic passage would be sufficient to induce the feeling of menacing strangeness, but all this talk of "remembering", "recognizing", "queer sensation", etc. does little to further the peculiar impression of weird foreboding that – to Hermann – seems both exciting and morbid.

The next instance of temporal conflation is done with much more subtlety, so much so, that it is quite easy to miss the instance altogether. The focus of the scene is on the letter that Hermann is trying to post to Felix. Curiously, he seems unable to drop this

[7] The cited passage envelops the earlier quoted fragment – in the novel, this game actually goes on for several pages, with the narrator patiently hammering the point home, until the reader is quite overcome with all the combinations of temporal references and indicators of significance.

letter into the post box, passing five or six boxes and still retaining the fatal letter. This is when he notices two little girls:

> I stood there, bending under my burden as before, and looking from under my brows at two little girls playing near me on the pavement: they rolled by turns an iridescent marble, aiming at a pit in the soil near the curb. I selected the younger of the two – she was a delicate little thing, dark-haired, dressed in a checkered frock (what a wonder she was not cold on that harsh February day) and, patting her on the head, I said: "Look here, my dear, my eyes are so weak that I'm afraid of missing the slit; do please, drop this letter for me into the box over there." She glanced up at me, rose from her squatting position (she had a small face of translucid pallor and rare beauty), took the letter, gave me a divine smile accompanied by a sweep of her long lashes, and ran to the letter box. I did not wait to see the rest... (124-125)[8]

Hermann is first preoccupied with the letter, and then with the beauty of the little girl – yet, he does wonder at her light garb. In fact, her clothing is perfectly appropriate to the season: she, with the entire setting of this scene, is borrowed from an earlier episode – Hermann's semi-hallucinatory wanderings through the town of Tarnitz, where he is supposed to meet Felix (dated October 1st):

> I stood under the porch and looked at two little girls playing marbles; rolling by turn the iridescent orb, now bending to give it a push with the back of the finger, now compressing it between the feet to release it with a hop, and all this in order that the marble should trickle into a tiny pit in the ground under a double-trunked birch tree; as I stood looking at that concentrated, silent and minute game, I somehow found myself thinking that Felix could not come for the simple reason that he was a product of my imagination, which hankered after reflections, repetitions, masks, and that my presence in a remote little town was absurd and even monstrous. (69-70)

While Hermann looks on, the reader of course notes the peculiar Y-trunked birch tree which is a double of the tree marking the site of the future murder. The game of marbles is described in almost the same words in both episodes, yet Hermann seems to be oblivious to the fact that he is mixing up two separate events. Interestingly, he does experience a feeling of *déjà vu*, but not during the episode that comes chronologically later, where it would be justified by half-unconscious memory. And on that occasion, there is no sign of exaltation that he exhibited while describing the murder spot, quite the opposite, there is every sign of weary distaste: "every man with a keen eye is familiar with those

[8] Note the forward-looking little messenger that Hermann employs – she seems a wink at the reader above Hermann's head, though that would be an anachronism, as the passage appears already in the Russian text of Despair, written long before the character of *Ada, or Ardour: Family Chronicle* or *Lolita*.

anonymously retold passages from his past life: false-innocent combinations of details, which smack revoltingly of plagiarism. Let us leave them to the conscience of fate..." (70).

Of course, that illegitimate nature characterizes all of Hermann's premonitions-memories: he tries to convey to the reader that scenes are familiar to him as "thing[s] of the future". But in the game of marbles we have a level of unreality that is quite dizzying even for such a novel as *Despair*. First, the little girls in Tarnitz suggest to Hermann the unreality of his existence – without, it seems, any obvious reason. We may only guess that to Hermann the game (depicted as a thing of beauty) somehow communicates the wretched nature of his mad dreams. Or, perhaps, he may be feeling that he is "losing his marbles", as the saying goes, slipping into insanity.

But there is another possibility always present in Nabokov's texts: Hermann may intuit that the game the girls play is an allegorized reflection of the celestial game that gods are playing with him. Shade, in *Pale Fire*, is elated to discover traces of this game in his life: "It sufficed that I in life could find / Some kind of link-and-bobolink, some kind / Of correlated pattern in the game, / Plexed artistry, and something of the same / Pleasure in it as they who played it found" (Nabokov 1996, 479-480). However, to Hermann, a failed artist and a proclaimed atheist, the game is a menace: in it he would be a plaything and not the player. That is why he feels queasy with the suspicion that his life is turning into a repetitive hallucination, he is nauseous because he intuits that not only Felix is an illusion of his obsessed mind, but also he, over-real Hermann, may be fictitious as well.

But to return to the Tarnitz episode: in the novel it has a very peculiar status, appearing as a sort of sustained hallucination or a dream – objects melt into each other, Hermann's actions are often absurdly inconsequent, he dreams those unsettling layered dreams, walks in circles, fighting a feeling that he is somehow back in his own past (unknown to us and quite tantalizing, because it may contain the secret trauma that shapes Hermann's character). The two girls with their marbles seem to be part of this illusory pattern. It has been suggested that the whole episode is a hallucination within the book (Saugee 1974, 56), yet it is because of the link forged there between Hermann and Felix, that some letters are exchanged between them later on, which eventually leads to the murder in the forest – the kernel of Hermann's tale. Deleting this episode as a fantasy would make the whole plot crumble.

And, even if the first episode is illusory (or invented by Hermann in retrospect), what of the second game of marbles? The little girl who mails the letter does not belong in the February day with her light clothing, which would mean that she either exists in a different time frame, or does not exist at all – and thus, the fatal letter could not have been delivered to Felix, he could not have come to the appointment with his killer, Hermann could not have shot him in the woods, and so on. Things fall apart.

Saugee postulates that "we can try to sort real from unreal, but since we must use as reference the document of a self-deluding neurotic, the task is futile" (Saugee 1974, 58). One is tempted to agree with this statement, and yet – even though the readers experience frustration and the literary detectives have trouble pulling apart Hermann's delusions, his deliberate lies and the actual story as it happened (has it happened at all?) – there is something so concrete about the world of the novel that both readers and critics are continuously tantalized and drawn to it, instead of being repulsed by all the unreliability they

face. Besides, the root of the problem is not quite Hermann's psychotic state, but rather his deliberate effort to create in the reader a certain uneasiness, an existential anxiety that he himself is continuously suffering from.

3.3 THE CARTESIAN DEMON

Hermann is suffering from a very particular paranoia – not an actual clinical condition, but an existential anxiety that William C. Carroll fittingly calls "the Cartesian nightmare." In truth, his most terrible fear is that his existence would lose its meaning if somewhere in the world there existed his double – Hermann's anxiety is that this double would prove to be real, and thus his whole existence would be pushed out into the realm of mirror reflections.[9] That is why he decides to put into action his very hazily and inexpertly concocted murder scheme: he feels that he must delete the double that threatens his reality in the world. He nears the realization of this truth in a rare moment of lucidity: "'Please, God!' I said with force, and failed to understand, myself, why I said so; for did not the sense of my whole life consist now in my possessing a live reflection? So why then did I mention the name of a non-existent God, why did there flash through my mind the foolish hope that my reflection had been distorted?" (67).

All Hermann is trying to do in his manuscript is to convince the reader (and himself) that the existence of the double gives him a certain power over reality, the power to distort it and bend it out of shape by playing with two identical images, with the viewer never quite sure whether the image before him is the object or the subject in the complicated game. Hermann tries to pose as a *deus deceptor,* or a Cartesian demon, whose existence may overturn our entire understanding of reality:

> I will therefore suppose that, not God, who is perfectly good and the source of truth, but some evil spirit, supremely powerful and cunning, has devoted all his efforts to deceiving me. I will think that the sky, the air, the earth, colors, shapes, sounds, and all external things are no different from the illusions of our dreams, and that they are traps he has laid for my credulity; I will consider myself as having no hands, no eyes, no flesh, no blood, and no senses, but yet as falsely believing that I have all these; I will obstinately cling to these thoughts, and in this way, if indeed it is not in my power to discover any truth, yet certainly to the best of my ability and determination I will take care not to give my assent to anything false, or to allow this deceiver, however powerful and cunning he may be, to impose upon me in any way." (Descartes 2008, 16-17)

For Descartes, this is merely a stage in reaching the firm ground of his "cogito": his obstinate refusal "to give my assent to ... allow this deceiver ... to impose upon me" echoes Calvino's Knight's existence by "will power ... and faith in our holy cause." Yet, before one reaches this safe haven of faith in one's own existence, there is this horrible

[9] Note, in this context, Hermann's fear of mirrors: at one point, he grows a beard because he cannot bear to see his own face in the mirror (177).

suspicion, not only that the world around is a counterfeit affair, but that one simply does not exist at all – "having no hands, no eyes, no flesh, no blood and no senses" – quite like Calvino's Nonexistent Knight. Failure to believe in his own existence is precisely the ailment that Hermann is suffering from. He inadvertently betrays himself in the chapter on God, beginning tantalizingly with the phrase: "The nonexistence of God is simple to prove" (101).[10] His discussion of the metaphysics, logically flawed and reeking of self-delusion – and ironic since, in Hermann's world, there is, indeed, an almighty god who is also a *deus deceptor* (the author) – succeeds only in proving that his existence as a self-aware being is fraught with existentialist uneasiness. Discussing afterlife in which the newly dead would meet their deceased loved ones, Hermann apostrophizes the reader directly in the following way:

> Now tell me, please, what guarantee do you possess that those beloved ghosts are genuine; that it is really your dear dead mother and not some petty demon mystifying you, masked as your mother and impersonating her with consummate art and naturalness? There is the rub, there is the horror; the more so as the acting will go on and on, endlessly; never, never, never, never, never will your soul in that other world be quite sure that the sweet gentle spirits crowding about it are not fiends in disguise, and forever, and forever, and forever shall your soul remain in doubt, expecting every moment some awful change, some diabolical sneer to disfigure the dear face bending over you. (102-103)

Obsessive repetition, peculiar choice of words (horror, endlessly, fiends in disguise, awful, diabolical, disfigure) and the peculiar – verging on Dostoyevsian hysterics – tone of the narrator indicate that this is not an abstract philosophical discussion, but something very personal and directly relevant to Hermann. His problem is, of course, something quite obvious to us – his fictional status. Nabokov's heroes are quite often tormented by the realization of their unreality and attempt in various ways to battle the terrible God-author who determines their lives and deaths. But in Hermann's case, the unbearable state of existence shadowed by a constant suspicion of nonexistence, does not limit itself to the figure of the narrating hero.

Suffering from the constant feeling of being embroidered into someone else's fiction, Hermann attempts to take his revenge – forcing the reader to experience the same existential anxiety, the same qualms of inexistence that torture his mind. If he appears insane, it may be a clever camouflage, serving multiple purposes. When he announces that he intends to make an April fool of the reader, this is a mild understatement: in fact he is after inducing in the reader the same state of paranoia that he exhibits in the text. When at the end he projects himself as director of a film[11], who is simultaneously the leading

[10] Note that these thoughts are consistently linked in Hermann's manuscript with the God issue, indicating his, perhaps subconscious, awareness that in his text there might be other powers working over his head.

[11] Note the consistency with which Hermann makes use of the cinematic allusions: two instances were already mentioned above (the first description of the crime scene, and the ending of the novel). There are many more examples – to mention just a couple: when Hermann sees Felix for the first time, he is reminded of a film about doubles

actor, making his escape, ordering the public to make way for him, he is not addressing his fictional audience, but rather his readers, thus embroidering them into his fictional world, entangling them into his deceitful story, enmeshing them into the fluid realm of existential instability.

4. THE NONEXISTENT NARRATORS

It is interesting to note that both Calvino's and Nabokov's narrators have a similar attitude to their task of transcribing their story. Hermann, on beginning his account, seems bored with it and interrupts it with the following explanation: "Dull work recounting all this. Bores me to death. But yearn as I may to reach the crucial point quickly, a few preliminary explanations seem necessary. So let us have done with them..." (5). However, even though he seems to have committed himself to the dull task of setting the scene, he backslides into boredom that is made worse by an unbearable agitation:

> I think I ought to inform the reader that there has just been a long interval... I have been sitting in a queer state of exhaustion, now listening to the rushing and crashing of the wind, now drawing noses in the margin of the page, now slipping into a vague slumber, and then starting up all aquiver. And again there would grow in me that prickly feeling, that unendurable twitter... and my will lay limp in an empty world... I had to make a great effort in order to switch on the light and stick in a new nib. The old one had got chipped and bent and now looks like the beak of a bird of prey. (5)

The tale seems to be escaping from Hermann, and instead of getting on to the essence of his story, he continues to write about the process of writing, concentrating on the external circumstances, his writing materials, his own distress. The state of excitement and inability to proceed with the task of writing, "that unendurable twitter," even the scribbles in the margins of the manuscript are well familiar to Sister Theodora, who also wants her tale to rush on but seems unable to concentrate on her task, and keeps writing about herself in the process of writing:

> One starts off writing with a certain zest, but a time comes when the pen merely grates in dusty ink, and not a drop of life flows, and life is all outside, outside the window, outside oneself, and it seems that never more can one escape into a page one is writing, open out another world, leap the gap." (71-71)

> I realize only now that I have filled page after page and am still at the very beginning... I long to hurry on with my story, tell it quickly, embellish every page with enough duels and battles for a poem but when I pause and start rereading I realize that my pen has left no mark on the paper and the pages are blank." (105-106)

(identified by Stephen Blackwell as "The Student of Prague", cf. Blackwell 2002/2003); Hermann also pretends to be an actor needing an understudy when he tries to "recruit" Felix.

For both narrators the tale seems to be a sort of penance: to the nun – an attempt to save her soul; to Hermann – an attempt to restore his faith in his own existence. Foregrounding their creative efforts, they make the readers realize that the heroes they are reading about are simply characters of stories – in a sense, nonexistent; at the same time the narrators legitimize themselves by indicating that they exist on a higher level than their heroes – and thus appear as truly existent, which quality is made doubtful again when the readers realize that the narrators are also the acting heroes.

Thus, both *The Nonexistent Knight* and *Despair* seem to deal with the Cartesian problem: what does it mean to exist and how may we interpret the unreliable phenomena around us. Is it enough to possess self-awareness to truly exist? What do we become when conventions that mark our boundaries – like the armor of the nonexistent knight – are transgressed or altogether abandoned? Can we then continue to exist?

In Descartes's *Meditations*, the doubt of one's existence turns out to be precisely the proof of that existence. Yet, for Agilulf, this doubt brings about his apparent demise. Self-awareness of the Nonexistent Knight survives the assault of doubt from the outside: when Torrismund undermines his past deeds on which his identity is grounded, this merely launches Agilulf's quest for the proof of his origins. He does not seem to need the belief of others to exist, rather – insubstantiality in others always gives him the feeling of "perfect calm and security" (21). When he reaches the goal and finds Sophronia, still a virgin by her own admission, this confirms the soundness of Agilulf's identity, her virginity being the Holy Grail of his quest, since his knighthood and all the subsequent titles were based on the single deed of saving Sophronia's virginity from being violated. Yet, when he goes back to Sophronia's cave with the Emperor, she is a virgin no longer, having spent the night with Torrismund. In theory, this should not have upset Agilulf: even before he began his quest, the emperor postulated that it would be a miracle for Sophronia's virginity to be preserved after 15 years, even in a convent, and Agilulf calmly replied: "Violated chastity presupposes a violator. I will find him and obtain proof from him of the date when Sophronia could be considered a virgin" (82). Logically, therefore, what Agilulf should do at this moment of trial is to demand from Torrismund a confirmation of Sophronia's virginity before their lovemaking – which he would have duly received. Yet, all Agilulf hears is Sophronia's admission that she has raised Torrismund, and this is enough to make him doubt his own reality: "I have no longer a name! Farewell!" (129).

Self-doubt destroys the Knight: when his armor is next found, it is truly empty, and Raimbaut takes possession of it. The knight who did not exist now also ceased to be real. However, we may never be sure of what really happened to the invisible knight – he dissolved into the air, and yet – was the outline of the armor truly necessary for his existence? May we really postulate that because that outline was broken, he exists no longer – remembering, that he has never existed before, though he was real enough. In fact, we may propose a different solution to Calvino's tale, which may explain not only the ultimate fate of its protagonist, but also the dubious role of its narrator.

The identity of the narrator is in fact the question that is never properly solved in the story. We have already established that it cannot be Bradamante. Yet, "Sister Theodora" is also merely an outline, a role: her "ownership" of the text does not explain the three first

impersonal chapters, told from a clearly omniscient position. But what if Agilulf, dissolving after taking off his armor, did not cease to exist? What would he become? Perhaps, he would become a mere voice – a narrating presence, a sort of omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent (non)being, almost a god, but a god who longs to learn humanity and tries to find an embodiment for himself – in the characters of his tale.

Agilulf's disembodiment perfectly explains the narrative stance of the first chapters: even the white knight that he used to be is no longer his identity, which explains the use of the third person in relation to him. The consequent adoption of the identity of a nun, shut up in a convent, may be seen as his attempt to adopt humanity, to be able to understand it better: a nun is the next logical step, as a figure who is removed beyond the margins of active life, and yet may observe it and comment on it. The final adoption of Bradamante's identity is a sort of repayment for her love – she is thus allowed to merge with the man she loves. It is also a conversion of a passive observer (a narrator) into an active hero – which was actually the true object of the Nonexistent Knight's quest.

Agilulf's voice, beginning in the semi-metallic tone of objectivity, is made to pass through all stages of human partiality, gradually growing in warmth. In the first chapters we can easily notice changes of tone: for instance, when the voice describes Bradamante there are sudden switches of intonation, from the ironically descriptive to admiringly lyrical, to abstractly poetic:

> Raimbaut could not believe his eyes. For the naked flesh was a woman's: a smooth gold-flecked belly, round rosy hips, long straight girl's legs. This half of a girl (the crab half now had an even more inhuman and expressionless aspect than ever) was turning round and looking for a suitable spot, set one foot on one side and one foot on the other side of a trickle of water, bent knees slightly, leant on the ground, arms covered with iron bands, pushed the head forward and the behind back and began quietly and proudly to pee. She was a woman of harmonious moons, tender plumage, and gentle waves.

Raimbaut admires the loveliness of the girl's body, Sister Theodora produces her typical description of half-woman and half-crab in the unlyrical act of urinating, and Agilulf's voice breaks through, with his typically abstract poetry of "harmonious moons, tender plumage, and gentle waves".[12]

Sister Theodora's narrative also frequently betrays the tendency to defuse the epic pathos, typical for Agilulf. The Nonexistent Knight always corrects the tales of the other

[12] Here it would be appropriate to comment on Calvino's statement in the Italian Preface to the trilogy that the first person narrator was added because the author felt the need to "counter the objective coldness, typical of fabulous narrative, with an element capable of introducing rapport and lyricism, something the modern narrative cannot do without." (Calvino 1962, cited in Weiss 1993, 64) It is interesting to note in the context of this pronouncement that according to Marc Beckwith in his anthology of *Italian Folktales* Calvino frequently deleted the very element that introduced the narrator into the story – usually, part of the story ending, when the narrator would indicate his/her involvement with the characters of the tale (Cf. Beckwith 1987, 247). This testifies to Calvino's awareness of the existence of the narrative convention including the elements he needed for his novel in the tradition of the folktales. His statement might be interpreted as a subtle hint for the reader to pay attention to the changes of the tone from that "objective coldness" to "rapport and lyricism", which is motivated by the secret identity of the narrator.

knights by adding the humdrum details which completely destroy the legendary status of the narratives. Sister Theodora manages quite as well: she narrates how in his first battle Raimbaut is constantly thwarted in his attempt to avenge his father, through bureaucracy, mistranslation, misidentification and so on, until even he can no longer feel the passion that moved him to join Charlemagne's army. Her other tactics of introducing grotesque, fantastic or grossly realistic elements into descriptions of epic events were already discussed above. Thus, there is at the very least an affinity between the nun and the knight, and if he has become encased within her figure, as earlier he had been within his white armor, it would be quite elegant and very fitting.

As the narrative progresses, the Knight learns to subdue the abstract to the particular, sustaining the various believably human intonations, giving more and more space to the developing "self" of the narrator, until it is ready to become an active self. Earlier, he did not exist because he lacked passion and empathy – the purpose of his narrative is to save his soul by teaching him what it means to be human: not merely self-aware, but also aware of human frailty and suffering and love. His narrative makes him complete – not an ideal, not a presence, but a person with desires and needs.

It is obvious that Calvino did not perceive the status of his characters as unchangeable. Villagers of the Koowalden, freed from the tyranny of the Knights of the Holy Grail, explain to Torrismund: "We ourselves did not know we existed... One can also learn to be..." (138). Gurduloo, having a body but lacking a stable name and the self-consciousness that is the Cartesian formula of existence, is constantly threatened by "being swallowed up into nothingness" (Migiel 1986, 58). His nonexistence is complementary to the Knight's. They are Calvino's doubles, not rivals (as in Nabokov's text), but two alienated halves that, reunited, would constitute a complete human being. Yet, the compilation of the opposites that is effected in the first story of the trilogy (rather crudely, by sewing together the two halves earlier torn asunder by a cannon shot) does not take place in *The Nonexistent Knight*: Gurduloo does not take up Agilulf's armor to merge with him. Instead, it is suggested that Gurduloo may still learn how to exist – without any use of magic, it seems. If a creature without awareness may hope to become fully human through experience, why should we deny the same possibility to a self-aware but disembodied consciousness, searching completeness through art?

If we accept this supposition, Calvino's narrator in *The Nonexistent Knight* would represent a paradoxical case of an omniscient narrator who is unreliable, a disembodied third person narrator who pretends to be a first person narrator. In Genette's terms, we would have here an extradiegetic narrator (above the level of the main story) who is simultaneously an intradiegetic one (narrating the story from within), and a homodiegetic narrator (involved in the action) who pretends to be a heterodiegetic one (not participating in the action). Calvino manages to mix up all the helpful narratological categories – his nonexistent character-narrator is abstract and specific enough to simultaneously wear all the available masks.

Thus, both Agilulf and Hermann are narrators who try to exert their existence through their texts. Hermann constructs a concrete world to battle the paranoia of his Cartesian nightmare (suspicion that everything, including himself, is a dream); Agilulf through his narration tries to recover his existence, going beyond the stage of self-doubt into the firm ground of

self-assertion, trying on various roles of his human characters who exist in the flesh. Both narrators, however, by telling their stories also fictionalize those who might have existed as corporeal creatures into the "pale organisms of literary heroes" who now need the lifeblood of the readers to exist. Of course, both narrators feed on this very lifeblood themselves, regaining reality through our efforts to visualize, decode and understand their worlds.

The text that encodes those visions is as changeable as the sea and perhaps this is why it enchants us and leads us through the meanders of literary detection and philosophical speculation: "The polymorphic visions of the eyes and the spirit are contained in uniform lines of small or capital letters, periods, commas, parentheses – pages of signs, packed as closely together as grains of sand, representing the many-colored spectacle of the world on a surface that is always the same and always different, like dunes shifted by the desert wind" (Calvino 1993, 99).

There is one more aspect of the tales that must be pointed out in conclusion of this discussion. In the introduction to his Italian Folktales, Calvino cites the Tuscan proverb: "The tale is not beautiful if nothing is added to it" (Calvino 1980, xxi). This, perhaps, gives us a gentle hint of the nature of Calvino's own tales: they are incomplete without the reader's participation. The same might be said about *Despair*: the mode of narration, with its fluidity and visuality, is designed to draw the readers in, making them in some way interact with the tale (if only to give the lifeblood to the heroes). We add our interpretations, trying to understand what the Nonexistent Knight stands for (all commentators of the novel invariably see the figure of Calvino's protagonist as an allegory), what is the source of Hermann's paranoia (all of Nabokov's commentators seem convinced that his narrator is deranged), what happens to Agilulf after he dismantles his armor, what happens to Hermann after his narrative is completed and the page is turned, who the true narrator is in Calvino's tale, and who is the true master of discourse in Nabokov's. We add to the tale, thus revealing its beauty.

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Marcin Rychter

HOW MUSIC TURNED INTO PHILOSOPHY AND WHAT IMPLICATIONS DOES THIS HAVE?

In this brief sketch I will focus on an issue that seems crucial to anyone who is engaged today in the philosophy of music. I will examine the unprecedented turn that took place in the 20th century. It could be said that this change involved the very essence of "musicality," namely – what we are willing to accept as music. First, I will briefly characterize this change. Then, I will try to develop a philosophical interpretation of this phenomenon by employing the notion of "ontological virtualisation," developed in reference to Heidegger, Deleuze and a contemporary Scottish philosopher – Raymond Brassier. Finally, I will offer an interpretation of several artistic strategies adopted by contemporary composers, considering them as philosophical statements and asking about their philosophical ramifications. I will conclude by posing some questions inspired by changes in contemporary music which, as I believe, are relevant to philosophy of culture in general.

FAREWELL, HARMONY!

Since antiquity, music in Western culture has been regulated by a rigorous canon. It defined not only the rules of composition or performing techniques, but even the social and cultural contexts in which music was played and enjoyed. It is worth pointing out that the origins of this canon are, in a sense, identical with those of philosophy itself: what I have in mind here is the Pythagorean claim that a hidden mathematical order can be discovered in the universe. After all, one of the arguments supporting this claim was the ancient discovery that consonant intervals depend on simple proportions between the lengths of two vibrating strings. Let us take a closer look at some of the crucial features of this Western musical canon:

a/ *Strict separation of "musical" and "non-musical" sounds*. The former are produced only by means of musical instruments handled by trained musicians (the human voice can be considered as such an instrument). Therefore, music is the domain of professionals.

b/ *Equal temperament*. The physical qualities of sound and the nature of human perception allow for an essentially continuous gradation of sound pitch (a good example of which is a glissando performed on a trombone). However, the Western tradition has developed a convention of dividing it into twelve equal semitones.

c/ *Functional harmony.* Chord sequences (and subsequently melodies) are constructed and follow each other in accordance with strict rules, the most important of which is that dominant chords (based on the fifth degree of a scale) are "resolved" towards tonic chords (based on the first degree of the same scale). Such "resolution" (when the tonic is played after the dominant) creates a sensation of repose and a feeling that tension has been relieved.

d/ *Mathesis*. Classical works of music employ simple mathematical structures on various levels: rhythm (bars and measures), arrangement of motifs, rules of counterpoint and so on.

e/ *Classical musical forms.* Each classical composition represented a given conventional form. Among them we find the song, plainsong, sonata, concerto, symphony, opera or music drama.

f/ *Social and cultural contexts*. These functions – as Plato already noticed – can be divided into two basic categories. On the one hand, we are dealing with situations in which music is supposed to impart a sense of gravity (*pathos*) to the situation. On the other, however, music performs a *ludic* function.

Today, this canon has lost its normative power. It no longer draws a clear distinction between musical and non-musical sounds, compositions and situations. This radical change, which can be experienced in contemporary musical culture, is without precedent and its historical significance to the philosophy of culture cannot be overestimated. Interestingly, there was no such break in mathematics, engineering or philosophy. Unlike those disciplines, Western music openly questioned its own fundamental principles and abandoned them. In short, "anything goes" in contemporary music as it is no longer governed by a single and universal set of principles. I leave aside here the question of the aesthetic or artistic value of various experimental works. The problem which this sketch undertakes is not related to aesthetics, but rather to philosophy of culture. I am concerned with the change that the ontological status of the work of art has undergone, and not with the various possible aesthetic evaluations of this process and its consequences.

It is quite impossible to point out a single or even chief cause of that turn, although one might discern several factors which influenced it. One of them was undoubtedly the development of technology. The emergence of mechanical and electronic means of recording, playing, as well as creating sounds, completely changed our idea of what can and cannot be considered music. In 1920, an eighteen year old German communist, Dadaist and student of composition, Stefan Wolpe, presented a piece in which the only instruments and the only performers were eight gramophones playing at different speeds. Seven years earlier, the Italian Futurist painter Luigi Russolo published a manifesto titled "The Art of Noise," where he claimed that: "We must break at all cost from this restrictive circle of pure sounds and conquer the infinite variety of noise sounds"[1]. In USA, John Cage composed in 1939 his experimental piece titled *Imaginary Landscape No. 1*, for two variable-speed gramophones playing frequency recordings normally used only for technical purposes.

[1] L. Russolo, *The Art of Noise*, trans. R. Filiou. Bristol 2004, p. 6.

The Frenchman Pierre Schaeffer went even further. In 1948 he recorded his famous *Railroad Study* (*Étude aux chemins de fer*) consisting of sounds made by trains, which were recorded on tape and later edited. Schaeffer himself was not sure whether the result could be called music, so he decided to name it "musique concrète." This novel idea proved inspiring for other composers, thanks to which *musique concrète* has become one of the most important currents in contemporary music in the second half of the twentieth century.

All of these experiments constituted a frontal assault on the Western musical canon, as they questioned all of its basic tenets and introduced to music sounds that were hitherto regarded as "non-musical," thus breaking away from all formal rigour. At the same time, however, another parallel process of "dismantling" tradition was taking place – one that attempted to overturn it from within (without making use of "non-musical" elements, as well as limiting itself to traditional instruments and means of expression). I mean here the first dodecaphonic avant-garde, represented by Schoenberg, Berg and Webern. These composers knew perfectly well the classical rules of counterpoint and functional harmony. Nevertheless, they rejected functional harmony's basic dogma – the rule of resolving dominant chords into tonic ones. They introduced the idea of creating music in accordance with strict mathematical procedures. One result of this was the destruction of traditional melodic patterns and harmony, which led to the later emergence of aleatoric techniques and the introduction of the element of chance to the structure of the musical piece.

Within just a couple of decades, Western music wandered far away from strict conventions, redefining what can and cannot be regarded as music, as well as opening a radical new world of surprising sounds and structures governed by chance. This turn of events becomes even more fascinating when we notice that it is irreversible. Once the canon loses its normative power, it can never regain its apodictic, self-evident and universal character. It is of course still possible to compose music according to classical rules, or to stylize it after the model of particular historical periods. Such "reactionary," neoclassical attempts are indeed made by numerous contemporary composers. However, it is now only one of the many possibilities available to musical artists who are no longer required to accept any rules, apart from those they force upon themselves. Music, one of the pillars of Western culture, has changed during the last century to a greater extent than it had done in the previous two thousand years.

STARTING ANEW

Let us now employ the philosophical concept of *nihilism* to interpret the contemporary breakdown of musical tradition. What is nihilism? There are many answers to this question. For the purpose of this sketch I will employ the definition proposed by a Scottish philosopher, Raymond Brassier, in an interview for *Kronos* quarterly:

> Very simply, nihilism is a crisis of meaning. This crisis is historically conditioned, because what we understand by "meaning" is historically conditioned.
>
> The pre-modern worldview (...) is one in which the world and human existence are intrinsically meaningful. (...) In this worldview, there is a natural

> order, and that order is comprehensible to human beings in its broad outline, if not in every single one of its details.
>
> The emergence of modern mathematized natural science around the 16th century marks the point at which this way of making sense of ourselves and our world begins to unravel. It [the pre-modern worldview] does not collapse all at once, but it begins to lose its official theoretical sanction (...).
>
> Galaxies, molecules, and organisms are not *for* anything. Try as we might, it becomes increasingly difficult to construct a rationally plausible narrative about the world that satisfies our psychological need for stories that unfold from beginning, through crisis, to ultimate resolution.[2]

The analogy between the current state of music and Brassier's description of nihilism seems striking. Brassier considers nihilism to be the collapse of the conviction that a certain coherent and rational narrative could somehow mirror the metaphysical structure of reality and thus reveal the structure of this reality to us. In Western musical culture, it was the classical canon that played the role of that intimate link between reality and the work of art. It was born out of both theoretical speculation and experiments with sound conducted by the Pythagoreans. They believed in *logos* – the rational, mathematical structure of the Cosmos – which manifested itself directly in music. Harmony in music was supposed to reflect and participate in the harmony of the Cosmos.

Historical remarks aside, I will now attempt to outline very briefly a general ontology of the work of art by cross-linking certain concepts developed by Heidegger and Deleuze. First, let us distinguish between the ontic and the ontological aspect. The latter would refer to the broadly understood "convention" of the work of art – its "style," the "rules" it follows and the "limits" of what the artist is and is not expected to do.

The ontic sphere, on the other hand, would be comprised of the individual decisions made by artists within these "limits." This opposition between the ontic and the ontological could be supplemented with a Deleuzian axis whose poles are virtuality (i.e. permanent change, the potential for transformation) and actuality (i.e. presence, unchanging identity).

Let us now relate the abovementioned fourfold structure to a musical work of art, both in its classical and nihilist form. In a work of music which belongs to the classical paradigm, the ontological dimension is precisely determined and fixed, since it is regulated by the "canon" I described at the outset. Employing Deleuze's terms, we could say that in Western classical music the ontological dimension of the work of art is "actual" as it constitutes an unchanging basis and a stable point of reference.

The ontological level of a classical musical piece is therefore actual in its character and fixed as far as its foundation is concerned. The ontic level, on the other hand, is virtual. Virtuality, or the free play of choice and differentiation, concerns the selection of musical themes, motifs and the adopting of particular techniques for developing them. Such stages

[2] "I am a nihilist because I still believe in truth." R. Brassier interviewed by M. Rychter. Available at: http://www.kronos.org.pl/index.php?23151,896

of composition as arrangement, orchestration, harmonization, the choice of *tempi* etc., also fall within the domain of virtuality. What we are dealing with here is free invention – a differentiating element which always starts working anew whenever a genuinely novel work of art is created. The presence of the canon (or actuality) on the ontological level does not – it must be emphasized – exclude radical virtuality on the ontic level (after all, radically diverse works within the same form were created and composers often attempted to broaden the limits of conventions; compare, for example, the symphonies of Haydn with those of Bruckner).

In contemporary music, on the other hand, we are dealing with a process which might be called the *virtualization of the ontological level* of the work of art. The canon is no longer a point of reference which guarantees that the work is metaphysically rooted in the structure of the Cosmos. The ontological level – the level of "what is acceptable" – becomes just as virtual as the moment of making particular technical choices by the composer. This means that the artists create the rules of their art whenever they write a new piece. It is worth stressing here that as a result of this the artist, whether he wants to or not, becomes a philosopher.

The ontological virtualization of the work of art burdens the artist as he is obliged to face a number of fundamental philosophical questions. What is a musical work of art? What are its rules? What is music itself? How does it differ from non-music? How can the musical work of art be constructed? What do its aesthetic value, cultural impact and social meaning depend on?

MUSIC AS PHILOSOPHY

Let us now consider a few of the most striking examples of philosophical strategies employed by contemporary composers who have been forced to give a completely new answer to the question "What is music?" This catalogue is far from complete and serves only as a general and highly subjective overview.

a/ *Sonorism*. In classical music the tone or timbre of sound were never really in the centre of the composers' attention. They tended to focus on melodic patterns, harmony, the art of the counterpoint and the development of melodic variations. Perhaps the most striking feature of contemporary music is the change of attitude in this area. From the beginning of the twentieth century, composers have been more and more interested in the timbre of the sound itself. The philosophical implications of this trend seem quite obvious. Since the canon lost its apodictic character and sound was freed from the constraints of *mathesis*, what we are left with is sound as such. Thus, contemporary composers seem to claim that we need to explore its hidden possibilities and focus on its material aspect. Sonorism is the affirmation of the "materiality" of sound. Importance is attached only to that which is immediately heard. Music is not about conventions or hidden mathematical structures, but about pure sound at its most fundamental level.

b/ *Spectralism, or changing the physical nature of sound.* Spectral music originated in the sonorist circles but deserves to be discussed separately. This technique is based on computer analyses of sound spectra. Individual overtones can then be used to create scales and melodies, or they can even be electronically modified in terms of their pitch. This is

especially important from a philosophical perspective, since it completely changes the relation between the musical *mathesis* and the *physis* of sound. Mathematics interferes with the very physical nature of sound rather than simply regulating existing tones: their pitch, volume and order. After all, the breathtaking effects created by employing the spectral technique are the result of complicated mathematical procedures and the use of advanced equipment, which in fact made them possible. Never before has *logos* penetrated so deeply into the *physis* of sound.

c/ *Radicalism*. Moderation, temperance and the search for "the golden mean" are all virtues that contemporary composers rarely refer to. They are rather interested in extremities and in breaking all imaginable boundaries. This tendency is exemplified in various experiments with sound volume, ranging from the deafening din generated by artists representing *noise* and *power noise* music (e.g. Masami Akita, Masonna, Government Alpha) to music created by Michael Pisaro and other composers of *silent music*, who combine subtle, barely audible sounds with complete silence. However, the radicalism of contemporary music does not boil down to the sharp contrast between the loud and the quiet. It rather originates in a desire – stimulated by the phenomenon of the ontological virtualization of music – to venture beyond the boundaries of musicality. Another aspect of contemporary radicalism is the ambition to evoke extreme, or at least unusual mental states. This approach is represented, among others, by repetitive music which is based on a monotonous pulse, putting the listener in a state of trance. This technique – whose sources may be traced back to the various ritual forms in European and non-European cultures – has been employed both by American minimalists (Steve Reich, Terry Riley) and *techno* artists (both avant-garde and popular ones). It can be interpreted as an attempt to revive the sacral and ritual dimension of music.

d/ Searching for music within the non-musical. The radical techniques of twentieth century avant-garde (especially "musique concrète" which forces the listener to focus on external, non-musical sounds) can also be interpreted as an attempt at reviving religious spirituality (understood as "constant mindfulness"). There is an undoubtedly "phenomenological" aspect to this approach which I locate in the attempts to purify experience and return to its "originary presentive" form.

e/ Socio-political critique. Cage's music, which radically broke away from tradition, was part of the counterculture of the 1960s and 70s, although he was not directly engaged in social or political critique. Those decades, however, witnessed the emergence of certain trends which defined a new basic task of music, namely – resistance to capitalism and middle-class mentality. Artists like Cornelius Cardew[3] or members of Fluxus identified with this approach, as they were bitter enemies of all academism and professionalism in art, which they considered to be limiting to individual creativity and freedom. Moreover, they defended a philosophical claim which could be summed up in the following way: art and musicality should show us a possible way out of consumerist society.

[3] See his book *Stockhausen Serves Imperialism*.

CONCLUSION

Any attempts to find a common denominator for the above strategies are not only bound to fail, but in fact seem unnecessary, because music appears now only in the plural. If contemporary composers really do arrive at a certain truth, it would consist of a discovery that there is actually no such thing as a musical absolute – "a set of all sets," in Cantor's language – and that any authentic effort to compose produces its own rules. This is of course a nihilistic thesis which is familiar to philosophy at least since Nietzsche's "death of God" which was later given an ontological interpretation by Heidegger and Deleuze, as well as a mathematical one by Cantor whose ideas were later formulated in philosophical terms by Alain Badiou.

The dissolution of the Western musical tradition, understood as a coherent system designating the "ontological" level of the work of art, has become an unquestionable fact. Although this fact may be interpreted in diverse ways, one thing is clear – it provides a powerful argument against all those conservative and traditionalistic conceptions within philosophy of culture which claim that tradition and identity constitute an invariable point of reference in all cultural production. Since music, which was always regarded as a crucial ingredient of culture, radically broke with the past, can one still speak of the continuity and permanence of Western culture in its entirety?

One more problem arises here – how are we to perceive tradition once this break has occurred? What is the current status of that which formerly constituted the "ontological" foundation of cultural objects? And how are traditional, "ontologically actual" works of art available to us today? They did not become "ontologically virtual" and thus do not resemble contemporary cultural objects, since what distinguishes them is still the classical canon described above. Because they were sapped of their apodictic character, their very identity has changed. To put it metaphorically, they have become their own spectre – something that is still visible, but has lost the power to materially affect reality. The phenomenology of such a "spectral," phantom-like tradition is a philosophical challenge which lies beyond the scope of the present sketch.

There is another problem which I may only hint at here, an even more interesting question perhaps which contemporary music directs towards philosophy. In music the process of ontological virtualization is already accomplished, but in philosophy it has not yet been completed. Just like music, philosophy seems to exist today only in the plural. Various philosophical schools, methods and languages coexist and compete whose representatives are unable to find a common ground. However, unlike music, philosophy is not a sphere where "anything goes." It would be a difficult task to find a philosophical equivalent to Cage's *4'33''*, or to noise music for that matter. It seems that philosophy keeps drifting away from *logos*, understood as *mathesis*, although in contrast to music it seems to be somehow chained to that concept, just as it is dependant on more or less traditional forms of expression. What needs to be examined is the nature of those dependencies, as they mark the place where we encounter the boundary between innovative thought, or language experiment, and meaningless gibberish.

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