DIOGENES

Diogenes 206: 37–53
ISSN 0392-1921

Essay on the Phenomenon of Indifference

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'If the whole of history is the history of human fates having worked their ways, what path are they following now?'

That human beings do not only live their lives as if running the distance between birth and death, but also search for meaning during their stay in this world, is almost a commonplace *differentia* in the definition of the human species. In this search, human beings undertake a task similar to that of a fairytale character: 'Go I know not where, bring I know not what.' Human beings go, without knowing where, making their way in life through the semantic field of unpredictable possibilities. The questions forming the rhythmic pattern of going this way or that also seem to derive from a fairytale: 'Who are we? – Where have we come from in this world? – Where are we going?' These questions are variations on the classic questions of gnosis: 'Whither do we strive? To escape from what? What is birth? What is rebirth?' (Valentine, II, Clem. Exc. Theod. 68.2). This echoes the Christian Gnostic calling to know 'What you are born for; to whose image? What is your essence? Who governs you? What is your relation to God?' (Clement of Alexandria, II Strom. v. 23, 1).

What is actually sought by human beings when they seek what they call 'meaning'? Maybe to live is to enliven the absurd, as Camus puts it? And then, perhaps an affirmation of the absurdity of the world is the summit of metaphysical happiness. However, the experience of non-metaphysical witnesses aside, absurdity frightens, oppresses, kills and alienates human beings from themselves and the world. It drives them into the impasse of despair and weakness. Absurdity is also a semantic limit in excess of which all possible senses, acquired, suffered for, suddenly lose their strength, dissipate, and fall apart into dust. So the experience of the absurd challenges human beings with an impossible world which initiates them, measures their strength and weakness, and tests their humanity and their anti-humanity. It delineates their patience or rebellion, their love or hatred, their spite or compassion. Properly speaking, the absurd challenges (or brings into question) the sense-creating potential of human beings in the world.

SAGE: London, Thousand Oaks, CA and New Delhi, http://dio.sagepub.com
DOI: 10.1177/0392192105052616

The search for meaning in western culture

If the growth of abstract reflection actually took place in the history of western civilization, where has this led? Are sense and understanding so dull in us that we cannot see the essential 'disorder' in the logic leading man to some strange, incomprehensible *necessity*: 'I have to know the meaning of my life. That my life is a mere particle of infinity not only does not give it meaning, it destroys any possible meaning' (Leo Tolstoy). Are the words we utter rapidly forgotten, even as they are repeated infinitely, over and over again?

> In searching for answers to the question of life I experienced all the same feelings which are felt by a man lost in the forest . . . I wandered in this forest of human knowledge between the shafts of light of mathematical and experimental knowledge. These shafts opened clear horizons, but they didn't show me the way home. In going ahead, I entered deeper and deeper into the darkness of speculative knowledge.[1]

Here the genius of Leo Tolstoy illuminates how one searches not only with thought, but also with life and even with one's own death. His exploration of speculative knowledge points to the search for what cannot be 'found'. Yet a life without the tension brought by the search for meaning appears to be meaningless. Apparently, the meaning of life is wrought by the ways the human searches.

The well-known phrase 'to know in order to be able; to be able in order to act; to act in order to live more fully' (which can be continued with another equally common recommendation: 'immerse life in activity, otherwise your heart will burst') was rephrased by Leo Shestov. In his view, to know means to restrict; to restrict means to take away opportunities; to take away opportunities means to kill freedom. 'We lament that we do not know where we came from, where we are heading, what was and what will be, what to do and what to avoid, etc., being confident in advance that if we knew, it would be better. However, maybe it would be worse rather than better: knowledge would chain and restrict us. And since we do not know, nothing restricts us.'[2] Shestov is confident that any epistemology, confined within the borders of the 'natural' only, leaves unattended the supra-rational spheres of other strata of Being. Metaphysics of knowledge striving to overcome such kinds of epistemological limitedness should first of all acknowledge that the 'natural' is the human superficiality in essence. The experience of absurdity, understood by the philosopher first of all as that of tragedy, overcomes the rigid borders of continuous logical obligatory generality. One can have a true cognition only if one is freed from utilitarian goals, the intentional accommodations of everyday consciousness.

A great deal is being said and written today regarding the originality of Russian culture, its spiritual wealth and its inimitable historical experience, its losses and achievements, as well as the complexities of its present stage of development. This inevitably brings to mind one of Dostoyevsky's famous remarks, in which he gives relevant expression to the idea of national conscience and its ability 'to embrace the idea of all-humanity concord, brotherly love and a sober outlook that forgives enmity, notices and pardons dissimilitude and removes contradictions'. Dostoyevsky stresses that 'only all-humanity concord can sustain life, but it is only achievable through

https://doi.org/10.1177/0392192105052616 Published online by Cambridge University Press

people *accenting their nationality*'. Nationality is treated as an 'individuality' that is capable of expanding to universalism by means of '*the gift of understanding*', until it embraces humankind as a whole. The primary importance of the moral nature of this striving to all-unity has been the source of western civilization's values, of worshipping reason and economic progress at any cost.

In our historical consciousness we do not consider the abstract idea of humanity, an idea that becomes visible and concrete in history, where it can be seen in its integrity. Karl Jaspers says the real measure of humanity comes when we stand helpless before a catastrophe, in the destruction of all our defensive thinking habits. From these experiential sources comes the demand for communication in its unlimited sense. Disasters engender the feeling of kinship. They indicate to us the aim that allows our will to communicate.

The insight of the present depends on our perception of the past, as does our foreseeing of the future. Our thoughts about the future influence our seeing of the past and present. So why, since the very beginning of history, where the transmission of experience originates, has the feeling of an end so characterized the human? Nobody can properly know what is in the past and what is in the future. Misunderstanding ourselves and the situation, maybe we are fighting against the truth? History is always an assimilation of the past and the consciousness of one's origin, conceptualization of one's roots and current events. Historical inventions are strictly associated with tradition; they are transmitted and so can be lost. The end of history is nothing other than total oblivion, the loss of experience accumulated through generations, and the loss of consciousness. In his reflections on world history, Burckhardt shares his insights along these lines. The ability to reason will be replaced with the ability to obey . . . Instead of culture the point will be mere existence . . . The state will regain supreme dominance of culture, and moreover significantly subject to its taste. Also, not to be excluded, the culture itself will ask the state how to satisfy its requirements. The predominant type of life will be strict expediency. The free ideal will ultimately react, but at the price of extraordinary efforts and stress.[3]

Scope of historical questioning

One of the 'favorite and oldest European issues' is flogging their own vices. According to Dostoyevsky, there are two ways the West avoids 'being grasped by the whirlpool of lies'.

The first way is casuistry and internal humiliation. The West lives according to the principle: '*If it wasn't this it'd be worse*' and 'notwithstanding all the abnormality and nonsensical character of the construction of what we call our great European civilization . . . we remain firmly of the belief that our society is headed for perfection. The West rejects the idea that the ideal of beauty and the sublime is shadowed, that the idea of good and evil is perverse, that abnormality turns rapidly into conventionality, that simplicity and naturalness die under the pressure of the growing heap of lies!'[4]

The alternative way is in essence the opposite: 'Since it is a difficult and desperate enterprise to treat the existing order of things . . . one would better destroy the whole

https://doi.org/10.1177/0392192105052616 Published online by Cambridge University Press

society and sweep it clean as if with a broom. And then one could start anew upon new foundations, sometimes unknown, but that cannot be worse than the present order. On the contrary, a fresh start would contain much chance of success. The main hope is science . . . One waits for a future anthill while going to carry out a slaughter.'[5]

Dostoyevsky's perspectives on historical progress cause one to look more attentively into the hidden depths of the human internal world, to search in the infinite and shake the soul for other sudden possibilities. Then one discovers the artist is needed not only for creating works of art but also for seeing a 'fact':

> For one observer all the phenomena of life are so sentimentally simple and so understandable that there is nothing to consider, nothing even to observe. Another observer is so troubled by the same phenomena that (which happens more than once) he is incapable of simplification and generalization (which would delineate the phenomena and make them easily comprehensible). He resorts to another sort of simplification and just shoots a bullet into his forehead to dim his suffering mind and rid himself of the questions together. These are only two opposites, but between these extremes there is every given human response. But, of course, we will never be able to comprehend all the phenomena of life, to get to the end and beginning of it.[6]

What epistemology can one speak of here? And what is this thought which is moved only by a huge, tiring tension of spirit and is capable of driving us mad? Whether this drive can be encompassed by any theoretical conceptualization or captured in an act of artistic creation, the reference here is not simply to a human or natural science. The reference here is to humankind's ascendance to being understood and the understanding of being through his own life creativity, the source of which is his own humanity. Could this understanding be conveyed by a perfectly formed rational treatise or system, even if it begs the question why philosophical searches in Russia have been expressed mainly in moral, philosophically religious and artistic language?

A contemporary reading of 'Russian classics' reveals the painful nerve hidden, as one of Dostoyevsky's characters puts it, in the interstices of logic. Dostoyevsky notes: 'one's own free will, one's own, maybe the wildest whim, one's own fantasy, driven to madness, all of this is that missed profit which does not fit any classification and which breaks all systems and theories.'[7] Afterwards the voices in his novel interrupt each other, speaking of the demonic control of the anonymous powers of things, of the despotism of highly formalized societies over individuals and systematic proofs of how the proliferation of production processes dominates people.

The 20th century, as we know, made commonplace the definition of a person as the result of increasingly complex processes of socialization. Vissarion Belinsky (1811–48) did not speak of such a person when he wrote: 'For me now, the human person is higher than history, higher than society, than mankind . . . The general is the executioner of human individuality!'[8]

For Dostoyevsky's characters, the most important thing is retaining internal reasons so they can claim: '*I was free to choose*.' The 20th-century manifestation of a new type of human who made logical inference the pivot of his life and gave himself to the idea, thus merging logical inference with the deepest feeling and thereby

becoming blind and deaf to anything else, troubled Dostoyevsky. He dug again and again into the secrets of the internal human world to clarify such 'opportunity'. But in the world created by Dostoyevsky, so to speak, one axiom would later lose its vital validity (actually, the force of the lifelessness killed it). The essence of this axiom is that 'thought arises from feeling and, in turn, being established in the man, creates the new'.[9]

The appearance of a 'hollow man', the well-known hero (not only literary) of modern civilization, is still unknown to Dostoyevsky. Only much later will Andrey Beliy (1880–1934), in his novel *Petersburg*, try to grasp the paradoxes of subconscious life of the 'maimed forms of thought'. Indeed, Dostoyevsky understood, more deeply than anyone else, that 'reason, science, and pragmatism can only create an anthill, not a social "harmony" in which a man could live'.[10] Dostoyevsky was convinced that 'the foundation of everything is the ethical basis'.

It should be emphasized that the searching ways of the human soul's ascendance to the ethical sources have been primarily motivated by the possibility of establishing the 'whole' man. In this possibility of fullness of thought and feeling, thought is not reduced to the powerful force of intellect but it rather penetrates the whole spiritual and ethical 'body' of man. Apollo Grigoriev (1822–64) wrote: 'Thought cannot accept the body if it is artificially made. Thought must be born.' Born, that is, from life, not logically constructed or occasioned by intellectual tension. 'Only then can it acquire flesh and, thus, be convincing.' Only then the reaction of life against theory starts. This is not a logically following theory, which would be an alternative arising out of a refutation, but a new 'vital principle' which pushes out all old constructions through the freedom of its birth. This principle is understood as a new word of life and art: the first sign of the truly new is not the presence of its unique content, but that it is based upon the vital force of the past: 'It is kin to everything and truly kin; to the past, future, present; but not being disconnected from anything, assuming everything, comprehending all in love, it never loses its own particular, since it is something highly conscious.'[11] What is particularly important is that 'the contemplation here is not cut apart but whole'.[12]

Such reliance on wholeness and fullness of life-thought-word, conveying not speculation of constructions, but first of all the moral force of deed, is surely a characteristic trait of the Russian spiritual legacy, a theme common to all Russian thinkers. The theme underlies works created by authors of highly diverse ideologies, and it can be summed up thus: thought in its existential-ontological wholeness necessarily unites in itself moral, artistic and philosophical principles, serving as opening to deeply personal participation in understanding the ethical basis of life.

One intuition of Russian philosophy is its assumption regarding the ontological nature of reason itself. Here one does not start with the subject–object division of pure epistemologism, but rather with the wholeness of 'vital thought', which has its basis and source in the being of the human in the world. In striving to build a 'whole picture of the world' through seeing correspondences and mutual illumination of the layers of being, the reason for the striving is hidden behind the mechanicism and panlogism of the rationalistic outlook, in which the world is reflected through the prism of thinghood and appearance.

This is not simply a process of discovery. The being creates possibilities for itself and for a world that did not exist before, to affirm in the world the value-meaningful reality of self-perfection. Dostoyevsky's famous words can only be understood within the context of this reality: 'Beauty is a great force and it will save the world.'

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Despite the strong pressure of historical structures and the tyranny of events, human beings as personalities and as members of society are able to influence the general course of history and determine their fate. And their values that are elaborated in the process of becoming self-conscious play a great role in this. Processes and events become complementary in history. Man becomes not only the causer of events, but more and more often he becomes the creator and the bearer of culture and civilization. Through studying both individuals and groups we can learn the intrinsic composition of this or that society and culture: rules for cultural comprehension of the world and therefore those for behaviour and activity. All the intellectual context of a time – language, customs, faith, rites, arts, morals, etc. – is considered necessary in understanding the historical logic of human activity.

The actual nature of the set of values in each particular culture has not been developed by axiological theories, but is rather the accretion of life experience and the living memory of generations. The uniqueness of national cultures is determined by the specificity of their unique historical experiences. Therefore even such indisputably fundamental human values as life, health, family, love, friendship, mutual understanding, freedom, dignity, beauty, kindness, truth, the value of the material and spiritual world, the value of land and skies in their real and symbolic meanings, the value of a child's laughter and a mother's smile, the value of a father's lessons, the gift of memory, the value of the air and a swallow of fresh water, and the value of the one's chosen destiny – all these, and many other things that unite people as a species in their resolve to be 'human and humane', are interpreted by each culture in its own way. In addition, each culture forms a certain hierarchy of values, in which (as long as the culture is alive) the distinction between the 'higher' and 'lower' values constitutes a significant principle.

The pragmatic technology-based civilization is, by its very nature, aimed at acceleration and success at any cost, at high reproducibility, the spread of its own achievements and their daily mass consumption. The required mass consumption of any product, including software, is easily secured by exploiting the lower forms of culture, those parts oriented toward bodily comforts, material well-being and entertainment. The New Information Technologies and networks in the service of the so-called globalization processes are first and foremost effective means of achieving the key objectives of the pragmatic technology-based civilization: expansion and domination.

The idea that the world is aging and that humans are becoming petty corresponds to the kind of economy that does nothing more than protect people from starvation, and even then not always. The mere keeping of available knowledge also corresponds to such an idea.

Today, when the world community has been speaking ever more loudly in the language of declarations and manifestos about the necessity of preserving cultural diversity, stressing the importance of saving the material heritage of national cultures, as well as some non-material riches of culture such as skills and traditions, we should not overlook the need to retain those levels of *freedom and dignity*, *ethical and aesthetic responsibility* that enable humankind to be not only a consumer and guardian of culture, but also, and primarily, its creator.

Our most humane qualities appear to be cordiality and kind-heartedness, and these qualities are least in demand in modern technology-based civilization. 'Humanity' as an ethical characteristic of existence is being energetically relegated to the sphere of ontological anachronism and irrelevance. Notwithstanding the conventionality of the notion of 'universal human values', there is an underlying foundation layer of human culture, wherever in the world it may have originated and developed, without which the reproducibility ceases of 'the human, too human' (as Nietzsche would have put it).

The increasing dynamism of contemporary culture and the accelerating speed of the man-made, technological, or virtual milieu, where modern humankind still tries to remain relevant, make it necessary to re-assess the phenomenon of stereotype. What qualities comprise the humanistic stereotype of 'humanity'? The most obvious are first our faculty for compassion, and then our willingness for mutual assistance. All the treasures of former cultures – the inimitable originality of interactive information, which can now be saved in video and/or text form in a database; hypertexts containing the many wise and not so wise dictums of present and past generations; archives containing past and present knowledge and achievements; information on schools and universities; lonely hearts services, directories for any eventualities, the ubiquitous mass media, the global internet shopping facilities, advertisements and games for any taste – have become the real values of the 'virtual world' of the users' information community.

Like any other technical innovation, the new information technologies are multifunctional and ambivalent. On one hand, the speed of information streams and their mixed nature lowers the level of reflecting sensitivity and turns a person into 'a user' who easily assimilates the required stereotypes and is capable of functioning effectively in the pragmatized milieu, but this person is deprived of the quality of humanism, that 'thrill for life' (to quote Albert Schweitzer) in which the wisdom of compassion rather than mastery of information opens the door to 'making the right decisions'.

The legacy of the Enlightenment

The ideological opposition of the Enlightenment to Romanticism in its classical period requires European culture to understand itself, and, in the post-classical era on the verge of entering another millennium, unquestionably calls for extra attention from scholars.

In the period of the late 18th to early 19th centuries Romanticism took shape as a complete, deeply and diversely developed culture, attempting to speak not from the

https://doi.org/10.1177/0392192105052616 Published online by Cambridge University Press

mind, but first and foremost from the 'heart'. To counterbalance the rationalism, that preference for the 'general', the 'typical' and the 'determined', that dominated the culture of the time, Romanticism discovered the extreme significance of 'the subjective man' with all his complexity, contradictions and inexhaustibility, and declared this man's sovereignty and value.

However, it is important to bear in mind that the Enlightenment also exercised great caution against the danger of the 'levelling' effects of rationalism. Diderot wrote: 'With my inner eye I see our descendants with calculating tables in their pockets and business papers under their arms. Have a better look, and you will understand that the stream carrying us along is alien to everything with the impress of genius.' Romanticism considered the levelling effect of rationalism the most awful trait of this era, believing that it deformed human beings, making them one-sided creatures. Indeed, where practicality prevailed, the function a man performed was the only means society had for evaluating him. A poet described this evaluation succinctly: 'All the sacred things are defiled and reduced to the position of being auxiliary functions; these barbarians, who carefully compute everything they do, are not able to act in another way. Among them you will find craftsmen, but not humans, thinkers but not humans, masters and slaves, youths and old people – but not humans' (Holderlin).

Romanticism dreamed of reconstituting the integrity of the human being. It aspired to give birth to the ideal of a new humanism and a new culture. The main characteristics of this ideal are: (1) versatility (the new culture absorbs all the previous cultures, and actualizes the spiritual treasures stored in them); (2) dynamism (creativity is viewed as an endless process valued above any of its results. Every fixed and final form is less valuable than an available and unrealized opportunity); (3) integrity and harmony of man considered the highest values of culture; and (4) the permanent introspection of culture into itself and in its products, that is, the radical philosophical character of culture.

But to bring the ideal to life, one should answer the question that the Enlightenment actually raised, which was formulated by Schelling: 'In what way can the objective undergo changes, under the effect of the ideal, so as to result in a complete correspondence with the latter?'

To solve this problem, Romanticism replaced the 'prose' of the Enlightenment (separation of the truth from reflection) with romantic poetry; that is to say poetry became the focus of all its aspirations and cravings. 'The more poetry the closer to reality' (Novalis), this is the main thesis of Romanticism. Poetry becomes a symbol of the 'life being created'; creative 'subjectivity' abolishes the prose of the world. One of the most prominent and consistent representatives of Romanticism in painting, Eugène Delacroix, wrote, 'Why am I not a poet? . . . I need to feel as strongly as I can what I want to transmit to people's souls.'

In accordance with the spirit of the age, Romantic poets were maximalists. They assumed they were called to give the broadest expression to the best energies of life, to its beauty and poetry. Schiller already viewed the artist as an aesthetic man, a man of perfection, an implementation of the ideal of an integral and harmonious personality. Now he drew the conclusion: 'There is no other way to make a reasonable man from a sensible one, but to make him aesthetic man first.' Kant, who contributed

greatly to paving the way for the Romantics' theoretical researches, saw in aesthetic consciousness the specific form that successfully overcomes the discrepancy between thought and experiences, knowledge and interests.

For the Romantics, art implemented this integrity of the rational and the emotional, the semantic and the formal, the idea and the image – and this implementation reconstitutes the integrity of the human. In Romanticism, the striving to reunify, to merge, to identify art with life was nothing less than a claim to all of the human rights necessary for the comprehensive development of the person.

Discoursing upon culture as life in love and justice, as the creation of the world under the signs of Truth, Goodness and Beauty, that is, as the cultivation of spiritual humanity, has unexpectedly failed at the end of the millennium. Conceptualization of culture without considering anything based on an alternative concept leads to the shock of confusion when the Romantic concept is confronted with real human activity, which is too often so destructive and injudicious.

At present it is often said that the 'Enlightenment Project' has exhausted itself and new ways of thinking must be found. But the wide range of problems that have arisen in connection with the search for a 'new consciousness' and a 'new way of thinking' makes us realize that simply wishing to think originally is insufficient to upgrade grey, tame thought to bright and penetrative wisdom. Wish alone can never turn a dull thinker into a far-sighted forecaster. We might naively suppose the need for a new way of thinking in the fields of politics, economics, ideology and indeed in the whole of life, is nothing less than a natural aspiration to pass from the thoughtless and heartless expansion of *homo faber* to life in the reflection and spiritual practice of *homo sapiens*. Another indication that thinking is not too easy, as a wise man noted. It seems that our time is one of extreme need for 'new consciousness' and 'new thinking', as evidenced by the flow of literature and corresponding real global problems. This new way of thinking turns out to be global, and thinking globally requires the dialectics of Universum. So in fact the new thinking is essentially philosophical.

Needless to say, the real functioning of institutionalized philosophical systems does not meet the above requirements. Philosophical texts have become 'sufficient unto themselves'. Real world problems seldom penetrate the wall between life and philosophy. Of course, such a situation is nothing new for theoretical thinking, but the philosophical attitude typically deems the situation trivial. Only wretched inadequacy in explaining a series of real world events with accepted theoretical models can impel philosophy to change its cold academic objectivity into ardent striving for 'participatory thinking'. The didactic and explicatory intonation of theoretical thinking, with its self-confidence that formal logic is sufficient reason, will only then give way to the anxious intonation of thought directed toward the comprehension of real life processes, and not only in the aspect of necessity but also of potentiality.

The elusive character of true life, its resistance to sophisticated syllogistic constructions, has been ever painful for theoretical philosophy, which results in periodic thrusts 'back to life'. The question reaches a Shakespearean level when the thinker, whose entire life was devoted to consolidating the apodictic foundations of his studies, unexpectedly says: 'Philosophy as strict knowledge is a dream flitting by' (Husserl). Is it not incurious in this connection to avoid looking at past methodological and stylistic quests for the 'philosophy of life'? Apparently this is the contro-

versy of the rational–irrational that especially emphasizes the question of how philosophy assimilates the cultural and ideological content of an era, of the way the philosophy is constructed. Although far from forever striving to be a 'science', philosophy has always had a relation to science. The philosophical interpretation of the science of thought depends on the notion of science as it is elaborated within the context of culture as a whole.

It is paradoxical that, as the role of science in society grows more and more important, some emerging philosophies openly declare war on scientific rationalism. To sublate this paradox we must take into consideration that philosophy is not only knowledge; it also renders the picture of the general structure of mentality in a given historical period, and it examines how that mode of reasoning is reflected in the personality of a culture. From this point, I propose to review the methodologies of the 'philosophers of life' whose search has been essentially non-rational.

It is widely recognized that changes in the structures of self-consciousness are controlled primarily by changes in the social forms of spiritual activity. In turn, these changes are influenced by ever-increasing control, as the programming and unification of individual consciousness becomes an element in the mechanisms regulating social life. 'Man is all artificial,' stated Kierkegaard, one of the 'premature' philosophers, in the early 19th century. 'This is the madness consisting of lack of internal life.' By the mid 19th century the 'desiccation of the human soul' was thought to result from overemphasizing the scientific approach and by its spread into all the spheres of life. 'To restore our lost humanity we must put an end to the hegemony of science' – so the philosopher's sincerity became naivety.

In the 17th century Pascal, another 'premature philosopher', expressed the well-known motive 'to touch man's heart'. He protested, 'There is nothing of ours in our nature, and what we call ours is artificial.' Therefore we must shake free of 'indifference and common respectability!' 'By returning to himself, let man think about what he is in comparison with nature; let him learn to put a right value on earth, states, cities, himself.'

Meaning and historicity

Jena romanticists laid the foundation of learning about the importance of affection, the value of 'state' as such, that is not embodied in any 'objective' form of cultural and creative performances, either artistic or theoretic. 'What are verses compared to that unconscious poetry which flows in the flower, shines in light, smiles in the child, and gleams in the bloom of youth?' wrote Friedrich Schlegel. The poetics of the romanticists, so long as they remain romanticists, is ever the same: life creation in nature, in history, in society, in culture, in individuals. Romanticism supplants the prose of Enlightenment, with its separation of reality from fiction. With romantic poetry creative 'subjectivity' cancelled out worldly prose. Poetry became the symbol of 'life created'. As Novalis and his like-minded colleagues observed, the more poetic, the closer to reality.

The truthfulness of poetic consciousness resists any reduction to what 'does not depend upon either man or mankind'. In fact this very dependency, which is to say

the passive voice of mutually penetrating states of world and the human 'I', is the basis of poetics. Sincerity and depth of feeling felt is the specific criterion of the verity and spiritual importance of poetic thought.

Schiller saw his ideal of a harmonic and integral personality in the artist, in the aesthetic man. Kant, who to great extent prepared the way for the romanticists' theoretical findings, considered aesthetic consciousness to be the very form in which thoughts and feelings, knowledge and interests, are integrated. Art was for romanticists the focus of integrity of reason and meditation, *logos* and *eidos*, idea and icon, rational and emotional, 'head' and 'heart', that is, the source of all that redeems man's integrity. It is apparent that striving to reunite, merge together and 'identify' art with life was for the romanticists nothing less than the claim of what is necessary for harmonious human development, and the realization of all human creative potentialities.

But these romantic strivings have been for too long condescendingly labelled the impossible dreams of naïve 'subjectivity' by enlightened 'rationalizing' toward radical 'positivity' (the positive affirmation of reason's subordination to the world of objects and things). As reason became strictly calculating, severe self-control penetrated all areas of life, from inner cold rationality to the rational regularity of external life (Max Weber). And the romanticists, forever children, so often 'get mad when one should smile, and raise their fists to heaven when it would be enough to shrug their shoulders'.

Even a penetrating and refined man like Hegel, who seriously applied his systematizing philosophical intellect, tried to demonstrate the 'ludicrousness' of 'poetical' thinking: 'They proclaim that substance should be found not by understanding but by ecstasy, not in the coldly developed necessity of affairs but through boisterous inspiration. The philosophizing that stands above understanding and for the lack of it thinks itself meditative and poetical thinking, spews out voluntary combinations of imagination, which are only disorganized by thoughts: neither flesh nor fowl, neither poetry nor philosophy.'

The deeds and revelations of the romanticists seemed to corroborate such a severe depreciation of their efforts. 'In general no one in this school with which I have been affiliated', wrote Saint-Beuve, 'had reasoning . . . I hid my reasoning in my pocket and gave myself up to fantasy.' In the internal world, all 'values' seemed to be displaced: 'I feel quiet and confident, which is the ultimate decline,' confessed Flaubert. But romantics claimed that rationalists 'escape from reality by means of imagination; by escaping to the sanctuary of personal sensuality'. The brothers Goncourt spoke of those 'skinless men', and said that 'what only touches others, from poets draws blood'. Undoubtedly, being 'close' to reality and 'blending' with it (not escaping) are radically different here. So 'poetic reason' does not find its expression in conventional notions and strict definitions, but in the penetrating exactness of the word that 'blazes forth', in delusional associations, in bright metaphors, and in the polysemanticity and inexhaustibility of symbols.

The rationalized intellect is exasperated with 'meditative intuition's' claim to comprehend and express the 'world-accommodating consciousness'. The rationalizing intellect criticizes the romanticists: 'They say the absolute should not be apprehended in notion but rather felt and contemplated. Sense and intuition, not the

intelligent notion, should speak out . . . Understanding should be replaced with unsystematic presentiments, inspirations and the arbitrariness of prophetic rhetoric, which despises scientific exactitude.' To the rationalizing intellect, romanticism is mere 'haziness', chaotic consciousness without thinking order, simplicity without depth of understanding. 'Here instead of truth one can only catch the clouds of delusion'; so Hegel disapproves of metaphorical style in the 'poetism' of philosophical *logos*.

It seems that Hegel's penetration and wit should have cancelled once and for all any possibility that philosophical reflection might 'appeal to the heart'. An appeal to the heart is merely the didactic 'nothingness of empty rhetoric', and philosophy must beware of being didactic. Its sole aim should be to 'comprehend' matters. The Olympian calm of Hegelian philosophy and its unachievable height will obviously 'trouble' future generations who try to decipher philosophical reflection. What is behind this apotheosis of understanding, and did not the same Hegel write about the 'Bacchic exaltation of the Truth'? Do liberation from presentiment and inspiration and the quiet seriousness of being included in the necessary and unshakable 'universal order' of things in the final account, amount to the loss, the dissolution of one's own subjectivity in substantial universality?

Much later, Durkheim wrote, 'To think logically is in fact to think impersonally. Impersonality and stability are characteristic features of truth. Any conversation, any intellectual communication among men turns out to be a mere "cheating with concepts", and a concept is essentially an impersonal idea, a "substitute" for collective thought, so to speak. We have an impersonal element in us.' Durkheim states an obvious fact, 'because we have a social element in us; and this impersonality spans, quite naturally, ideas and activities as well'. The same process of 'depersonalization' was articulated by Hegel in his own way as the 'general order of things, the realness of the universal in the individual'. 'In consciousness', he wrote, 'one's own individuality should submit to the discipline of the universal, true and good in itself; . . . true discipline is *sacrificing the whole personality*' (emphasis added). But how far from this model of 'obedience' was the maximalist spirit of the romanticists, who felt called to let life pass as much as possible, with all its beauty and poetic quality!

Although, according to Hegel, romanticism became a mere 'rebel of individuality and the madness of self-opinion', one cannot help admiring its aspiration towards discovering human inner life and the beauty and value of spiritual individuality.

Romanticism formulated the problem inherited by the philosophy of life: How do we capture the limitless world of feelings with the limited forms of theoretical or artistic creativity? 'For me,' Nietzsche confessed, 'reason means being subjected to the soul's movements, having my being constantly turned into fire and flames . . . being burnt by my own thoughts.' In Nietzsche, philosophizing becomes the highest form of experience; in philosophy nothing impersonal exists. Philosophers who, like Socrates, do not have systems must influence people with the integrity of their spiritual lives, their ways of thinking and their personalities.

By discovering new areas of the subjective world unknown to 'classic rationality' and inexplicable in terms of strict and exact notions, the philosophy of life was intuitively inclined toward the artistic. Hence an aesthetic type of philosophizing formed and developed. The ideal of notional deductive discourse and the theoretical

clarity of each logical step are here combined with the ideal of intuitive penetrative association, refined and bright metaphorical conceptualization and figurative thinking. The distancing neutral tone of abstract categorical thought that is characteristic classic philosophizing is replaced by a confessional tone, thus allowing the author to express the fluidity, elusiveness and deep meanings of life, this 'most fragile thing in the world' according to Pascal, and to apprehend the inexplicability of his own spirituality, while merging the immutable ground of life with the experience of life 'performed' in actions.

Obviously only art is able to approach such an aim. Approach, but not reach, however. Art is trivial in comparison to life. Life is always deeper than any word said about it and more sudden than any gesture depicting it. The idea that romanticists and philosophers of life were confessors brings us back to one of humanity's eternal problems: 'To find the final conclusion of life in life itself, to realize the infinite in finite form' (Georg Simmel). To objectify the fullness of the life experience in the multiplicity of cultural forms produces the reality of needing to escape exhausting objectivity.

The concrete historical realization of stylistic orientations in philosophical thought on the one hand shows their relative opposition (for example, in Cartesian vs. Pascalian, Hegelian vs. Kierkegaardian traditions), and on the other their essential mutual attraction, arising from the integral character of culture and the nature of philosophical reflection.

The search for ways to 'combine the domains of reason and heart' (Pascal), in order to overcome humans' estrangement from nature, society and themselves, began in the 17th century. From then on interest became more and more actualized in European culture and mentality. In this light, the great battle between Romanticism and Enlightenment, as well as the extremely degenerate opposition between scientism and anti-scientism, can be understood as mere variants in humanity's effort to solve the problem of making humans integral, powerful and happy. It is important to look behind the romantic aspiration of the philosophy of life through intuition and the spontaneous movements of the soul toward the ultimate causes of human existence, and to look behind the neo-positivist efforts to remove the mask of authenticity from established logical and linguistic structures – to look and recognize the human motive: human beings, wounded by the partiality of their existence, wish to make their life all truly personal. They need to express the sense and meaning of life that fulfills our soul.

The tragedy of existence

What is tragedy, not on the stage but in life, if not pervasive and omnipresent hopelessness? The domain of tragedy suddenly befalls and envelops man, and the very possibility of hope is assuredly destroyed. And what is understanding if not man's unique capacity for sympathy and compassion rather than intellectual, epistemological or cognitive perception?

But how can understanding exist in a place where pain, hopelessness and desperation dominate life and deform it into a constant trial of all human qualities, of the

https://doi.org/10.1177/0392192105052616 Published online by Cambridge University Press

very human ability to be – and not only to be, but despite everything to remain – human, i.e. to retain ontological dignity?

Everyone can face their own Abrahamic sacrifice, and no one is exempt from the potential for undergoing Job's trial. The biblical text is merely a refinement of universal experience which, besides its purely religious meaning, has existential, cultural and ethically significant meanings and intentions.

To continue the never-ending story, I ask you mentally to open the Book of Job and introduce some new characters into it. Instead of Job's three biblical friends, let Spinoza, Kant and Nietzsche, well-known philosophers, whose works concentrate on the understanding of ethics in the European tradition, meet Job. Then let Shakespeare, Dostoyevsky, Kierkegaard and Shestov say some words on the ethics of understanding: after all, each of them looked deeply into man's soul.

In the Bible, Job's friends 'made an appointment to come together and sympathize with him and comfort him' (Job 2:11). This very act is a moral decision, a real step, a personal participation in the fate of another, which shows that they are not indifferent to the Other. In our metaphysical experiment with the Book of Job, we introduce with the figure of the philosopher 'the pathos of distance', and the position of immediacy, the so-called 'unhappy consciousness', is thereby excluded. Conditionally, proceeding from the textual potential of Spinoza's, Kant's and Nietzsche's ethical views, we can discover each one's specific mode of 'keeping distance'. Spinoza's distance draws the line *more geometrico* with almost graphic sharpness. The weakness of Spinoza's thinking is that he does not reveal the most appropriate way to address practical life issues arising from human nature itself with reliable and indisputable arguments. For Spinoza, the problem of ethics is almost an arithmetical one. This explains Spinoza's tendency to approach human affairs with a free spirit. By reducing human affairs to mathematical objects, Spinoza's objective is 'not to ridicule human actions, not to be annoyed by them, not to curse them – but to understand them'. But what can such a mathematical mind, with its accompanying ethics, understand when it hears Job's words and moans (incidentally, words that also resort to mathematical metaphor): 'Oh that my suffering were thoroughly weighed in the balance with my iniquity! For then it would be heavier than the sand of the sea' (Job 6:2–3)?

Probably '*Spinoza's distance*' is such that its specificity is just to pass by, not coming into real contact with the 'human, too human'. He has polished his lenses so well that they allow him to keep maximum distance from man, to the point where humans are indistinguishable from parallelograms and triangles. Undoubtedly Spinoza (for the purposes of this discussion he is merely a rhetorical figure) will understand nothing of the domain of tragedy. He will note to himself coolly: 'all that is unnatural or supernatural is pure nonsense.'

'*Kant's distance*', his categorical imperative, will make the philosopher who has made contact with the experience of tragedy silent for a time, as Job's friends were when 'they sat down with him upon the ground seven days and seven nights, and none spake a word unto him: for they saw that *his* grief was very great' (Job 2:13). '*If* we essay to commune with thee, wilt thou be grieved?' This was the beginning of their having the wisdom of sympathetic thinking. 'But who can withhold himself from speaking?' (Job 4:2). By not waiting for a reply and retreating into their own

https://doi.org/10.1177/0392192105052616 Published online by Cambridge University Press

minds, they unwittingly proved that 'judgement and justice take hold of you' (Job 36:17). But there is and can be no understanding here. Poor Job could do nothing but remark to his friends: 'For now you are nothing; you see *my* casting down, and are afraid' (Job 6:21). 'Do you imagine to reprove words, and the speeches of one that is desperate, which *are* as wind?' (Job 6:26) 'Oh that you would be completely silent, and that it would become your wisdom!' (Job 13:5).

Will Kant pass through the domain of tragedy, the trial of human suffering, in silence, and thereby save his wisdom? Or will he speak, and shower us with his imperative explanations of justice? 'Kant's distance' is not made of silence. He insisted with unambiguous mathematical certainty that 'Moral sin and omission should not be discriminated by quality but only by quantity.'[13] Ambiguities arose somewhat later. Kant's position changed when he grappled with the notion of judgement and justice. It is said that 'Kant is a symptom of the death of thought . . . Kantianism is the enthronement of abstraction, its coronation.'[14] Little by little it became clear that the man of the 'mathematical mind' had in the end successively reduced himself to the limitless sacrifice of his being anything. The sacrifice is accomplished through the consecration of his thinking as 'the most universal and abstract', an anonymous, impersonal universality of thought which knows all and can do all in its sphere, but can know and do nothing concrete. The obvious conclusion to this line of thought is captured by the admission of Paul Valéry's hero Mr Teste, a statement which could be said to sum up an entire philosophical tradition: 'I cross out what is alive . . . I retain only what I want. The difficulty is that I don't know what I shall want tomorrow.'[15] The tragedy of imperative ethics thus reveals its ontological impotence. Here tragedy is explained with increasingly refined techniques, but there is no energy of understanding, no ability to take possession and thereby overcome a tragic situation in the practical dimension of real life

Cognitively oriented philosophy, remaining loyal to Descartes' formula *cogito ergo sum*, conceals in its depths the belief that 'life is very simple' and one has only to meditate on things to resolve human problems. The peculiar ethical basis of this philosophical orientation is fundamental: the mind indicates to the will the choice of actions in life situations. The mind distinguishes true from false, and the mind determines how we know to act and live with confidence . . . Thus, not only a certain system of behaviour, but even a system of inner life, is prescribed here. Strictness and decisiveness are ideal qualities of this orientation. Once a decision is thought over and taken, there is no place for regrets or remorse. The algorithm of the calculating mind becomes the ethical ideal. However, the 17th century produced not only Descartes but also the 'phenomenon' of Pascal, the tragic figure of a 'premature' philosopher. We had on the one hand the 'pure and simple admission of events', based on the 'strict and simple rules' of the Cartesian model, and on the other the inner pain of seeing both 'indifference and decency accepted by the world' and the striving to 'move the heart'.

When Nietzsche considered the ancient Greeks' basic attitude toward pain and their sensibility, he found another question in their depth: 'What do morals mean with respect to life vision?' His response was almost predetermined. Morals, virtue and holiness are all mere vision defects. Nietzsche concluded that the most dangerous and unhealthy state, one that is even hostile to life, is compassion: 'you need

to make yourself indifferent'. Nietzsche's 'artistic metaphysics' do not accept the 'metaphysics of consolation'.

'Nietzsche's distance' is an energetic vortex in which the excess of suffering and ecstasy are fused into one, and thus even the potential for compassion (the primary basis of the 'too human' world) disappears. Philosophizing is here turned into the highest form of experience. For Nietzsche, to reflect means to undergo the influence of spiritual movements, to transform the whole of your being into fire and flame, 'to be burnt with your own thoughts'.[16]

As Job said, 'Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward' (Job 5:7). In their spirit, rhythm and intonation these words could have been Nietzsche's. '*Nietzsche's distance*' is very conditional; for this philosophizing within the realm of tragedy it is necessary to 'understand with inevitability'. It is important to understand before entering tragedy (and no one volunteers to do so, people fall in unwillingly); it is possible to absorb the experience of tragedy in one's soul and emerge alive only by virtue of the force of irreconcilability. The philosophy of tragedy, for Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Shestov or Unamuno, is not the philosophy of hopelessness, desperation or madness. It is the philosophy of fighting against hopelessness, fighting against madness. Fighting for great hopes in a world of pain, suffering and sorrow.

'Though He slay me, yet I will hope in Him: but I will maintain my own ways before Him' (Job 13:15). The biblical fate of Job, who endured all the exorbitance of his trials, absorbed the experience of 'the great impossible', and what happened then seemed as if it never happened. In real history, where our mind tends to look for witnesses to success, one can easily learn that each step (and even its illusion) is accompanied by hecatombs of tortured people. This fact is so obvious that we almost prefer not to draw anybody's attention to this kind of 'step' by focusing interest on it. This stance echoes Nietzsche's credo: not to write anything that would reduce hurrying people to despair. Leave them blissful in their petty compassion, rather than making them absolutely powerless and hopeless before the yawning depths of suffering.

In these depths tragedy is not a part of the human universal experience; the omnipresent mode, the very form of meeting between man and the world, born of our watchful readiness for the unpredictability of coexistence. Here is not and cannot be the place for well-being and the respectable measurements which determine 'everyday hopes'. Man's readiness to face primary chaos (that has within it the inexhaustible potential of life), his readiness to look into the abyss of non-existence, requires the force of irreconcilability and an ability to resist the tempting 'pessimism of tiredness with life', the readiness to become a conqueror in an uneven fight.

Shakespeare and Dostoyevsky, Nietzsche and Shestov – everyone who has some experience with tragedy is inevitably doomed to understand there is evil in this life, there are appalling and corrupt fates. Who doubts this? To protest indignantly, to demand an account from the whole universe for all the tortured human beings, is patently absurd. Yet it is also nonsense to try to build on this fact the familiar syllogism: 'Let us therefore love one another.' It is impossible to hide in the attractive role of a morally lofty exposer, or to shield oneself with stunning assurances of loving the fateful sufferer. Nothing can reconcile humans to the unhappiness and senselessness

of their existence, not knowledge and its strength, not *Ubermensch* and exalted, fine words about the 'great sorrow'.

Probably our only chance to enter and preserve the ethical sensual continuum of lives and fates is the 'non-alibi in being' (Bakhtin), brought about by our capacity for interested thinking. To close with a quibble, I would like to say that ethics and understanding presently wait for a deep understanding of ethics to emerge, first as the ethics of sympathy, compassion and mercy. Otherwise we shall soon be forced to admit: 'We are only of yesterday, and know nothing, because our days upon earth are a shadow' (Job 8:9).

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Notes

1. L. N. Tolstoy (1985), *Confession*, Moscow, p. 59.
2. Leo Shestov (1951), *Athens and Jerusalem*, Paris, YMKA Press, p. 253.
3. The reader is referred to J. Burckhardt's *Reflections on History* (1905), translated into English by M.D.H. and published by Allen & Unwin (1943); reprinted (1979) by Liberty Classics, Indianapolis.
4. F. M. Dostoyevsky (1983), *Writer's Diary*, in *Complete Works*, in 30 vols, vol. 25, Leningrad, p. 201.
5. *Ibid*.
6. *Ibid*., vol. 23, Leningrad, 1981, pp. 144–5.
7. F. M. Dostoyevsky (1973), *Notes from Underground*, in *Complete Works*, in 30 vols, vol. 5, p. 113.
8. V. G. Belinsky, *Complete Works*, in 13 vols, vol. 11, Moscow, pp. 556, 539.
9. F. M. Dostoyevsky (1975), *The Adolescent*, in *Complete Works*, in 30 vols, vol. 13, Leningrad, p. 46.
10. F. M. Dostoyevsky (1980), *Writer's Diary*, *op. cit*., vol. 21, p. 10.
11. Apollo Grigoriev (1986), *Art and Ethics*, Moscow, pp. 54, 57.
12. F. M. Dostoyevsky (1980), *Writer's Diary*, *op. cit*., vol. 21, p. 10.
13. Immanuel Kant (1964), *An Essay Introducing the Philosophy of Negative Values*, in *Œuvres*, vol. 2, Moscow, p. 99.
14. Andrei Bely (1922), *On the Sense of Cognition*, St Petersburg, pp. 14, 15.
15. Paul Valéry (1976), *An Evening with Mr Teste*, in *On Art*, Moscow, p. 95.
16. F. Nietzsche (1911), *Ecce Homo*, St Petersburg, p. 84.