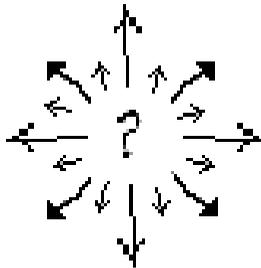


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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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<b>I. PHILOSOPHICAL DIMENSIONS OF GEOPOLITICS .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Is the New “Neoconservative Revolution” of Donald Trump Going to Transpire or What? .....</b>	<b>5</b>
Petko Ganchev (International Business School).....	5
<b>Legislators’ Temporary Permanence and the Revocable Vote .....</b>	<b>25</b>
Eleferios Sarantis (University of Sofia) .....	25
<b>II. MEDICAL PHILOSOPHY IN A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>Human nature: Balancing the Unbalanced.....</b>	<b>43</b>
Zoran Dimic (University of Nis) .....	43
<b>III. INTERPRETATION IN ART AND BEYOND .....</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>On the Aesthetics of the Sublime and the Boundaries of Understandability .....</b>	<b>59</b>
Sofia Angelova (University of Sofia).....	59
<b>The Sublime and its Connection to Spirituality in Modern and Postmodern Philosophy and Visual Arts.....</b>	<b>64</b>
Ilona Anachkova (University of Sofia) .....	64
<b>On Translation and a Boundary of Understandability .....</b>	<b>87</b>
Sofia Angelova (University of Sofia).....	87
<b>IV. BOOK REVIEWS .....</b>	<b>93</b>
<b>Donald Phillip Verene, James Joyce and the Philosophers at Finnegans Wake. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2016. 152 pp. \$34.95.....</b>	<b>93</b>
Pravda Spassova (National Academy of Fine Arts) .....	93
<b>Zdravko Popov, ed., Myth and Philosophy. St. Kliment Ohridsky University Press, 2016, 363 pp.....</b>	<b>96</b>
Rossen Stoyanov (University of Sofia) .....	96
<b>V. ANNOUNCEMENT M.A. AND PH.D. PROGRAM IN PHILOSOPHY TAUGHT IN ENGLISH.....</b>	<b>103</b>
<b>INFORMATION ABOUT AUTHORS AND EDITORS .....</b>	<b>109</b>



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# PHILOSOPHICAL DIMENSIONS OF GEOPOLITICS

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## **Is the New “Neoconservative Revolution” of Donald Trump Going to Transpire or What?**

*Petko Ganchev (International Business School)*

### ***Abstract***

This article aims to analyze topical issues on global scale of the last 10-15 years as well as the reasons that have allowed them to materialize. It is my claim that Donald Trump's unexpected victory in the elections for the 45th USA President post can be understood only at the background of the expectations to resolve the above problems in a untraditional manner. The crucial question here is whether Donald Trump himself realizes the deep causes that led to this situation after the WW II and, in particular after the 90-s and if he will dare in these new circumstances to carry out his new "neoconservative revolution" like his "idol" Ronald Reagan did in early 80-s. And is not the way of resolving such problems shown but missed still in the years of WWII?

On 19<sup>th</sup> December 2016, the Electoral College confirmed the election of Donald Trump as the 45<sup>th</sup> POTUS with 304 votes. Under enormous pressure, two electors abstained from voting for Hillary Clinton and instead voted for other Republicans while five “Clinton’s electors” did not vote for her either. In this way, with much squeaking and grinding, the archaic electoral system of the still most powerful economy and democracy in the world, having been trying for over a quarter of a century to modify the world in its own image, elected its 45<sup>th</sup> POTUS. As I write, the inauguration is due on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2017. Following that rather formal step, Donald Trump will be able to launch his practical policies (announced during his campaign), whose unconventional moves swept away the prevalent strategy of the US establishment.

However, before Donald Trump takes up his duties as POTUS, a minority of serious political and geopolitical analysts, both within the United

States, Europe, Russia and China as well as in the rest of the world, cannot but raise the following question: will he succeed in carrying out his new “neoconservative revolution”? Moreover, this question is ever more relevant in terms of the fierce opposition put up by the MSM (mainstream media) pseudo-analysts on duty, chained to the chariot of the Clinton clan, George Soros and the CIA, and “working” for the victory of Hillary Clinton (who was supposed to carry on with the geostrategy of neoliberal globalism and will now continue to work in this time, but against Trump).

But which is the “neoconservative revolution” that Donald Trump wants to propagate by restoring its authentic spirit?

As older readers will remember, and younger ones can read about, it was chiefly theorists and ideologues of the Republican Party in the US who started the “neoconservative revolution” in the late 1970s, organized around the “Heritage Foundation” as well as the Conservatives in Britain. It was a revolution that tried to revive developed capitalism (which had entered yet another crisis) by taking it back to fundamental moral Christian values, by reduction of taxes, stimulation of private initiative through low-interest loans, and mainly through reducing the role of the state and releasing the market to be the main regulator of economic dynamics. Social programs had to be cut, as they were too expanded, and under the influence of the example of “real socialism” in the spirit of “the state of universal prosperity.” It was no accident that the father of American Management, Peter Draker, once wrote that the US had built its own “socialism.” That is why also, by no coincidence, the “heart,” that is, the “engine” of this “neoconservative revolution,” trying to return capitalism to its classic “Manchester roots,” turned out to be the economic theory of monetarism created by the Chicago School of Milton Friedman. The first successful experiment with this theory was carried out in Chile by the dictator Pinochet after the coup of 1973.

The “neoconservative revolution” made its breakthrough on the world stage and in the history of capitalism as “Reaganomics” and “Thatcherism,” as well as an attempt to preserve fundamental Christian moral values and also to give a new impetus to the spirit of capitalism and the system of social relations within capitalist countries, already altered by the new information and communication technologies. This “neoconservative revolution” tried to combine the “uncombinable.” That is, it tried to combine into a whole set the relatively stable system of fundamental moral Christian values pertaining to the era of national capitalism and the nation-state with capitalism’s expan-

sionist spirit which, in order to thrive, needs to be continuously growing and overcoming all spatial and temporal limits. In essence, the ideologists of the "neoconservative revolution" tried to preserve the moral values of the old "national" capitalism, which were crumbling under the heavy blows of the new information, production and communication technologies, by setting the spirit of capital free from the suffocating confines of the nation-states.

Instead of setting free the whole system of social relations of capitalism in line with the huge opportunities offered by the technologies born out the scientific, technological and industrial revolution of the 1970s and 1980s, this "neoconservative revolution" released the old spirit of capital, the one that wants to constantly grow, to accumulate profit and to subordinate everything to its insatiable financial greed. Monetarism had given the "simple recipe"—"less state," "more market." Moreover, "free markets without borders" became the slogan of the "neoliberals," who emerged out of the tidal wave of the "neoconservative revolution." The free markets became the tool for the implementation of these recipes through which money, from having been a means for the realization of moral and other values, very quickly became the main value itself. And so the "neoconservative revolution" turned from a proclaimed revolution of values into a neoliberal revolution that removed government restrictions and obstacles to financial capital. This, however, only briefly revived the old or "mature capitalism" (J. Habermas) in limited areas of the West in the 1980s.

As some readers may remember, in the 1980s, the state socialism of the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries had entered into a new crisis and was lagging far behind technologically. For this reason, it had also launched attempts at reforming itself. Those attempts were called "perestroika" by Mikhail Gorbachev—the last secretary general of the CPSU and last president of the USSR. The preliminary charge of perestroika, however, was carried not by ideas aiming to free enterprise and to democratize the system of relations of these societies and thus aim at the future, but by the confused ideas of Vladimir Lenin from the early 1920s. That is, not looking forward but yet again looking backward. In this case, there was again the call for "less state." At the end of a five-year period, the communist regime of the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries showed its full incapacity to make the necessary reforms in accordance with the principles of authentic Marxism and ended the launched "perestroika" as "catastroyka" (A. Zinoviev) and thus fell prey, straight into the arms of the old liberal capitalism already fully loaded with the ideology of neoliberalism. And so because

of the stupidity and betrayal of the venal communist elite in the USSR and Eastern Europe, the socialist project in Europe was buried as the other version of history. The only communist regimes left were China, Vietnam and the Cuba of Fidel Castro. In some way, the victory of Western capitalism in the Cold War, given away as a gift by the hollow and corrupt communist elite, created room and new opportunities for the rise of *neoliberalized* capitalism under the slogans of democracy and free trade used in the former Communist Block. The era of neoliberal globalism had begun and its main engine was precisely “liberated” financial capital...

Over the past quarter of a century, it became clear to many that in fact “democratization,” in accordance with the principles of neoliberal globalism, was a form of new colonialism by the West and primarily by its financial and transnational economic and media oligarchy. With their industry, energy systems and agriculture destroyed, former Eastern-Block European countries became a market for the second-rate goods of the West, while their political and power structures provided room for a pseudo-democracy and the debauchery of mafia representatives, who had risen from the last echelons of the former communist power circles. Orwell’s “1984” dystopia pales in comparison to the realities in these societies. Here undoubtedly Bulgaria was a leader. It was no coincidence that from being ranked the 16<sup>th</sup> country in Europe in 1988, far ahead of Poland, Hungary, Romania, Serbia, etc., for the previous 26 years, Bulgaria climbed down to the last place in Europe. In addition, the country’s prime minister, a former firefighter for whom suspicions about links with organized crime have been raised in the German media, openly boasted at the outset of his political rise to power 15 years ago, that he had only read one book—Karl May’s *Winnetou*.<sup>1</sup>

In the realm of the irretrievable decline under the steam-roller of neoliberal globalism, Russia was first to come to its senses. After the disgrace of the Yeltsin period in the 1990s, it began to recover at the beginning of the new millennium. In a relatively short time, Russia modernized its army. That came as a surprise to the generals of the US and NATO, but also provided sufficient grounds for a tougher policy on Russia seeking to assert its geopolitical interests and dignity. Gradually within the EU, rifts began to emerge between groups of countries in Western and Eastern Europe.

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<sup>1</sup> Winnetou is a fictional character of a native American who is the main protagonist in a novel bearing his name in the title.

Already towards the end of the first decade of the new century, a new financial and debt crisis emerged starting from the United States and spreading over areas covered closely by the Washington Consensus (based on monetarism and neo-liberal ideology). The bubble of cheap credit burst. That cheap credit fueled no economic growth and technological advance under the terms they were distributed, but just a consumer wave of spending. The burst hit not so much the banks of the United States, and their associated countries, as it did their economies and that created fresh waves of millions of unemployed citizens in the US, Europe and the rest of the world, who were thrown into poverty. Meanwhile the information concealed by the MSM outlets that were subordinated to the financial oligarchy showed that profits grew exponentially. Only the most critically-minded and far-sighted analysts and researchers in those early years knew that the financial-debt crisis was caused by the very financial oligarchy that needed a new expansion of its capital in order to carry out the geopolitical strategy of neoliberal globalism, namely, eliminating all national borders and restrictions and thus imposing its global hegemony. In those early years, very few analysts, including the author of these lines, were saying that the newly unleashed global financial and debt crisis was only the tip of the iceberg of a deep global crisis of human civilization. Precisely those same researchers had pointed out a decade earlier that contemporary neoliberal globalism would not stop at anything and would present the world with new terrible challenges.

And neoliberal globalism did just that. It did present those challenges. It awoke, through quaking the earth's crust, the dormant volcano of Islam in the Middle East and let it spew its deadly content over weakened Russia. Then, through disguising and shaping that volcano according to the model of liberal democracy, human rights and minorities, neoliberal globalism went on to offer it along with its neoliberal recipes for "less state." But behind all that "civilizational" goodness, there always stood the main geopolitical task—to take control over strategic oil and gas resources. And so the militant core of global Islamic terrorism was created—"Al Qaeda," "Islamic State," "Jabhat an-Nusrah" and so on and so forth. Actually that wasn't very difficult because in the kernel of these Muslim societies, hidden cells of the "Muslim brotherhood" had been lying dormant for decades, patiently waiting for their hour to strike.

And the hour struck. The invasions of Iraq (2001), Afghanistan (2006) and Libya (2011) conducted by the US and its faithful allies from the UK

and several countries of the former Eastern-Block, including Bulgaria (under the auspices of NATO and without any specific UN resolution), most of whom did not realize that they were used as tools to carry out the geostrategy of the “manageable chaos” (aka ‘controlled instability’) were followed by the so-called “Arab Spring.” The results—probably already several million casualties and tens of millions of displaced refugees from their homes, accommodated in the makeshift camps of misery in Turkey and Jordan or herded along the roads of Anatolia and the Balkans or forced also to sail perilously the waves of the Mediterranean Sea to Europe.

The neoliberal globalism of transnational capital was a unifying trinity of the financial, economic and media oligarchy (whose heart is Wall Street, and in particular the Federal Reserve aided by the governing US administration, MIC, CIA, NATO and of course, the Brussels’ Euro-bureaucracy whose main parties over the years have gone from their extreme left—Trotskyist and Maoist—doctrines all the way to neoliberal globalism). Unfolding its geostrategy to conquer new territories, it not only deepened the global crisis of an entire civilization, but brought humanity to the threshold of a new devastating global war.

And to ensure the feeling of pending war among the billions of people on Earth was felt, these forces staged a coup in Ukraine (2013/2014). They did that not only to confront Russia’s disapproval of what was going on but also, by conquering Crimea, to strike Russia below the belt and shut its access to warmer seas. That didn’t work out. For the first time in decades, Russia reacted quickly and as efficiently as possible. Following all established international laws, Crimea was annexed to Russia. Sanctions were imposed on Russia but those who suffered were mainly European businesses and the peoples of Europe.

At the same time and in parallel, the transnational financial and economic oligarchy made stringent efforts to ensnare European nations not only through the military structures of NATO and the economic dependence arranged by TTIP (Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership) but also through completing the military and economic arc to the far east, covering Russia and the irresistibly advancing China (PRC) by TPP (Trans-Pacific Partnership). It was not enough to dominate the world through conquering Roman lands (the world conquered by the Roman Empire and the Mediterranean basin) but also to control the “Heartland”—Eurasia (Russia, Central Asia and China). That was the dream of all Anglo-Saxon geo-politicians from Mackinder, Mahon and

Spykman to Brzezinski and Wolfowitz, but those dreams of theirs had to be broken up and squeezed in their own space in reserve.

More by instinct, environmental movements (along with some nationalist parties and movements gaining ground in Europe) opposed through protests and petitions the threat of becoming the 28 new colonies of the United States (because the TTIP agreement between the EU and the US, as well as SETA, between the EU and Canada had not been previously published). This threat was also recognized by leading European businesses. At the end of 2016, despite his shuttle-diplomacy during which he twisted the hands of his European partners (essentially vassals), Barack Obama had to miserably complete his term in office as POTUS. An important point in the collapse of the "unstoppable rise" of the Nobel Peace Laureate Barack Obama, who epitomized the strains of the transnational, rather more precisely, *transnationalized* financial and economic oligarchy, was the failure of the planned war against Iran (based on allegations of its advanced nuclear program) and Syria (based on provocations with chemical weapons by Islamic terrorist formations supported by the US and its allies in the Middle east—Saudi Arabia and Turkey) and of course, Brexit (the EU being left by the UK which had realized the incompatibility of its imperial traditions and ambitions with obedience to Brussels, *ergo*, Washington).

Of course, Obama's collapse did not happen spontaneously and autonomously, that is, as a result of the "awareness" of European nations, some political circles and businesses. It also did not happen, because the Pentagon and the CIA were afraid of another war in the Middle East, much like the previous ones in Iraq and Afghanistan, where they entered with ease, but sank into the bottomless sands from which, like the jungles of Vietnam, they could not see a way out. It was Russia's hand, that of Putin himself, which definitely played a pivotal role in this collapse. But it was not "the hand of Russia," which was involved in the politics of the EU, the policy of the US administration revealing, through its propaganda or hacking, the hypocrisy and corruption of party bosses and the bribing of European and American politicians and officials.

What, in short, is the risk of burying the essence of this policy that is favored by the neoliberal globalists? After a few rather individual instances of dissent with the vassal policy of Mikhail Gorbachev, and especially with that of Yeltsin, towards the self-proclaimed "winners" in the Cold War, Russia gradually began "to focus on itself" (A. Gorchakov) and to regain its

self-esteem as a great country in the new millennium during the presidency of Vladimir Putin. Despite years of volatility and instability during the Russian Empire from the fifteenth century to 1917, and the Soviet Union from 1917 until 1991, it was precisely the state as an institution, along with the Orthodox church, that was able to control and strike a balance across the vast territory of Russia in which there are many other religions and ethnicities. But the return to leadership of the state with the ideological support of the church is in fact a falling back on the traditional values that have been formed throughout the cultural history of this vast country and nation, and have shaped its cultural identity. And like other great nations and civilizations that have played a great role in history and their own "idea," Russia too has its own "Russian idea." The essence of this "Russian idea" can be understood as readiness of the leading minds of this country to take on the initiative and mission in the most difficult of periods in the history of a nation (and of humanity as a whole) to help rescue it. The examples for that are many. Let us not forget the liberation of the Balkan peoples, including Bulgaria from its five-century Ottoman-Turkish thralldom in the nineteenth century! Also let's take into account today's ongoing fierce battle against Islamic terrorism in its lair in the Middle East. All this has happened (or is happening) in most cases, with the opposition of one force or another in the West or the-not-so-fair "partnership" of that same West. In this sense, the carrying-out of these missions has always required self-sacrifice or has cost, in some cases, hundreds of thousands or millions of young lives (the wars with Ottoman Turkey and the Napoleonic Wars, or World War II).

But all this shows and outlines ever more clearly another general trend (other than the one being imposed by neoliberal globalism, namely, a unipolar world) which reflects the universal evolution of the history of mankind in all of its cultural and civilizational forms as a natural logic open to unfolding in different versions.

The neoliberal globalism that is imposing the dominance of the transnational financial, economic and media oligarchy over states in most of the world and is affirming the trends of a new kind of feudalism, in fact, also inflicts damages on its own core, as I have written on many occasions. Otherwise it would not have been globalism. Just like many centuries ago, in the process of becoming an empire, Rome gradually lost its status as a particular territory at the expense of enhancing the status and role of other territories from the empire's periphery, so similarly today the United States, as the main instrument of the policy of

neoliberal globalism, gradually lost its leadership role. Out of the many indicators of its emerging decline in the last quarter of the 20th century, it is enough to mention only a few facts—the quickly growing US debt that has now reached the mind-blowing number of 20 trillion (120% of GDP), the tens of millions of unemployed Americans and tens of millions illegal migrants on welfare benefits, the increasing military budget (600 billion US dollars) and expenditures on all sorts of “ally” countries and organizations around the world with zero return. Last but not least, there is the sinking into various military conflicts that has led to loss of reputation and willingness to cooperate with other regional powers.

All this has been acutely felt by the vast majority of the American people. This is in contrast to the country’s establishment, which by and large, as it turned out, had not realized—prior to the recent presidential election—the dangers to befall the United States, and continued to believe that Russia and China (who were closely following behind) were the main enemies. This is simply because the establishment doesn’t want to play by the rules imposed on it by neoliberal globalism, but wants to protect its national interests and participate in an equal partnership in the process of solving global threats to humanity, such as terrorism for example.

Despite the massive manipulation of public opinion by MSM outlets in service of the transnational financial and economic oligarchy, the election for the 45th president of the United States held on 8<sup>th</sup> November 2016, became the clashing point for the realism of the vast majority of American people and the ideological delusions of the US establishment. The elections turned out to be a victory for the American people and a shock for the country’s establishment. Donald Trump definitely scored a big victory too because he started off equally unaccepted by both supporters and party members of the Democratic Party, and the party leaders of the Republican Party. He started against the entire media system, relying solely on himself and his supporters on the Internet. He won because he managed to capture the expectations and hopes of millions of working Americans, many of whom had meanwhile become redundant due to the outsourcing of production facilities, primarily to China, in the name of ever higher profits. He did not win so much because of the unconventional methods of his campaign. The methods were rather his armor, not the weapon that drew attention to him. He won because he was able to capture the general trend of the time in which it was precisely the state that had to take care of the stability of its national space. This is

why Putin was not his enemy as he was to Obama, but a president with whom one could reach understanding as a respectful partner.

Now however, Donald Trump is confronted with the two major questions: has he recognized his main enemy? And will he be able to tackle this enemy? Because, it should be noted, his main enemy is neither China nor ISIS and the other Islamic terrorist structures. As a phenomenon and a real threat to the US, they are only a consequence but certainly not the reason for what is going on in the US and the rest of the world.

With the risk of speaking aloud a public secret, known to many thoughtful Americans and Europeans, I permit myself to say that the main threat is neo-liberal globalism, while the main subject that has unleashed this ideology is the financial oligarchy with its powerful Federal Reserve System. And as all rebels and protesters know, the Fed is lying in the heart of Wall Street. It is precisely that heart with all of its arteries and veins that has been setting the pulse of the body of American civilization for over a century, and of the world for the last seven decades, since the adoption of the US dollar as a world currency. In other words, this heart, so to speak, is in every way more experienced and wiser than the 70-year-old Donald Trump, who had managed to start off as a small entrepreneur and rise to become a billionaire. Trump too was taking advantage of the same technologies and policies through which the Federal Reserve stimulated the US economy (albeit by arrhythmia, every now and then throwing in occasional crises, which in turn dragged the world economy down throughout the twentieth century and until today).

Much has been written about the secret birth of the Federal Reserve in 1908/1910 and in 1913, after the same bankers triggered by themselves a financial crisis in 1907. The famous J.P. Morgan played a leading role in those years and in the outcome of that crisis. The idea for the creation of such a Commission was proposed by the then future US president Woodrow Wilson. After a ten-day “brainstorming” session of leading bankers on the island of Jekyll, the idea for the Federal Reserve System came to Senator Nelson Aldrich. Then President Theodore Roosevelt legalized this fact exactly 103 years ago in December of 1913. It has to be noted that the creation of this commission comprised entirely of “professionalists” who knew well the historical experience of the Rothschild family as well as the fundamental analysis of money, and its role as capital, made by Karl Marx half a century earlier. After years of influence on the Washington administration the structure of the Federal Reserve finally crystal-

lized as a system of 12 federal banks located in 12 federal districts and including 2672 small banks with thousands and hundreds of thousands of shareholders first in the United States itself, and then worldwide. This extremely private entity takes upon itself the responsibility to solve the financial issues of the entire United States, that is, to govern the financial system of the most powerful economy in the world.

The formal role of the state in relation to this private structure is expressed in the approval of a seven-member board for a 14-year mandate while its chairman is approved for a four-year term in office. However, given the fact that US presidents are elected for a four-year term and can at most exercise power for eight years, it became clear that council members who elect the chairman from among themselves are situated for a long and "deeper" ride. The first members of the council, included along with Nelson Aldrich (who was close to J.P. Morgan), and John Rockefeller Jr., who was married to Mary, daughter of Aldrich. In accordance with the contract between the state administration and the Federal Reserve, the latter does not depend on the Senate but on the President. As is well known, the Fed prints the dollar bills and as of 1913, each bill has been stamped with the seal of the Fed and not the state seal of the United States. The Treasury only issues bonds, sold to the Fed for dollars. Then the Fed can sell the bonds for a percentage of their rate. This ultimately means that, formally "elected" by the Senate and "appointed" by the President of the US, the chairmen of the Fed is beyond the control of either of the two state institutions. This is evidenced by the fact that Alan Greenspan for instance served as chairman of the Fed for 19 years while Ben Shalom Bernanke, elected in 2006, has already "out-termed" two US presidents. These are in fact the two chairmen of the Fed who launched the neoliberal globalism that led to the global financial crisis and the state in which the world is today. The big question here is whether we can expect from this second chairman that he will change this role of the Fed.

Of course, the essence, structure and status of the Federal Reserve System has not grown out of thin air, separated from the state, but rather follows the logic of the evolution of the growing of the American state as a superstructure/federation of individual member states with independent constitutional order. Despite the recurrence of slavery, the United States grew as the first "purely capitalist" state based on a pluralistic liberal democracy, free from the legacy of feudal, absolutist monarchies and of the

national European countries with dominant state ethnicity, religion and treasury. This is why the decision of the “founding fathers” of the Federal Reserve System is logical. It does not have only its historical preconditions, but also its practical reasons to be a system-corporation of private financial structures set to “control” the system of society and political power.

Being essentially the “blood circulation system” of society, the public banking system seeks independence from the political system and with it by virtue of its nature, manifests its right to ensure a balance between the state and its citizens in their capacity as an entrepreneur and performer of certain socially necessary activities. In this sense, the banking system within the system of the Federal Reserve, with its rigid rules of guaranteed annual dividend of 6% for shareholders, comes not just as a mediator but also as the authority that sets the pulse of society through the management of financial flows. It is precisely here that the secret trust of the state in the Federal Reserve lies. The state trusts that the Fed will prevent policy makers from the opportunity to solve short-term issues by printing more money, through which the whole of society can be hurled into a new crisis. Of course, this is just the theoretical argument, namely, that only such a financial authority independent from different political and ideological temptations will provide the balance of the entire social system. But here, as we shall see later, are buried the set of temptations for professional bankers themselves. Because if we disregard for a moment the Mont Blanc of aspects and processes analyzed by Marx in “The Capital,” then one of the briefest possible conclusions is that the capital as money, not as “treasure,” can thrive only as it increases by constantly creating “surplus value,” overcoming the boundaries of time and space. And surplus value, as demonstrated again by Marx, is only created in the economy, in the system of production. Any other way of “making money” is based on one or another method or speculation that does not create “new value” and therefore does not play the role of capital.

In this sense, when money appropriates the field of economy as part of its own system of “circulation,” money can actually “make” new money. So through the public body of the economy (all constantly expanding systems of production and services of different nature) money fulfills its power to stimulate the deployment of more production and thus achieves a new “surplus value” and increases public wealth. In contrast, money reduces the rhythm of functioning of a given society by causing activities such as contractions, mergers, bankruptcies, unemployment, and ultimately poverty.

With the risk of again simplifying the whole complex range of approaches and mechanisms of the impact of money on the economy, in this case the role of the Federal Reserve and its contractors (Central and large banks) on the US economy and subsequently on the global economy, we shall narrow it down to two main approaches. The first one is the following: through printing a certain amount of US dollars, so-called "quantified mitigation" is achieved. That is, the Fed provides loans with low and declining interest rates. This, in turn naturally leads to vitalizing of the real sector of the economy and therefore to increase of asset prices, calculated in US dollars. This also "naturally" leads to a drop of the rate of the US dollar against other currencies and to expansion of US goods on global markets. In such instances, simultaneously with the process of stimulating the US economy, and subsequently economies across the globe directly or relatively linked to the US dollar, the speculation of "making money from money" through trade and exchange rates gets really going. These are spillover effects that come as benefit to eminent brokers such as George Soros and millions of other small brokers.

The second approach "relaxes" the dynamics and achieves inverse effects on borrowers by increasing the percentage rates. This leads logically to reduction of the asset prices (stock prices, commodities and resources—metals, oil, gas, etc.), and also to increase of the rate of the US dollar against the other currencies. In turn, this makes goods manufactured in the US "more expensive" and the US market gets flooded with cheap foreign goods.

Thus, through the policies it implements, the Fed maintains the balance between the US and global economy. Of course, it is not always that the "demiurges" of the US financial system manage to strike and maintain this balance. As a result, not only by their subjective will, but by many other factors not taken into consideration, the economic crises of capitalism take their toll.

And since it is not only a bank or a plant at stake, but thousands of banks and hundreds of thousands and millions of business structures of varying size, they can all get information about adopted policies by the Fed through certain public intermediaries, that is, mainstream media (MSM) outlets. Moreover, in order not to distort the information submitted by the Fed or use it for other purposes, it is desirable for those MSM outlets to be "obedient," i.e. dependent.

So it becomes clear that the money/US dollars issued by the Fed-

eral Reserve can fulfill the role of capital only in the system of the triumvirate Money-Economy-Media. But as we know well from history, the first triumvirate of Rome (60 BCE) was created by Gaius Julius Caesar, Gnaeus Pompey and Crassus (who defeated Spartacus), but soon Caesar defeated his partners and became the one and only. After the assassination of Julius Caesar by the republicans, his nephew, Gaius Julius Caesar Octavian, created the second triumvirate with Marcus Lepidus and Mark Antony in 43 BCE. In this case too, Caesar defeated and killed his “partners” and remained the one and only *Princeps* (Emperor). In fact, Caesar declared himself a reincarnation of God to make it clear to all who He actually was. It is time to bring to attention at least one quote from the teacher Marx:

money and commodities are mere forms which it (the capital) assumes and casts off in turn. Nay, more: instead of instead of simply representing the relations of commodities, it enters now, so to say, into private relations with itself. It differentiates itself as original value from itself as surplus-value; as the father differentiates himself from himself qua the son, yet both are one and of one age: for only by the surplus-value of £10 does the £100 originally advanced become capital, and so soon as this takes place, so soon as the son, and by the son, the father, is begotten, so soon does their difference vanish, and they again become one, £110.

(Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, part 2, ch. 4, p. 107-108)

It is in the process of circulation in the economy and through self-growing value that money becomes capital, that is, money begets money (or as the mercantilists have said—money which begets money). With regard to the third member of the triumvirate—the mass media, they are simply the instrument, i.e. the servant, by which the Spirit of God the Father enters into God the Son, to prove that God is the Father and is actually one. So it turns out bankers who have created and have been governing the Federal Reserve for over a century have learned Marx’s lesson, namely, how through the economy actually “money makes money.” Unlike the communists, who could not learn how, after “expropriating the expropriators,” one could build the “kingdom of liberty” in accordance with “the law of the planned collective development.” In essence, they created a state capitalism run by communists.

But the financial lessons of Karl Marx regarded systems of the national economies from the era of national capitalism. However, it has to be noted that his disciple—the “founding fathers” of the Federal Re-

serve—were able to strategically predict one more element beside all those mentioned above, which enriched this private structure—the Federal Committee on open markets—and thus prepare the Fed to play a global strategic role in the system of global capitalism.

Three decades after the founding of the Federal Reserve System, the time came at the end of World War II (in 1943) when still in conditions of secrecy and at the apparent decline of the British Empire and the loss of prestige of the British pound (pound sterling), the US dollar was declared a global currency.

The dollar as a global currency was given its official start at a conference on July 1944 in Brittany Woods, New Hampshire. The conference was chaired by the Minister of Finance of the US Henry Morgenthau and was attended by 730 delegates from 44 countries, including the Minister of Finance of the USSR Mikhail Stepanov. The main role during the conference was played by the head of the US delegation Harry White and Britain's John Maynard Keynes. The battle was mainly between the representative of the declining British Empire and the rising new "unique empire"—the United States. While John Keynes proposed the creation of a new global currency called "bancor" to get rid of the gold reserve, Harry White pushed for the US dollar to become that global currency and the gold reserve to be retained. Ultimately, it was not the great Keynes but white-collar clerk White who won the battle through the support of the majority of the delegates. It was then that the decision was taken to establish the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which began operating in 1947, and the World Bank for Reconstruction and Development (WBRD), later converted to the World Bank (WB), which started its activity in 1946. Both bodies were dominated by the United States and the countries under their control. This is how in Brittany Woods the spirit of Marx's Capital got scattered throughout various national currencies and its last "true prophet"—the US dollar—was declared.

Now that the spirit of Capital got incarnated in the US dollar, the role of God the Father had to be categorically confirmed and He was to unravel His true potential, namely, to make money out of money. And He showed His potential in the new territories under his control—Western Europe and Japan.

But in the bipolar world that came to existence after World War II, the Soviet Union and its East European satellites remained hostile to the dollar's newly assumed role. Throughout their territories the rhythm of

the economy was set not by the dollar but by the Russian ruble, “tied” firmly by Stalin to gold reserves. That was one of the few lessons that the Bolshevik seminarist Stalin had learned from the old teacher Marx, namely, when in the form of money that gold is the absolute measure of value. And actually nobody knew how large the gold reserve of the Soviet Union was. At that time the US dollar was also “tied” to the gold reserve. But how much gold was needed to expand the global role of the dollar? For the two decades that followed, the gold reserves of the United States melted by half. What followed was years of inflation and devaluation of the declining gold reserve.

Along with that, some of the US allies also showed reluctance to play by the rules of the Federal Reserve and its international/global instruments—the IMF and the World Bank, and later also the World Trade Organization (WTO) which had inherited GATT (General Agency of Trade and Tariffs). One example was General Charles de Gaulle in France. Having recovered after their defeat in World War II, Germany and Japan also strengthened their currencies—the German mark and the Japanese yen, which along with the British pound and the Swiss franc, were also used as reserve currencies.

All this forced Richard Nixon in 1971, on the advice of his clever Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, to *liberate* the US dollar from its gold-reserve anchor and let it free-floating, only formally tied to the “black gold”—oil, again at the idea of the same advisor Kissinger who had managed to secure the support of the Saudi monarchs in the “game.” That was probably the turning point at which the US dollar became an instrument of the oligarchy, because it had been *liberated* from the obligation to be tied to the spirit of capital, that is, the “absolute” value of gold as money, which through the process of circulation, created new added value. Since the ambition to manage everything in society and the entire human civilization was embedded in the gene structure of the financial system, it only came as no surprise that the following of rules and regulations was done with. The financial oligarchy, led by the Federal Reserve, had finally won.

In the battle against the opponents of the absolute role of the US dollar in global financial affairs and the development of the world economy, other tools had to be included in order to enforce the absolute spirit of capital and its personal reincarnation—the dollar. And as God/Allah spoke to Mohammed through the angel Jabrayil/Gabriel, so too the Fed

already spoke only through the media about what it did, would do and planned to do. As an addition, the CIA, the Pentagon and the entire Washington administration were all already working to aid the conquering of new territories. The reading and thinking readers know the role of these institutions in the twentieth century, especially after World War II, that led to the hegemony of Pax Americana and the illusion of eternity.

Of course, all this had to be paid for. And the Fed was turbulently busy with printing more and more dollars without any gold coverage. This began to increasingly threaten the culture of capitalism, which was seen and predicted not only by great futurists like Daniel Bell ("The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism," 1976) and Alvin Toffler ("Powershift," 1990), but also such apologists of American "exceptionalism" as Zbigniew Brzezinski. In the late 1970s, the crisis in the two leading countries of the capital—the UK and the US—led Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan out onto the political arena. It was precisely they who started the neoconservative revolution. Their ideological weapon was, as mentioned above, the marginal economic theory of monetarism, hatched at the Chicago School of Milton Friedman. In fact, the theory of monetarism was what the Fed needed to spread out its policy on a global scale—"less state," no state regulation, complete freedom of the market and only control of the money supply.

After the temporary agitation of the advanced capitalism that followed, capital gasped yet again. The countries of "real socialism" in Eastern Europe and the USSR stood before it. As it became clear from the confessions of M. Thatcher in her memoirs, these countries scared the West through their planned economies. And since, the need for reforms in accordance with the possibilities of new technologies was felt within these "real socialism" countries, part of the communist establishment under the slogans of "perestroika" carried out an historic betrayal that led to the infamous end of this system. The unexpected victory in the "Cold War" unlocked the processes of the new globalization wave. But instead of unfolding in accordance with the logic of objective laws and opportunities, globalization, as recognized at the end of the last century by the leading American journalist Thomas Friedman in his "A Manifesto for the Fast World," published in New York Times Magazine, "is American," is "in the interest of America" and has been imposed on the rest of the world by its "hidden fist"—"the US army, US Air Force, US Navy, and the US Marine Corps."

But even the controlled market realm of the former socialist countries

of the Eastern Block and the Soviet Union could not now save global capitalism from the financial and debt crisis (2008), which was actually a global crisis of human civilization. This global crisis definitely required a radical change in the whole system of principles and rules, which human civilization had been following over the past quarter of a century. According to information broadcast by the Canadian-American TV channel Bloomberg, the 9 (nine) trillion US dollars loaned to unknown customers of the Fed in this particular 2008, did not calm the financial markets by ongoing bankruptcies of major US and European banks, and thus preserve the slowing pace of the global economy. Instead, as became clear, it added a lot more fuel to the fire that spread over the entire global economy and social system. (As became known later, until that moment the cumulative global GP (Gross Product) was about 70-75 trillion US dollars while in circulation in the world there were over 4.5 quadrillion dollars, not to mention also the trillions of euros, pounds, francs, yens, rubles and so on, and so forth. So, the 4.5 quadrillion US dollars were “only” 60% of the money of the world in public circulation while the US economy accounted for 20% of this global GP.)

Indeed, it is precisely this money, without real economic coverage and without any return opportunities from those consumers who took it as loans that proved to be the huge bubble that burst. Money could no longer produce money because it did not play the role of capital that creates added value, but rather became simply the paper that came out of the printing presses. The financial oligarchy had long ago lost its sense of reality. Is it so little? By printing US dollars at will and without any coverage, the financial oligarchy could easily buy politicians, parties and governments, destroy clever and dangerous opponents, bring the economies of entire countries and regions (1998) to total collapse or raise to eminence obedient scoundrels. And all the TNCs (transnational corporations) led by it gradually conquered the entire world, destroying millions of small and medium-sized business structures, which were trying to swim by themselves in the stormy ocean of the world economy.

As panic gripped the private structure of the heart of the financial oligarchy of the world, i.e. the Federal Reserve, the other instruments (“archangels” or rather “hidden fists”) were called in—the CIA and the Pentagon. As a result, the “Arab Spring” (2011) blossomed and was followed by the second “Orange Revolution” (or, simply, the coup) in Ukraine (2013-2014). Steven Mann’s operational doctrine of the “con-

trolled chaos" was fully deployed. New and not fully-controlled territories with vast strategic resources such as oil and gas had to be conquered. And as Brzezinski, the elderly geopolitical strategist of the "unique empire," the United States of America, convinced himself, on the "great global chessboard," the US was not the only one playing. There were also other players in many respects wiser and with much more historical experience such as Russia, China, Iran, etc. And in order not to perish, the US, and along with it the whole world, was faced with the imperative to radically change its policy towards itself and the rest of the world. Unfortunately, it seems that precisely this point has not been figured out by Barack Obama, whose term has ended ingloriously after a series of failed geopolitical initiatives and the loss of prestige of the United States not only among its opponents—Russia, China, Iran, etc.—but also among its closest allies and vassals—the UK, France, Turkey, etc.

The scale of the global crisis that has in one way or another affected all countries and peoples of the Earth and threatened the entire civilization with a global catastrophic war, raging global Islamic terrorism and with a rapidly advancing climate change is known to billions of people. This crisis puts to a huge test not only the peoples of Europe, Middle East and North Africa, but also of the United States.

It is in this situation that the mandate of the 45th US president Donald Trump begins. The political analysts are yet to start following all the moves of the President of the still most powerful economy in the world and to what extent he will follow on the promises he made during his election campaign. This article has no such claims. Following the logic of what has been said above, the author only seeks to once again direct attention to the question: whether Donald Trump understands the reasons that led 35 years ago to the replacement of the conceptions of the "neoconservative revolution" with those of neoliberal globalism as well as the role of the Federal Reserve System (Fed) in these processes? If "yes," then, what steps is he going to undertake to stop this role that is disastrous for both humanity and the US? And parallel to his efforts in this direction, what can the other "major players" in the world do in order to build together the new world order in the interest of all countries and peoples?

The enormity of the posed questions compels me only to sketch the options and consequences that will with a high degree of probability be unfolding in one or another undertaken initiative or step.

It is known that the CIA openly voiced assumptions not founded on

any facts about the so-called hacker attacks carried out by Russia on the websites of the Democratic Party which led, as it is claimed, to the victory of Donald Trump. In line with these assumptions and without evidence, the outgoing President Obama imposed another round of successive sanctions against Russia. Among analysts and supporters of Donald Trump the view dominates that an attempt on the life of the 45th US president is being plotted, even before he takes office, and the grounds for a possible impeachment after he takes office are also prepared.

The CIA, as I remarked above—this being no secret to all serious analysts in the world—is but an instrument of the financial oligarchy whose core is the US Federal Reserve. In the political practice of the United States as well as that of the rest of the world, there are many examples of how this system reacts when its role and interests are affected—J. F. Kennedy (1963), Richard Nixon (1973), Oskar Lafontaine (1998), etc. Trump knows this probably all too well and therefore it cannot be expected of him to make such reckless moves despite the fact that the manner of his political behavior on the campaign trail shocked his opponents. After all such reckless moves can be fatal...

It may turn out that much more successful for Donald Trump could be the strategy in which he gradually, in concert with the rest of the major “geopolitical players” on the global stage of history today (such as Putin, Xi Jinping and others as well, among them François Fillon), prepares the conditions to carry out the idea of the great John Maynard Keynes from 1944. Keynes’ idea was for the UN to adopt one new universal currency—world, welt, monde, мир, свят, etc. – which similarly to the universal measures like 1 meter, 1 kilogram, 1 ton, etc., won’t be tied to gold or any other natural product but instead be an expression of the global economy. The currency should be put under management of a truly World Bank which, in turn, would be under the monitoring of a special UN entity. In such case, all national and regionally used currencies should be tied to that one universal currency that belongs to the whole of humanity.

Naturally, the solving of this one issue will not solve all other global, regional and national problems humankind has faced. However, it is my deep conviction that this is the key to untying the huge bundle of problems that have been amassed in the last century and that will serve to open a new horizon towards the establishment of a novel and just global order which will allow humankind as a whole, and each nation by itself, to seek solutions for their freedom, dignity and prosperity.

# Legislators' Temporary Permanence and the Revocable Vote

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## **Abstract**

This article argues that the link between the modern wave of democratisation and elitism lies in *legislators' temporary permanence*. Legislators get elected on pre-election platforms, which they are not directly accountable for fulfilling after election. This political structure allows the elites to capitalize on their economic power and influence political decisions through propaganda, lobbying and/or bribing. The primary contribution of this article regards the introduction for the first time in academia of the notion of *en masse revocable voting* within the framework of liberal democracy, as a response to *legislators' temporary permanence*. *Revocable voting* means that a voter would be granted the opportunity to revoke or reassign his or her vote directly, when he or she feels misrepresented by the legislators. The revocable vote is a process envisioned to be incorporated within representative democracy as a means to transform it into a more direct form of democracy without necessarily ousting the concept of representation.

The philosopher can be objective with regard to nature, but he cannot be  
neutral with regard to politics  
Hannah Arendt

The disproportionate power of elites today is factually confirmed by a recent Oxfam study, suggesting that the richest 1% will accumulate more wealth than the rest of the world put together; a staggering confirmation of global injustices.<sup>1</sup> Marxists would immediately say that such injustices are the result of the unjust control of means of production and, therefore, the solution lies in reversing capitalism. However, the economic system is simply the outcome of political decisions, unless of

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<sup>1</sup> Oxfam, *An Economy For The 1%*, Oxfam Briefing Paper (Oxfam, 2016), <http://www.oxfam.org>, 1.

course it has been imposed via coercion. That said, capitalism is the result of the dominant political system, with democracy (or various form of democracy) currently being the hegemonic political system globally. *If one aims to correct economic injustices, he or she should first target correcting political injustices.*

One would also fairly argue that absolute wealth egalitarianism does not need to be a society's exclusive goal. Nevertheless, the profound inequalities and extreme poverty even in democratized societies is a moral decadence in a world of abundant resources that needs to be addressed more radically. In that respect, I adopt Hannah Arendt's view that a philosopher can be objective regarding nature, but one should not limit oneself to neutrality, when it comes to politics<sup>2</sup> and such moral decadence necessitates action in order to be reversed. Looking for a potential remedy to wealth imbalances and poverty at the global scale, one needs to locate precisely the source of *de facto power inequality* within liberal democracy, which gradually becomes the dominant political system globally.

It is evident by now that, unlike other theorists, who attack capitalism directly as the primary evil of poverty and wealth imbalances, that *I only see such substantial inequality as the result of major injustices in the political sphere.* I partially derive this approach from Castoriadis, who despite being keen on socialism, has gradually distanced himself from Marxism and focused his critique of modern societies on political institutions. Castoriadis suggests that political power enforcement has always existed and will continue to exist in collective decision-making, unless one believes in the poor anarcho-Marxist utopia that one day humans will take collective decisions spontaneously, without the enforcement of some form of power.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, Castoriadis calls for a more autonomous and just distribution of such political power. He praises ancient Greece and Western political institutions for organizing the first autonomous political communities, but he remained extremely critical of modern liberal democracy, mainly due to the element of representation. Castoriadis believes that there is no form of democracy other than direct

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<sup>2</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Essays In Understanding, 1930-1954* (New York: Schocken Books, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Cornelius Castoriadis, *Democracy And Relativity - Δημοκρατία Και Σχετικισμός* (Athens: Στάσει Εκπύπτοντες, 2015), 41.

democracy, which was the main reason of his appreciation of the ancient Athenian regime. Representation appears for the first time in the medieval West in self-governed cities of the 11th-12th centuries and was not known in antiquity. Representation is an insult to the represented and constitutes a modern idea with roots in political heteronomy and alienation, Castoriadis says,<sup>4</sup> and further recalls Rousseau's "The British are free once in five years" (i.e. on election day).<sup>5</sup> The moment voters grant political power permanently and irreversibly to a representative, they immediately alienate themselves politically, Castoriadis adds.<sup>6</sup>

Even though, I share Castoriadis's view that modern liberal democracy is far from an authentic democracy, I do not locate the democratic insufficiency in representation, but rather I would like to argue that injustices rise from the temporary permanence of representation or in other words in *legislators' temporary permanence*. By that I mean that the embodiment of one's will in another person for several years through a parliamentary election is not a direct source of alienation, as Castoriadis thought. Instead, liberal democracy's injustice stems from the usual absence of a direct control mechanism that would disrupt a government's *permanence* by ending its tenure, when the voter feels inadequately represented. The source of de facto power imbalances in favour of the elites is precisely located in the *permanence* of legislators for several years (temporarily) between elections (four to five years usually), which empowers the efficiency of lobbying, propaganda, targeted party-financing and bribing. To consider the latter's essence, one should wonder; which are the means in liberal democracy that bind politicians and parties to commit to pre-electoral promises that brought them to power in the first place? The answer is simply none; there is no *binding* mechanism that would force a politician to fulfil his promises or else to step down from power. The only such *non-binding* mechanism is the indirect control of a parliament. However, the few legislators of a parliament can be easily influenced by elites' financial power.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>5</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (Baltimore, MD.: Penguin Books, 1968).

<sup>6</sup> Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Ancient Greek Democracy And Its Importance For Us Today - Η Αρχαία Ελληνική Δημοκρατία Και Η Σημασία Της Για Μας Σήμερα* (Athens: Ύψιλον, 1999), 34.

The primary mean of democratic manipulation by the elites, which leads to power imbalances, is propaganda, as the elites bear substantially stronger capacity than the poor to promote their ideas in society. The second very important tool for the elites is lobbying, such as keeping close ties with politicians, financing parties or even bribing legislators, if necessary. In fact, sometimes politicians themselves are part of the domestic elite. It is not a coincidence that incumbents in many liberal democratic countries are usually rich people and entrepreneurs, as usually they are the ones who can finance or seek peer-financing to propagate their electoral campaigns. Notably, elite propaganda is utilised mainly prior to elections, in order to distort public sentiment and elect the politicians favoured by the elite. If we could mathematically graph propaganda with time, the levels of propaganda would spike prior to elections when propaganda is necessary to maintain high re-election chances, and would then drop again during the tenure of the government. On the other hand, lobbying is more essential after an election, as the relatively long period of a government's tenure (*temporary permanence*) allows the elites to influence politicians towards legislating elite-friendly policies.

The more complicated the structure of representation, the less powerful the voters are in monitoring the government's compliance with its pre-electoral commitments to the people. In other words, in liberal democracy the people have no legitimate, direct way of evaluating the government's performance after election, while their representatives in parliament might be following their own personal or party agenda, or worse, they could be influenced financially by the domestic elite. On the other hand, modern legislation is so complex that parliamentary representation indeed bears benefits for the efficient coordination of the collective will. However, indirect government control through parliaments has proved extremely susceptible to corruption and the economic power of elites, which allows them to increase their de facto political power within liberal democracy by manipulating the few legislators that constitute a parliament. The *temporary permanence* of legislators is a mechanism of major social injustices that should be corrected, without necessarily ousting the parliamentary system. In any case, any reform towards further democratization will take gradual steps that will meet the fierce opposition of elites, who favour less democratized societies. *A potential transcendence from liberal democracy to direct democracy seems to be an unrealistic utopia at this historical stage for most parts of the world.*

Nevertheless, one should envisage small dialectical steps towards more autonomous societies that would remove the responsibility of governmental control from the parliament and would transfer it to the people.

To sum up, for Castoriadis ancient Athens was the first society that showed willingness to form an authentic political community and took historical steps forward towards *autonomy*. In fact, Castoriadis says that ancient Athens was the first society to show elements of political and institutional *autonomy*, while such elements re-emerged in Europe during the Enlightenment after a long historical break and only after the end of Medieval times and feudalism.<sup>7</sup> *Autonomy* derives etymologically from the Greek *auto-nomos*, which means to provide to oneself one's laws. Nevertheless, historically, societies have almost always been heteronomous. When referring to his view of autonomy, Castoriadis says:

I call heteronomous the society where *law*, the institution, is provided by someone "other" (*heteron*). Of course, as we know, the law (*nomos*) is never provided by someone "other," but it is always a creation of the society. However, in the vast majority of cases, the creation of institutions is assigned to an extra-societal authority that exceeds the power of the people (e.g. God, ancestors, historical necessity).<sup>8</sup>

Despite this article's criticism of modern representative democracy, some modern societies have already taken more considerable steps towards autonomy, such as Switzerland, which has constituted a liberal democracy with the relatively frequent use of referendums. A gradual democratization path that would transform modern liberal democracies into referenda democracies similar to the Swiss political system, would indeed be a solid dialectic step forward towards more just and *autonomous* societies. Even though a referendum democracy similar to the Swiss political system almost surely constitutes a democratic improvement over liberal democracy, it is still an indirect way of executing governmental control. Due to the usual finality of referendum decisions, a referendum democracy would still lack the dynamic element of direct democracy, where legislators (and consequently policies) would constantly be evaluated. That said, the elites would still hold disproportion-

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<sup>7</sup> Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Rise Of Insignificance - Η Άνοδος Της Ασημαντότητας* (Athens: Ύψιλον, 2000).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

ate de facto political power in a referendum democracy, as they would bear incentives to invest substantial capital in influencing a referendum decision prior to the vote through propaganda or bribing. That said, the power of propaganda remains extremely strong in a referendum democracy, as the likely *permanence* of any referendum decision for a substantial period, allows considerable manipulation by the elites, which in most cases controls the dominant media and communication means in a market economy. On top of that, politicians (and hence elites) still bear relative freedom in a referendum democracy to ignore an “undesirable” referendum decision, by only proceeding with minor adjustments. A popular case is the well-known Greek referendum in 2015 in Greece, when the people voted against a bailout agreement with the EU, but the government still accepted a new bailout, only through a minor adjustment to the initial proposal, which Greek people had turned down in the first place! In other words, societies should dialectically transcend not only liberal democracy in its current form, but also referendum democracy, which remains a form of democracy that allows substantial manipulation by the elites. As an idea for such a dialectical transcendence, *en masse revocable voting* will be introduced for the first time in academia, in the second part of this article.

## The revocable vote

“Revolution does not mean torrents of blood, the taking of the Winter Palace, and so on. Revolution means a radical transformation of society's institutions. In this sense, I certainly am a revolutionary.”  
Cornelius Castoriadis

The *revocable vote* entails a voter's ability to revoke or reassign his vote directly and immediately, when he or she feels misrepresented by the chosen legislators.

Revocability is today an essential part of the modern private sphere, with the most typical example being private sector employment. It is broadly accepted on the global level that an underperforming employee is sacked swiftly from his or her company in market economies. On the other hand, revocability remains a taboo for the public sphere and in particular for democracy, as governments are able to remain in

power, even after substantial mistakes, whether those were intentional or not. I should remind that the power of a government after an election, is strictly subject to the will of the few legislators comprising a parliament. Nevertheless, those same legislators are directly affected by personal interests, party interests and the interests of the elites. The fewer the legislators, the more powerful the elite, which necessitates the franchising of direct government control to the people.

*The idea of en masse revocable voting within representative democracy* is novel. As envisaged, revoking a vote should be taking place without the intervention of any indirect form of democratic institutions, such as a parliament or a senate. The revocable vote is a process aiming to be incorporated within representative parliamentary democracy, transforming it into a more direct form of democracy without ousting the concept of representation.

We should begin by tracing historically the notion of *revocability* within political systems. *Revocability* of delegates is a known electoral concept since the ancient Athenian democracy.<sup>9</sup> Karl Marx also praised the Parisian Commune for adopting the notion of *revocability* in its decisions, while revocability was also present in election of delegate the Soviet workers' councils prior to their subordination to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Finally, forms of revocability have also been recorded in workers' councils in Italy and Germany in 1920-1921 and in within the context of US and Swiss democracies, while some forms of revocability have also been recorded in Canada, Ukraine and Venezuela. What we call today a recall election or recall referendum has been applied in the US since 1631 and in Switzerland since 1846. A recall election differs from *en masse revocable voting*, in the sense that it consists of collecting signatures with the aim of recalling a delegate either directly or through a referendum. On the other hand, the *revocable vote*, as introduced in this paper, consists of the direct revoking by the voter of a parliamentary vote (including parties and delegates). A considerable amount of revocation would eventually lead the government to fall.

Since the revocable vote is a concept almost newly introduced in

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<sup>9</sup> Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Ancient Greek Democracy And Its Importance For Us Today - Η Αρχαία Ελληνική Δημοκρατία Και Η Σημασία Της Για Μας Σήμερα* (Athens: Ύψιλον, 1999), 39.

this paper, we should elaborate on theoretical specifics, without however going deep into pragmatic details that go beyond the purpose of this study. *The revocable vote is envisaged as a radical addition to existing democracies, but does not constitute an idea for a completely new democratic system. The revocable vote would take effect after elections and the after formation of a government, which is ratified by the parliament. After the enforcement of the revocable vote a citizen would be allowed to revoke and immediately reassign his initial vote to another party/president/delegate (subject to the given democratic structure). This would lead to a dynamic democracy, where the government would constantly have to sustain a specified majority across the voters to remain in power and to be allowed to legislate its desired policies. It is important to note that all voters would be allowed to revoke and reassign their votes, including opposition party voters, who could reassign their votes to the government to enforce its policy agenda. In case an adequate number of government voters reassign their votes to opposition parties, without the same number of opposition voters reassigning their votes to the government, then the government falls and the country heads to national elections. I should stress here that the revocable vote does not regard individual delegates, but the revoking of a full administration. That said, the power of controlling a government is removed from the parliament and passes to the hands of the voters. If a government maintains in power throughout its official tenure (four to five years), then national elections should take place as foreseen by each national Constitution.*

*Revocable voting is admittedly a radical idea.* It prioritizes equal democratic participation and political involvement to be *the primary right and obligation* of every citizen. However, given that the revocable vote is a concept that targets reducing the power of oligarchies, it would not be welcomed by the elites. Let us remember, how unwelcome ideas such as abolishing slavery, granting voting rights to the poor or franchising democracy to women, once sounded – the latter being excluded from voting across the world until the early 20th century. The rise of liberal democratic hegemony on the global scale is in the hands of corporatocratic elites that hold disproportional de facto political power, due to their ability to influence liberal democratic institutions. In turn, the Left and the poor are still organising their struggle on the traditional socialist approach of prioritising their social requests with respect to wealth im-

balances, targeting specific economic policy decisions and, to a great extent, neglecting that wealth imbalances are directly the result of political injustice. The revocable vote is a concept that targets providing the poor and the intellectuals with the right theoretical tools to reorganize their struggle and combat social injustices at the root of the problem; the elitism of politics. Think of a normal non-elite citizen; does he or she hold the same political power as a TV channel owner, or the owner of a big bank, or an oil tycoon, even though they all might be citizens of the same state? Well, according to liberal democracy they all hold equal democratic power, which they can exercise once every four or five years with their vote. In theory, all citizens hold equal *de jure* political power through voting. In practice though, the oligarchs hold all means possible (propaganda, lobbying, bribing) to impose their interests on politicians over the four to five-year tenure of the elected government. On the other hand, the simple citizen can do nothing but wait until the next election, where under immense propaganda pressure he or she will be called to cast a vote again. The poor and the Left need to prioritise reallocating their resources into combating the political power of the elites, as the social struggle for wealth redistribution is vain, without addressing the source of such imbalances, which is political injustice. The revocable vote aims exactly at addressing political elitism and equipping the hands of the poor with stronger political power.

Let us now address the advantages of an *en masse revocable voting democracy*, when comparing it to the outstanding known models of liberal democracy. We should start with the most important deficiency of liberal democracy, *legislators' temporary permanence*, which simply means that a politician can promise a certain number of policies, without being directly accountable for their implementation after election. In fact, he or she can be elected and implement the exact opposite policies with some—usually—unfounded political excuse. The parliament is an inadequate control mechanism of politicians' policy consistency, as usually the government holds a majority and individual delegates, usually do not diverge from their party's official line, due to personal interests. In a nutshell, *direct political accountability* is absent from liberal democracy. The latter is the source of a series of undemocratic evils within representative democracy; propaganda, bribing, lobbying or simply making political mistakes as a legislator without being directly accountable for them.

Beginning with propaganda, we already know that the elites control a vast amount of resources that they could invest prior to elections to influence the voters' choice. This means that not only voters come to the ballot rarely, but they are also obliged to make a crucial long-term choice under the influence of heavy elitist propaganda. If we could mathematically graph propaganda with time, the levels of propaganda would spike prior to elections and would then drop again during the tenure of the government, when lower levels of propaganda are necessary to maintain strong re-election chances. However, *a revocable voting democracy would prevent this phenomenon*. Revocable voting would reduce elites' incentive in investing so many resources in pre-election campaigns, as any administration could be revoked at any time. One would fairly argue that average propaganda levels would rise in the long run, but they would almost surely not reach the usual extremely high pre-election levels, as this would be financially unsustainable for the elites. Moreover, even with elevated average propaganda levels, we need to understand that a society, that would be politically engaged constantly (through the revocable vote), would become a trained receptor of propaganda and would adjust accordingly. In the end, *revocable voting would reduce the effectiveness of propaganda in affecting policy in favour of the elites*, without of course eradicating propaganda fully. Still, a more politically engaged society would adapt more efficiently and would eventually make wiser political choices with time.

Bribing and lobbying also belong to the same category of shady acts that the elite can adopt when it wishes to influence politicians. However, they both come with costs. Would the elite be willing to assume those costs, if it knew that a government could be immediately revoked at any time within its tenure? The revocable vote once again, like in the case of propaganda, would reduce the efficiency and effectiveness of bribing and lobbying, without however eradicating it. Most importantly, under a revocable vote democracy corruption scandals would now be at the discretion of the people and not of the parliament, through which corrupted legislators usually find ways to avoid the retributions for corruption acts.

The revocable vote is not only a democratic protective valve against elitism and corrupted politicians. Politicians and governments, even if not corrupted, are not all wise and they certainly do make mistakes, over which sometimes they escape accountability by unfounded

clarifications. Judging the validity of such clarifications after a mistake, or even the ability to foresee an upcoming mistake, should lie in the hands of the people, who are in the end the subjects of all policies. Democracy is founded in an aristocratic way, where politicians are allegedly wiser than the masses. Well, even if the latter is indeed the case, the will of the people should transcend the wisdom of politicians, if wisdom is not communicated convincingly to the people. On the other hand, if we believe that adults are not adequately capable of making credible political decisions, then why do we have democracy in the first place? The revocable vote is a democratic tool that would franchise political power to the people. Several times we have witnessed politicians making substantial political mistakes and remaining on power until the next election, simply because the people have no say over politicians' or government decision for several years. *Periodical voting is aristocratic, elitist and unjust!*

Crises (economic, political etc.) is yet another element of democracy where the revocable vote would contribute to less aristocratic and more popular decisions that would reflect the peoples' will. In most cases, a crisis emerges amidst a government's tenure. However, a government is elected under different circumstances and does not always bear the democratic legitimacy to make decisions at times of crisis. Some governments have the political honesty to call for snap elections in case of a crisis or to call for a referendum. But in plenty of cases, governments unilaterally assume the legitimacy to act at times of emergencies, based on a vote they received months or years ago. Governments might even manipulate the events of a crisis to achieve political gains. The *state of emergency* is a common excuse that governments utilise to cease acting democratically and to make decisions without considering the peoples' will. The is yet another factor that renders contemporary democracy an elitist political system.

Let us now delve into a specific example of revocable vote democracy. For reasons of simplification assume that elections take place under a simple proportional voting system. This means that a party or ruling coalition needs 51% of the vote to form a government, and if for example it gets elected on 55% rate, this translates to 55% of the voters and 55% of the parliament seats. Let us take the latter as our case scenario. One party or ruling coalition come to power with 55% of the vote and consequently forms a government that is ratified by the parliament,

where it controls 55% of the delegates. In the revocable vote model, this government would have to sustain at least 51% of the vote in order to avoid revocation and consequently snap elections, where a new government would be elected. We should note here that each voter in revocable vote democracy would be allowed to revoke his or her vote and reassign to another party. However, this would not hold only for the voters who backed the government, but also for opposition voters, who could revoke their vote from opposition parties and reassign it to ruling parties, if they deemed that the government's policy trajectory favourable. As a result, assuming a 55% rate as a starting point after elections, this would mean that if 5% of government voters revoked and reassigned their votes, while 1% of opposition party voters revoked and reassigned their votes to the government, then it would still sustain the 51% threshold, which would be necessary to remain in office. In other words, revocation and reassignment voting flows are free through an electronic dynamic democratic platform and the government maintains power as long as it remains above the 51% threshold. The moment a government's appeal in the electronic platform drops below 51% at any point of its tenure, the government is immediately dissolved and the country heads to snap elections to elect a new government. Following the explained mathematical rule, a series of revocation examples are presented in flowchart A.1 (see Appendix).

The revocable vote does not only bear benefits, but would come at costs. The primary one is the risk of multiple consecutive elections, where people decide to revoke governments too frequently. However, there are remedies to this problem, by introducing for example brief grace periods of a few months after the election of a government, or by allowing people to revoke their vote periodically, as discussed earlier. Also, democracy is a social system of mostly rational agents and as such, even after a brief period of destabilisation, it would tend towards reaching an equilibrium or equilibria. In the end, people would be displeased with a potential prolonged destabilisation and would begin to utilise their revocable vote right wisely (if at all) across longer interims. Over the same period, politicians would become trained to the fact that if they lie or do not deliver on their promises, and fail to explain why to the people, they would be facing the risk of having their mandate revoked. *The latter would cause a virtuous cycle of gradually more honest politicians and in turn of citizens, who would have a decreasing need to*

*revoke politicians, as long as they make sound pre-elections promises and stick to them.* (Flowchart A.2, see Appendix).

A government cannot always anticipate the circumstances of its tenure. If those change and it cannot deliver its promises, it would either have to call snap elections or explain to the people, why they should not revoke their earlier votes. If the explanations are convincing, revocation would be avoided, but this would still be the outcome of a dialectical democratic process between the rulers and the ruled. *I should stress here that in the hypothetical case that people do not use their revocable vote right at all, we would be back at the contemporary representative democratic model that we know so far.* That said, the revocable vote is a direct democratic *addition* to representative democracy not a reform that changes the essence of democracy. *Even though political participation of a conscious citizen is an obligation and a right in my view, the revocable vote would be a right, but not necessarily an obligation.* In the end, a government's deeds might be righteous and the voters would choose not to revoke it, thus not destabilising the political system. The revocable vote would be an incentive for honest policies and a threat for dishonest governments.

Another anticipated criticism to the revocable vote would be to claim that with revocable voting politicians would only campaign for short-term policies, as long-term policies are sometimes misunderstood by the people, or that politicians would not be able to push forward some necessary unpopular reforms due to fear of revocation. If we are to have democracy, the policies that are to be implemented need by definition to be popular. If the people are displeased with a certain policy, no matter how necessary that policy might be, then it shall not pass. Assuming that the people are less intelligent or hold weaker expertise than politicians is a common claim, and in fact it might be true. But allowing politicians to legislate against the will of the people is again aristocratic and far from being democratic. If the people are not wise enough to allow a beneficial policy to pass, so be it!

When discussing *public wisdom*, it is useful to consider a significant dialogue between my two main inspirations Chantal Mouffe and Cornelius Castoriadis, from December 1994, when Castoriadis was still a Professor at the Sorbonne in Paris and Mouffe was a member of the

political team MAUSS (Mouvement Anti-Utilitariste dans les Sciences Sociales).<sup>10</sup> Briefly, I recall that Castoriadis was a great proponent of the revocability of legislators, without however favouring my view that revocability could be incorporated within representative democracy, as I am arguing in this paper. In their discussion, Mouffe and Castoriadis agreed on the necessity of radical direct democracy, but openly disagreed on the potential implications that a majoritarian direct democracy would bear on minorities. In an effort to defend partially modern representative democracy, Mouffe begins the argument by claiming:

There is no other democracy, other than direct democracy, agreed; but does democracy protect individual liberties? So, in order to protect individual liberties, shouldn't there be next to democratic institutions other institutions parallel to democracy related to pluralism? In the end, Switzerland has achieved the most democratic regime, but this does not prevent it from making extremely troubled decisions in relation to immigration. If your position is that more democracy would necessarily lead to the right decisions, then I do not agree with you on that.<sup>11</sup>

The ideal institution remains a mixed regime of direct democracy with some constitutional protection of minorities, according to Mouffe. Castoriadis's response to Mouffe was as follows:

Do you [Chantal Mouffe] suggest that we should have a Constitution that cannot be revised under any circumstances? Of course, we cannot do that. The idea of a non-revisable Constitution is practically and logically nonsense. In the same way you cannot forbid the Swiss people to limit migration inflows with a referendum, in the same way you cannot forbid the people from saying (I will say something intentionally stupid here): 'We remove voting rights from people with height below 160cm and above the height of 190cm.' The majority here surely falls between the 160-190cm height, so they could in theory adopt this prohibition in a majoritarian democracy. What can one do? I would of course personally oppose this amendment and I would fight against it. If we accept the rule of the majority, we also accept necessarily, despite all guarantees, that there is always the chance that people will go crazy and might do one thing or the other. Hitler came to power in a way by a majority. What should we do

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<sup>10</sup> Cornelius Castoriadis, *Democracy And Relativity - Δημοκρατία Και Σχετικισμός* (Athens: Στάσει Εκπύπτοντες, 2015), 7.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 99

then? Forbid German people to vote? This is the evolution of history. We can fight against wrong democratic decisions, but we cannot limit democracy through judicial amendments.<sup>12</sup>

So, should citizens acquire special or general knowledge (in order to be eligible to participate in democracy), Castoriadis was once asked and he answered: *the specialists should be at the service of citizens not at the service of politicians. Citizens can only learn to rule, via ruling...* Such a simple thought by Castoriadis, yet so essential. If we do not allow people to rule, how can one learn to become a responsible legislator. It is common to blame the masses for being unintelligent or incapable of making wise decisions, when the whole democratic system in the west is dominated by propaganda, elitism and lobbying, coupled with a new-wave life of consumerism, which aims to disorient the people, instead of engaging them in political processes.

People need to assume political responsibility, exercise their political rights and bear the consequences of their decisions. This is the definition of democracy; not the rule of some all-wise political aristocracy that makes the "right" decisions for the people irrespective of their wishes. In the end, politicians should be the representatives of the people, not their rulers. That said, revocability would be an essential tool to restore, at least partially, the political balance between the elites and the poor in modern democracies.

Before concluding, it should be noted yet again that the *en masse revocable voting* model, as presented in this article, constitutes indeed a radical reform, but still only an addition to the currently prevailing liberal representative democratic model. That said, if voters do not exercise their revocable voting right, we would find ourselves back at the known representative democratic model, without any change (see Flowchart A.1). In other words, the revocable vote aims at improving representative democracy and correct its structural deficiencies, such as legislators' temporary permanence and elitism, but does not distort the foundations of representative democracy. Instead, it adds one additional layer of governmental control on top of the parliament. It should also be clarified here, that the parliament sustains its full functionality and would also be able to withdraw its support for the government under the revo-

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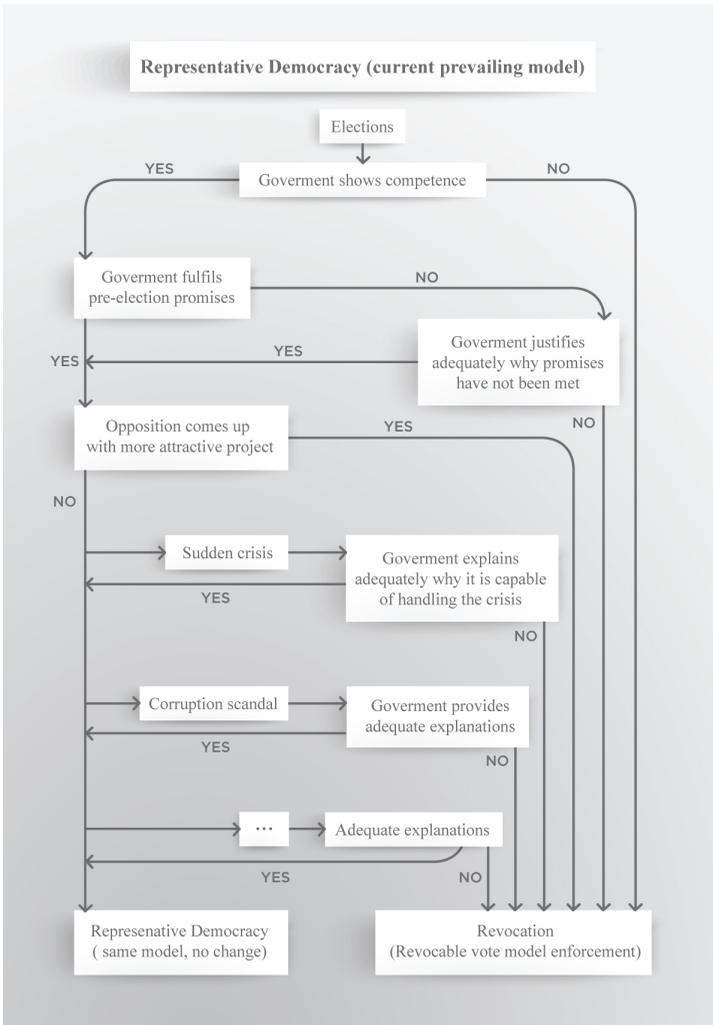
<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 103-104.

cable vote model, in the same way as in the currently prevailing model. The revocable vote is an additional control mechanism that franchises government control from the parliament to the people, in case legislators are not competent or honest enough to conduct their tasks. However, legislators do sustain the *same authority*, as members of the parliament *but with less power*. This means that their expertise is still being utilised, but not without the control of the people. Legislators might indeed be constituting a superior skilled technocracy compared to the median voter (though not always), but under the proposed revocable vote democratic model, legislators need to provide adequate explanations to the people (see flowchart A.1) and justify their actions comprehensively in order to avoid revocation and maintain the right of exercising their expertise. *Legislators should be civil servants, not rulers!*

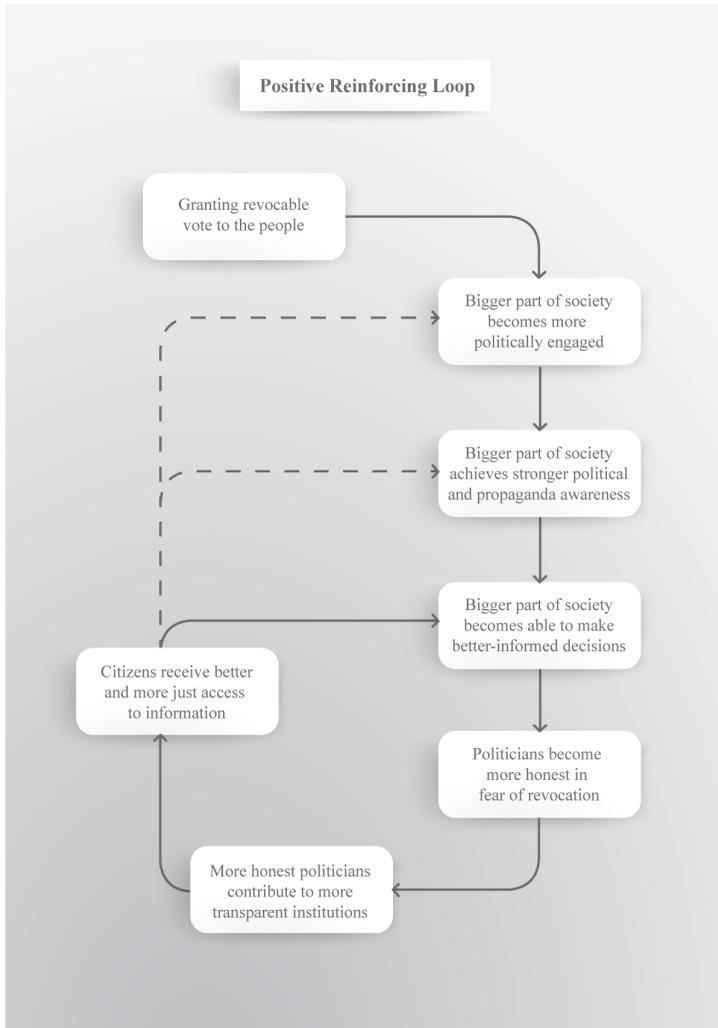
# Appendix

## Flowchart

### A.1



## Flowchart A.2



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# MEDICAL PHILOSOPHY IN A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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## Human nature: Balancing the Unbalanced

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### *Abstract*

Galen's understanding of human nature appears to be very specific from many points of view. According to Galen's concept "*vis medicatrix naturae*," the physician appears to be the assistant of nature. He balances between opposites as well as nature. What we find particularly significant in Galen's view on human nature is a lack of "big ideas" and of a strong theoretical approach, which burdened for instance Plato and members of the Methodists school. Galen realized the whole complexity and relativity of human health and, first of all, realized its dependence on many agents: four qualities and four fluids, air, water, earth, etc. That is why he stated that the treatment of the patient had to be individual. Theory cannot cure. It is only the physician who cures on the basis of some theoretical ideas, but firstly on the basis of his experience. Galen's idea that throughout the treatment of a patient, it is of utmost importance to take into consideration his personal humor, physical condition, and his lifestyle in the present and the past, today has to be a main marker for the further development of medicine. Thus the aim of this paper is not only to better understand Galen's concept of human nature, but to contribute to present-day debates on health and illness, and the societal role of medicine and the doctor.

Galen's understanding of human nature appears to be very specific from many points of view. He was firstly not inclined to consider human nature as something solid and steady. On the contrary, human nature is constantly on the move and is trying to achieve balance between opposites. On the other hand, Galen's attitudes in certain parts of his writings often changed and they were very dependent on his humors (*humori*), that is on the overall atmosphere in which he was living and working. He did not bother to hide the changes in his claims. When we take a look at the problem of nature from the doctor's point of view, we get a similar picture. Ac-

ording to Galen's concept "*vis medicatrix naturae*," the doctor appears to be the assistant of nature. He attempts to achieve balance between opposites as well as nature. But, before we consider some aspects of Galen's understanding of human nature, we would like to stress that Galen (129-200 A.D.), a doctor and philosopher from Pergamum in Asia Minor is considered one of the key founding fathers of western medicine. His influence was prevalent in the history of European medicine until the second half of the 19th century. In Galen's awe-inspiring opus (about 500 writings), we can find an equal amount of both medicine and philosophy. Relying on various traditions, he developed a very original and powerful synthesis which made him an authority in both Christian and Islamic medical tradition in the centuries that followed. At the same time, there are places in his theory filled with inconsistency, contradictions and unresolved difficulties. The aim of this paper is to explore Galen's theory of human nature and to deal with its contradictions and unresolved difficulties.

Galen's conception of human nature appears to be fundamental for the entirety of his scientific work. A profound insight into his essential writings sheds light not only on Galen and his time, but also on the whole history of medicine on which he made such a strong impact. However, this paper aims not solely to comprehend Galen's understanding of man better, but to contribute to current debates on the essence of human health and illness as well, that is, to determine the contemporary social role of medicine and the doctor.

For centuries, until well into the 19th century, Galen's work was prevalent in medical theory and practice. The works attributed to the so-called *Hippocratic Corpus* (*Corpus Hippocraticum*) have been preserved mainly inasmuch as they were admired and often commented upon by Galen. Even today, Galen's works, as well as the works of other doctors and philosophers of the age, offer remarkable material for delving into important issues on the ways medicine, both in theory and practice, worked within the intellectual and socio-cultural context of the time. What we have in mind here is, above all, the status of medicine as a "rational" skill, its interaction with the philosophical tradition, as well as the moral and social issues such as the authority of the doctor and the doctor-patient relationship. It was at a certain point a little before and after 1980 that an intensive study of Galen's works recommenced, in the works of M. Frede and G. E. R. Lloyd.<sup>1</sup> Concurrently, J. Barnes and P. J.

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<sup>1</sup> For instance: M. Frede, "On Galen's Epistemology," in *Essays in Ancient Philosophy*

Hankinson did a great deal to explain Galen's conception of medicine, with the special stress on his particular ideal of philosophical medicine, or medical philosophy, as it could be phrased, as well.<sup>2</sup> V. Nutton and H. von Staden have been focused more on medical aspects, and have contributed significantly to our knowledge of Galen's work.<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, many conundrums and issues related to him have yet to be resolved. One such issue is certainly the question of the coherence of Galen's anthropology, especially if we have in mind the wide variety of perspectives Galen used in order to study this problem, i.e. having in mind his multidisciplinary approach. However, grasping Galen's anthropology seems crucial for the comprehension of his overall understanding of medicine, and also necessary in order to understand the subsequent history of medicine, where he, his works, and his attitudes regarding key medical issues have been considered indispensable.

Having considered the status of these issues, the exploration of the desired topic here would commence from that which is known within Galen's medico-philosophical cognitive context, out of which, in fact, stem the issues related to the central question that is to be posed here what is the essence of human nature, considering both historical and universal significance?

Namely, Galen approaches the study of human nature from several different points of view:

1. Anatomical and physiological: referring to the fact that he establishes what the main organs (i.e. principles, *archai*) within the human organism are.

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(Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987); G.E.R. Lloyd, "Galen and his contemporaries," in R.J. Hankinson, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Galen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); G.E.R. Lloyd, "Theories and Practices of Demonstration in Galen," in M.Frede and G.Striker, eds., *Rationality in Greek Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> We have here in mind the following works: J. Barnes, "Galen on logic and therapy," in R.J. Durling, and F. Kudlien, eds. *Galen's method of healing* (Leiden: 1991); R.J. Hankinson, "Galen and the best of all possible worlds," *Classical Quarterly* 1 (1989), 206-27; R.J. Hankinson, ed., *Method, Medicine and Metaphysics*, *Apeiron Suppl.* Vol.22.1 (1988).

<sup>3</sup> V.Nutton, "The chronology of Galen's early career," *Classical Quarterly* 23 (1973); V. Nutton, ed., *Galen, problems and prospects* (London: The Wellcome Institute, 1981); H. von Staden, "Experiment and experience in Hellenistic medicine," *Bulletin of the institute of classical studies* 11(1975), 178-199.

2. Psychological (when he determines the structure of human spirit, distinguishing reason from emotions).

3. Metaphysical and ontological (when he elaborates on the essence of soul (*psyche*))

4. Moral and social (e.g. in the writings where he deals with human virtues and, conversely, human evil).

Unfortunately, in most earlier research into this subject, a question which seems central in fact remained open. Namely, did Galen strive to assemble all these different perspectives into a coherent view of human nature, and if so, how successful was he in it really? Or, if we choose to proceed a step further in posing questions, did Galen consider all these viewpoints confined to their particular fields and domains of application, regarding some to be more significant than others?

It appears typical of Galen, as a medical scientist, to have emphasized the role of physiological factors regarding the question of character and personality, as well as emotions, that is, occupying a materialistic position, according to which the soul is considered subservient to the needs of the body. On the other hand, it seems apparent that Galen develops a philosophical and teleological view of human nature within a cosmological context, which naturally, in accordance with the time he lived in, includes a religious dimension as well. Even if the inner tensions of his theory on human nature cannot quite be resolved, probing and analysing them could, in our opinion, shed a precious light on the nature of his stand, that is, on the fact that he almost consciously cherished different and opposing approaches and possibilities.

The question of the unity (coherence) of Galen's thought includes simultaneously the identification (recognition) of various influences, both medical and philosophical, which impacted upon his work. To explore Galen's understanding of human nature means to take into consideration the plenitude of possible influences. That kind of endeavor is often complicated by the fact that Galen himself is actually our only source about his predecessors: strictly speaking, his prevailing status and impact lead to the disappearance and decrease of the influence of other scientists' works, which were no longer worth preserving. What seems to be of major significance, certainly, is his relation towards Platonism, Aristotelianism and Stoicism, and, as for medicine, the relation to the *Pneumatic school* of medicine, which relied on Stoicism, particularly regarding psychological issues. Within that context, Galen's polemics with Aristotle not only with

his works, but also with his Peripatetic school, as well as with the doctors from the *Pneumatic school* (Athenaeus, Archigenes), has not yet been entirely grasped, thus calling for additional research.

But let us step back from the broader context of the structure, significance, and influence of his scientific opus, to the question that lies in the title of our work, Galen's specific understanding of human nature. Galen's system of physiology and pathology is grounded directly in his conception of nature, which has of course become obsolete in the context of contemporary scientific medicine. In order to understand this concept of nature, first we have to understand the conflict between the two major scientific schools of the time regarding the relation between body and spirit. For a better understanding of the subject of this debate, we will use a quotation from a famous work of Galen's, *On the Natural Faculties*. There he discusses the question of nutrition in quite a straightforward manner:

Diet must in a certain way include a kind of turning of nutritive elements into food. However, some people claim that there is no such a transformation, and that it is obvious. Those are the ones who think that nature is neither like a craftsman, nor sagacious towards animals, and it is the fact that it has no special abilities by which it would change the order of things that in fact attracts some, and simultaneously eliminates others. In medicine and philosophy there are two kinds of schools among those who have dealt with nature...One regards all matter found in nature as prone to genesis as well as decline, making it therefore permanently liable to change. The other school assumes that matter is immutable and divided into tiny parts, separated by empty space... According to the latter, there is no such matter or force which would exclusively belong to nature or spirit, however, both nature and spirit come into being in such a manner that in fact makes this two original bodies...which become acquainted with one another. However, from the standpoint of the former, nature is not secondary in relation to atoms, but primary and older. Therefore, according to their view, nature itself creates bodies of both plants and animals, by using some of its faculties the faculty of attraction, the faculty of assimilation, and the power of secretion for the separation of that which is a foreign body. It shapes everything like a craftsman under whose thumb objects come into being...<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Claudii Galeni Opera Omnia*, Editionem curavit C.G.Kühn, 20 B (Original Edition, Leipzig: 1821-33), (Hildesheim: Olms, 1964) II, 26. Author's translation. Unless indicated otherwise, the translations of all quotations in the text to follow are likewise author's.

Galen considers Hippocrates the author of the metaphor of nature acting like a craftsman.<sup>5</sup> This claim, however, should be taken with a pinch of salt, bearing in mind that Galen's Hippocrates is in fact more of an imaginary character with whom all Galen's viewpoints coincide, than a real person. W. D. Smith, for instance, is of the opinion that that, if we base ourselves on Galen, it is very difficult to distinguish fact from fiction regarding Hippocrates.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, there is no doubt that Galen himself shared the above-mentioned standpoint. He was obviously prone to seeing bodies of living beings as works of art, created by an intelligent nature with a specifically determined purpose. At the same time, the members of Atomistic school were of the opinion that living beings were created by accident. Galen, for instance, claimed that they thought the mouth to have originated from the spirit or breath, which formed an opening at the place where it came out. While criticizing them, however, he wondered why, if it were so, the opening did not form at the top of our head, since it is typical of spirit to strive and reach the highest of peaks? Likewise, what would then be the purpose of teeth in our mouth, properly ordered like singers in a choir, and quite perfectly adjusted to their function? Additionally, if we choose to follow the logic of the Atomists, it is hard to explain why no other bodily opening has teeth. He directs this sort of critique to the Atomists in another work of his, *On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body*, which, according to him, was written in order to refute the Materialists who did not believe in a nature that acts purposefully like a craftsman. It is in this writing that we can see the intertwining of Galen's attitudes with religion. He claims that a respectable study of the work of the divine Creator himself is more desirable than sacrifice, and in that sense, that what he wrote represents a perfect theology.<sup>7</sup> Despite his attitude being less religious in some other writings, he never renounced the belief that nature is purposeful. Generally speaking, Galen's scientific work is so extensive and complex that it is impossible to reduce his entire system to a few succinct pages. Interestingly enough, what we are faced with in almost each of his works is

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>6</sup> W.D., Smith, *The Hippocratic tradition* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1979), 9ff.

<sup>7</sup> *Claudii Galeni Opera Omnia*, Editionem curavit C.G.Kühn, 20 B (Hildesheim: Olms, 1964) IV, 360.

the fact that Galen's attitudes and claims very often depend not on a particular viewpoint, but on a philosopher or a doctor he chooses to admonish at the moment, or, in other words, with whom he is in dispute. Apart from that, a specific attitude of his also directly depends on the phase of scientific development he was in at a given moment, i. e. on the particular mood he was in. Although today it seems very odd and unacceptable, and, according to our current understanding of scientific work and creation, it should not be considered relevant, Galen's attitudes in certain parts of his writings often did depend on his humors (*humori*), that is, on an overall atmosphere within which he was living and working at the time. P. Brain, for example, does not perceive these features of Galen's writings and standpoints as pointing to a fatal inconsistency and incoherence of his system, but seeks reasons for it in the extensiveness and voluminosity of Galen's opus.<sup>8</sup> According to our stance, this does not have to do solely with the extensiveness of Galen's opus, but it is here that we can in fact clearly see the essential feature of Galen's point of view, that is, his way of dealing with medicine and philosophy. Namely, Galen does not start from purely theoretical scientific issues to which he has only a methodological and technical relation. Likewise, he does not treat problems he deals with coldly and from a distance. Each and every problem is for him very concrete and therefore connected to a specific debate with a contemporary, or with certain schools in the history of medicine. He does not approach a scientific issue in an abstract manner, as though it were something vague and remote, but treats it like his own patients something that is here and now.

Nevertheless, let us go back to Galen's understanding of human nature. As opposed to, for instance, the Christian God, nature, as understood by Galen, is not omnipotent. It is enough for the Christian God just to order something, and it will happen at once. He creates immediately. Nature, on the other hand, needs to act according to the common laws of cause and consequence, and in doing so, has to use only the available materials. For example, it cannot create a living bird or a cow out of paper or rock.<sup>9</sup> To create living things, it must use specific elements that already possess a certain kind of corporeality, since it is not capable of creating

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<sup>8</sup> P. Brain, *Galen on Bloodletting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 3.

<sup>9</sup> *Claudii Galeni Opera Omnia*, Editionem curavit C.G.Kühn, 20 B (Hildesheim: Olms, 1964) III, 906.

something out of nothing. For that reason, although “intelligent,” it is also intelligible, fathomable, thus rendering science itself possible.

Within such a context of understanding nature, Galen distinguishes the crucial medical terms, health and illness. This means that both of these concepts are understood “naturally.” Illness is a kind of unnatural bodily condition which impairs a certain function, or completely disables it. On the other hand, health is a condition where an organism is in accordance with nature, which is hence the cause of the bodily functions working properly.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, nature is purposeful and driven to the maintenance of well-being of living creatures. It does everything in its power, for instance, to restore an organism which fell into an unnatural condition, i.e. illness, to the condition of rapport with it. This pertains to a famous concept “*vis medicatrix naturae*” (the healing power of nature), one of the greatest spokesmen for which is Galen himself. Out of it springs the purpose of the doctor’s position as well. Namely, his role is to cooperate with nature. When a patient suffers from a certain illness, nature struggles to overcome pathogenic agents, and if it succeeds in it by itself, no doctor is needed whatsoever.<sup>11</sup> However, should it not manage to win the struggle unaided, he is obliged to make haste and enable it to achieve what it would otherwise do on its own, if it could. Accordingly, the doctor must preserve that which is in accordance with nature, and eliminate that which is not. Galen deeply believes that the same perspective was also held by Hippocrates.

The difference between Galen and the Materialists thus pertains to the way they understand the question of causality in biology. The essential cause for Galen is what we commonly call the final or purposeful cause a purpose or an aim due to which a specific thing happens. Conversely, the Materialists renounce the final cause as an implausible one, inasmuch as they do not perceive nature as purposeful. In relation to this, Galen gives us an example of the final cause referring to a man who goes to the market. If somebody asked him why he went, he would definitely reply at once that it is because he has two legs which enable his body to move on the ground. It is indisputably one of the causes of

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<sup>10</sup> Claudii Galeni Opera Omnia, Editionem curavit C.G.Kühn, 20 B (Hildesheim: Olms, 1964) VI, 837.

<sup>11</sup> Claudii Galeni Opera Omnia, Editionem curavit C.G.Kühn, 20 B (Hildesheim: Olms, 1964) VII, 194-196.

his actions, the so-called instrumental cause, but a more important one, which includes the concept of purposefulness, is in fact the final cause. In this case it is the intention of the man to buy something in the market, or possibly to meet with his friends.<sup>12</sup> Galen ascribes the final cause to nature itself, due to it being, according to his view, an intelligent and purposeful agent. It does everything with a particular purpose, and hence arranges everything in the best possible way. Similarly to Aristotle, Galen also claims that nature does absolutely nothing in vain.

Purposeful nature in bodies acts with the aid of certain faculties or powers (*dinamis*) that it possesses in itself. The primary activities of nature are: birth, growth, and nutrition.<sup>13</sup> Birth pertains to organism formation out of embryo. With the aid of semen, the menstrual blood of the mother, withheld in the body during pregnancy, is transformed into a placenta and organs of a new organism. Thus we can say that nature is cleverer than a craftsman, because the sculptor Phidias, for instance, cannot transform wax into gold or iron. Semen, likewise, has a certain feature which enables it to draw blood to itself, and yet another faculty by which the blood is either shaped or dissolved.<sup>14</sup> The faculty of growth works in those parts of the organism which have come into being, increasing their volume and shape. The faculty of nutrition turns food and drink that the body takes into parts of the organism, aided by blood as a mediator, whose primary function is in fact to deliver the food to specific body parts. Blood is transformed into body tissue, more or less straightforwardly, depending on the similarity of the latter to the former. Turning blood into flesh is, compared to some other transformations, relatively simple. However, turning blood into bones is, incidentally, a much more complicated and longer process. Food also differs in how suitable it is for transforming into a useful kind of blood, blood that would reach its goal, the feeding of the organism. Flesh, for instance, can almost completely be turned into useful blood, with the exception of a tiny leftover (*perittoma*), which is inadequate for transformation. There is such food that man is incapable of transforming into anything else. Galen, for example, considers

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<sup>12</sup> Claudii Galeni Opera Omnia, Editionemcuravit C.G.Kühn, 20 B (Hildesheim: Olms, 1964) III, 464.

<sup>13</sup> Claudii Galeni Opera Omnia, Editionemcuravit C.G.Kühn, 20 B (Hildesheim: Olms, 1964) II, 10-11.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 82-86.

that, in the case of humans, it is grass. It is transformed into useless sediment, whereas vegetables, for example radishes, have a small useful component, but leave behind a huge sediment. To release itself from such a sediment, nature uses the faculty of disposing of the surplus of it. It hence takes what it needs from the food through the faculty of attraction and disposes of the rest. Since it does not act solely as a craftsman, but as someone who makes sure that the organism is provided with everything it requires as well, it takes only what is suitable.<sup>15</sup>

In this review of Galen's understanding of nature, the following ought to be emphasized as well. Namely, according to the results he obtained, nature rules the body from three centers, or, borrowing the term Plato coined, "three parts of the soul": liver, heart, and brain, which act through veins, arteries, and the nervous system. Referring to Hippocrates, Galen considers him right in the claim that the center of all faculties is in the brain, i.e. soul, as it is commonly known that Plato used to say as well. P. de Lecy offers a thorough report on this view, as well as on other opposing theories from the antiquity, for instance, Aristotelian, according to which the center of human organism is in fact in the heart.<sup>16</sup> The question of where the center of all our faculties resides was one of the major apples of discord in ancient medicine. What can clearly be seen, based on Lecy's analysis, is that the sticking points of various theories in medicine in fact followed the already established discords in philosophy, especially in relation to Plato's theory of ideas and Aristotle's study of *ousia*.

The faculty of nutrition, also referred to as an appetitive one by Galen, takes its origin from the liver, where veins also originate from, and where blood is created out of the material coming from the intestines. What should be emphasized here is only that in Galen's perspective of how the organism works there was no room for circulation. Namely, as he sees it, blood flow in both veins and arteries occurs from the center outwards slowly, in the veins with the aim of feeding the body, being replaced in the center after it has been "spent" in the periphery.<sup>17</sup> This faculty is also in charge of the sense of enjoyment. However,

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>16</sup> P. de Lecy, *On the doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato* (München: Academie Verlag, 1980), 65ff.

<sup>17</sup> Claudii Galeni Opera Omnia, Editionem curavit C.G.Kühn, 20 B (Hildesheim: Olms, 1964) X, 635.

much nobler a power is distributed through arteries from its source in the heart. It is a spiritual or vital faculty, whose function is to equip the soul with a *tonus (humor)*, to be unswerving in carrying out the orders coming from reason, and what is more, in the moments of wrath, to provide a “boiling” within the heart in its left chamber, to be more specific. Moreover, this faculty distributes the heat and growth to body parts, and provides arteries with pulsation. The condition of this faculty can be observed by measuring the pulse, which clearly indicates the current strength of this faculty. Thus the noblest of faculties is in fact a logical one, with its center in the brain, transferring through the nerves an element known as the psychic pneuma, formed in the chambers of the brain. It brings sensory and voluntary movements to all the body parts and simultaneously brings forth imagination, memory, knowledge, and contemplation.<sup>18</sup> According to Plato’s view, disagreed with by Hippocrates, this was the only immortal part of the soul. Galen, though full of respect for Plato, was uncertain about the immortality of any part of the soul, thus regarding it more as an issue for theoretical philosophy than for medicine.<sup>19</sup>

Nature creates everything out of the four elements (earth, water, air, and fire), connected to four Aristotle’s qualities (hot, cold, wet, and dry). Fire is hot and dry, air hot and wet, water cold and wet, whereas earth is cold and dry. In celestial phenomena there is a fifth element, ether. It is more divine than the materials found in the sublunary sphere, where all living beings reside. However, it also dwells in certain amount in the innate heat produced by the heart, as well as in semen, which has the power of creating life in the same manner as the sun creates the heat. These four qualities are of utmost importance for Galen’s understanding of nature. Namely, they are united in the bodies of all animals whose bloodstream consists of four body fluids, which can therefore be taken as the key elements of living beings. Those are: yellow bile (hot and dry), blood (hot and wet), phlegm (cold and wet), and black bile (cold and dry). The first three are true components of the body, whilst black bile is a fictitious substance devised in order to make all the body fluids complete. As it is commonly known, Galen borrowed this system of four body fluids from Hippocratic school, and developed it further. Despite the impact this

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<sup>18</sup> Claudii Galeni Opera Omnia, Editionem curavit C.G.Kühn, 20 B (Hildesheim: Olms, 1964) V, 600.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 791-794.

school had on the subsequent development of medicine, it is one of the most problematic, most contradictory parts of his scientific system.

Based on everything aforementioned, we can say that the first essential principle of Galen's teaching is the one of the purposeful nature acting like a craftsman, creating and regulating the work of living beings. The second one is the principle of balance. Four qualities and four body fluids, though tightly linked, have in fact quite distinctive features. Yellow bile and blood contain warmth/heat, whereas phlegm and black bile are cold. On the other hand, blood and phlegm are wet, while yellow and black bile are dry. The idea of balance seems to derive from Alcmaeon of Croton, who claimed that health is in fact characterized by an equal balance of its opposite, whereas illness is marked with the predominance (*monarchia*) of one of these elements. This balance of body fluids affects both body and spirit equally. However, the well-known theory of the four temperament types, or four humors (sanguine, choleric, phlegmatic, and melancholic), derived from four types of body fluids, did not originate from Galen's teaching, but appeared later. On the foundations of these insights about four body fluids and the principle of balance, a whole system of treatment, perceived by Galen as a Hippocratic one, came into being, according to which opposites in fact have a mutual function as the key medicaments for treatment. If, for instance, a patient is hot and feverish, he is treated by coldness. Conversely, if too dry, he must be treated with moistening, etc. In that respect, Galen sees health as a harmonious balance among the four qualities, i.e. four body fluids within the organism.

However, it is here, at the key point of Galen's teaching where he defines health itself, that we come across one of the major problems of his system. Two types of bile and phlegm are pathological body fluids in the sense that Galen had a difficulty deciding what their purpose is, besides maintaining balance within the organism. Yellow bile, for example, is pathologically hot and dry, and if there is too much of it in the body, it will cause high temperature. If health consists of a perfect mixture (*crasis*) of four qualities as well as the same amount of body fluids, while illness means the imbalance (*dycrasia*) of four qualities and body fluids, then each one of body fluids is a potential cause of imbalance. Taken independently, they could be a source of imbalance, i.e. illness. However, it is here that we encounter a problem. Galen claims so for two types of bile and phlegm, but he is unable to admit that blood can

also be a cause of imbalance. Namely, he compares four body fluids with four seasons of the year. Blood, in that metaphor, corresponds to spring a season characterized by growth and development of the body. According to his view, as opposed to other seasons, spring is in itself harmonious, and balanced. It is neither too hot nor too cold, neither too wet nor too dry. It is, therefore, moderate in every respect.<sup>20</sup> Analogously, Galen ascribes the same qualities to blood. The entire nutrition of the organism is directly dependent on blood. If the malfunctioning of an organ leads to a production of blood which is in itself imbalanced and therefore a potential cause of imbalance, it finally results in illness. Hence the problem Galen's scientific system confronts is the following: how can it be that such a well-balanced body fluid can form a harmonious scheme together with three fluids which are a potential source of imbalance? To this Galen does not offer an answer.

Notwithstanding the fact that Galen gives almost equal attention to all the qualities as equally important opposites, heat seems somehow the most significant one for him. According to his view, there are two kinds of heat: a common heat that leads to things burning, and the innate heat of living beings themselves, which enables things to grow and hence is a cause of birth. The latter kind is in Galen's writings frequently identified with nature. The moment that this kind of heat leaves the body is the moment that the living being ceases to be alive. Inasmuch as this kind of heat is transferred to all body parts via arterial circulation, it is, likewise, often identified with blood. As its very name suggests, the innate heat does not come from outside, but reaches the embryo from the semen, which contains the heat in itself. The breathing function is directly linked to the intensity of innate heat, whose center is in the left antechamber of the heart. Breath comes directly from the oxygen mixed with the arterial blood in the left heart chamber, and via it, gets distributed further. The innate heat is the most conspicuous upon the birth itself, and since its source is in the blood, children have more blood than adults, in a manner of speaking. With growing up and getting old, the amount of blood and the heat are decreased, so that especially the limbs of very old people are usually colder. The most thorough account of place and significance of Galen's understanding of the innate heat, and its connection with the

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<sup>20</sup> Claudii Galeni Opera Omnia, Editionem curavit C.G.Kühn, 20 B (Hildesheim: Olms, 1964) I, 524-534.

heart, can be found in Furley and Wilkie.<sup>21</sup> Even though it may seem nowadays that these kinds of analyses of Galen's meticulous considerations about the specific human organs and their functions do not make much sense, inasmuch as the aforementioned insights have been overcome by modern and contemporary discoveries in medicine, they in fact help us grasp Galen's understanding of the human organism in its entirety, and finally, his complete understanding of human nature.

Excessive heat in the body commonly causes high temperature, which may come in several types. In Galen's view, all types of high temperature are pathological imbalances of heat. For instance, he would not have agreed with the modern idea that high temperature is a kind of adaptation, i.e. a sign of body's struggle against the illness. It comes to high temperature when the heat increases to such an extent that it disturbs certain functions of the organism and debilitates a normal functioning of the body. There are several reasons why the body heats up and becomes hotter. Galen distinguishes several types of temperature. Short-term temperature appears due to a momentary overheating of the body. The doctor's task is simply to reduce the temperature and eliminate the cause of overheating. Temperature due to an inflammatory process is more complex and hence it might be necessary to eliminate the cause of the inflammation itself. Bloodletting is one of the recommendations that Galen offers in this case. A major role in decreasing the temperature is also played by body's release of excess materials, i.e. its discharge, which was considered unusually important in the ancient medicine.

Even though Galen's system of pathology may seem too complex, it is basically very simple. All medical illnesses arise due to imbalance of this or that kind. All that a doctor has to do in that case is re-establish the disturbed balance of four body fluids within the organism. His task is not an easy one inasmuch as all patients differ in the natural state they are in. Some are naturally cold, whereas others are hot, etc. Thus, throughout the treatment of a patient, it is of utmost importance to take into consideration the natural state he is in, that is, his personal humor. In that respect, each patient must be approached individually, regarding both his natural humor and physical condition, and his lifestyle in the present, as well as in the past. As opposed to, for instance, the Methodist

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<sup>21</sup> D.J. Furley, and J.S. Wilkie, *Galen on Respiration and the Arteries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1984), 10.

school which held that during the treatment of every person we must adhere to one and the same principle applicable to all, Galen's approach to treatment was an individualist one.

However, we want to emphasize some concrete issues of Galen's scientific system here as well. First and foremost, namely, this is not a story of a coherent system in the understanding of human nature, health, and illness. As we have seen, there are many contradictions in Galen's teachings, which have remained unresolved. Many of his contemplations and attitudes have become obsolete nowadays, and, viewed from the contemporary stage of the development in medicine and science, they look naïve. However, what is particularly worth emphasizing in Galen's teaching is his tendency to regard human nature as very indented, complex, and altogether concrete, in the context of health maintenance and treatment of illness, as opposed to viewing it through the prism of some "great" philosophical theory, as, for instance, was done by Plato or Aristotle. Dealing with the issues of health and illness, Galen has before him a flesh-and-blood person who is to be examined, observed, analyzed, and then, based on all those insights, he makes his own conclusions about the nature of health and illness, i.e. about the essence of human nature. In accordance with some contemporary trends in philosophy and ethics, in deliberation of human nature and the problems of health and illness, he takes into consideration the elements from man's environment as well (air, water, earth, etc.), which makes him quite contemporary. It is a complex approach to the issue of human health and illness such as this one that enables Galen to look upon human nature itself in a more acute and comprehensive manner. In this way he establishes a base for better understanding of the link existing between research into human health and illness, and the very nature of mankind, that is, the essence of what humanity really is. In that respect, it seems Galen is really becoming quite contemporary. His approach to the study of these issues fits very well into what H. T. Engelhardt and F. Jotterand emphasize in their preface to the Pellegrino's famous book, *The Philosophy of Medicine Reborn*. Namely, basing their explanation of a new approach to the issues in philosophy of medicine on Pellegrino's clues, they in fact argue that a "new-born philosophy of medicine" today must necessarily be developed on the basis of a different approach to the relation between eminently medical problems, and a thorough questioning of the essence of humanity, or, in Galen's words, the essence of human na-

ture.<sup>22</sup> In other words, Galen's insight into the significance of understanding of human nature prior to further dealing with concrete issues in medical practice is in accordance with the contemporary streams in the development of the philosophy of medicine.

What we found particularly significant in Galen's view on human nature is a lack of the "big ideas" and strong theoretical approach, which burdened for instance Plato and the members of Methodists school. Galen realized the whole complexity and relativity of human health and first of all he comprehended its dependence on many agents: four qualities and four fluids, air, water, earth, etc. That's why the treatment of the patient has to be individual. Theory cannot cure. It is only the physician who cures on the basis of some theoretical ideas, but firstly on the basis of his experience. However, the physician does not cure the illness, but the living man who is ill. Given the noted relativity and complexity of human health, it is easier now to understand why it was so difficult for Galen to talk about immortality concerning human nature. If somebody is so dependent on so many agents and if her/his health is always on the edge between balance and imbalance, it is difficult to advocate the perception of human nature as something solid and steady. Supported by the physician here and there, nature is continuously balancing between balance and imbalance, which means, between health and illness. Since the physician always cures the particular living human, medicine has to have "human face." This is the most important lesson we should today learn from Galen, and we could not learn it from Plato or members of Methodist school. Galen's idea that throughout the treatment of a patient, it is of utmost importance to take into consideration his personal humor, physical condition, and his lifestyle in the present and in the past, has to be today a main marker for the further development of medicine.

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<sup>22</sup> E.D. Pellegrino, *The Philosophy of Medicine Reborn* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 2008), 4ff.

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# INTERPRETATION IN ART AND BEYOND

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## **On the Aesthetics of the Sublime and the Boundaries of Understandability**

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### ***Abstract***

Drawing on Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition*, the paper discusses the relation between the aesthetic of the sublime that underlies modern art and the rationale of avant-gardes, and ventures an enquiry into the problematics of the understandability of 'formlessness.' The implicit character of the difficulties for understanding formlessness is elucidated by recourse to Kant's treatment of the sublime, Roland Barthes distinction between first and second order signification and Derrida's concept of 'différance.' It is concluded that if, following in Lyotard's steps, we refuse to resort to the transcendental illusion of a totalizing real unity and true infinity, then the sublime will inevitably remain not only beyond the boundary of understandability, but also of representability.

At a time when Malevich's *White on White*, John Cage's *4'33*, or Nathalie Sarraute's *Silence* can no longer induce shock, it has become more viable to explore the rationale behind their aesthetics impartially. Since the impetus behind this enquiry is not to address the problematic of literary, music or art theory, but to put the somewhat paradoxical attempt at presenting the unrepresentable in a philosophic perspective, it will be irrelevant for our purposes whether such works are defined by some as modernist or postmodernist. Avoiding any mechanistic distinction between modern and postmodern, we will proceed from Lyotard's definition of the postmodern as "that which, in the modern, puts forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms;...that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unpre-

sentable,”<sup>1</sup> and refer to all such works simply as ‘avant-gardes.’

Our point of departure will be Lyotard’s view of the aesthetic rationale of Modernity and Postmodernity presented in his seminal work, *The Postmodern Condition*. In the face of the appeals for liquidating the heritage of the avant-gardes, he questions Habermas’s suggestion that the remedy for the gulf between culture and life lies in ‘changing the status of aesthetic experience’ so that “it is put in relation with problems of existence,”<sup>2</sup> thus creating a unity of experience and bridging the gap between cognitive, ethical and political discourses. Sceptical towards bridging this chasm, described in Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*, by invoking some Hegelian transcendental illusion, Lyotard warns against the ominous danger of the nostalgia for the whole and the one, and calls for a war on totality. He describes the situation of any modernity as one in which for some reason the belief in reality is shattered, so that it is found to ‘lack reality,’ and it therefore sees the emergence of new realities. For Lyotard such a ‘lack of reality’ is akin to the Kantian theme of the sublime. Therefore, for him, it is the aesthetic of the sublime that underlies modern art and the rationale of avant-gardes. Unlike the sentiment of the beautiful which is achieved when a work of art corresponds to the principle of universal consensus, the sublime involves incommensurability of reality to concept, that is, inadequacy between the ability to conceive of something and to present it, and therefore evokes both pleasure—from conceiving—and pain—from failing to present. It imparts what is unrepresentable: the infinitely great, the infinitely powerful, the ultimately simple. The way this end is achieved, according to Kant, is by means of formlessness, or the absence of form—avoidance of figuration and representation, so as to shatter the fetters binding thought to the gaze, and let it venture into the realm of the unrepresentable.

Taking this affinity between the aesthetic of the sublime and avant-gardes as a point of departure, we will venture an enquiry into the problematics of the understanding of the latter, or more generally, of the understandability of ‘formlessness.’ We will first of all have recourse to the source of Lyotard’s interpretation of the sublime—Kant. According

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<sup>1</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 81.

<sup>2</sup> Jürgen Habermas, “Modernity versus Postmodernity”, *New German Critique* 2 (1981): 12.

to Kant, the domains of the aesthetic and the pure reason are entirely separate, so within the Kantian system it is not possible to find a direct answer to the question of the understandability or non-understandability of the sublime. And yet, there is an important clue: for Kant, one possible way to conceive the sublime is by formlessness or the absence of form.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, the only way understanding operates, is through forms. Thus, it could be claimed that the sublime is—at least, in some cases—beyond the boundary of understanding. The flaw in presuming that formlessness as such invokes the sublime is in the substitution of implication with equivalence: we can sense the sublime when we are confronted by what causes it—the infinite, the boundless etc.—but even though it appears to us as formlessness, it does not follow that it is enough to be confronted by formlessness, in order to conceive the infinite and the boundless. We are as if confronting not it, but its empty form—which is familiar to many from their experience with 4'33.

We can further try to elucidate the implicit character of the difficulties for understanding formlessness by turning to Roland Barthes.<sup>4</sup> Stepping on a distinction between denotation—the literal meaning, and connotation—suggested or associated meaning, Barthes introduces his terms of first- and second-order signification. The first-order sign is 'appropriated' and becomes the signifier of a new signified, forming with it a new second-order sign. This second-order sign 'parasitizes' and depends for its survival on the first-order sign. Within this distinction, it might be argued that radical absence of form in art is an attempt at a second order signification without a first. Since there is nothing to suspend the second order of signification, it is at a risk of 'flopping.' The 'reader' of the message, who, after the death of the author has been announced, plays the decisive role for creating the work, is confronted with the extremely demanding task of creating something out of nothing, or that 'which is' from that 'which is not'—or the task of the author *per se*. Thus, it appears that the author is not dead, but has abdicated, leaving the challenging task of creation to the audience. But since such a challenge is beyond the powers of just anyone, we are faced with the

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<sup>3</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), 98.

<sup>4</sup> Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (The Noonday Press - New York, 1991).

paradoxical situation in which it takes an author to be an audience. Therefore, though not impossible, the interpretation, or understanding of such messages is by default limited but to a few.

And finally, we will look to Derrida for a prompt. He believes that the true nature of signification can be fully accounted for not by the Saussurean concept of ‘difference’, but by what he calls ‘différance.’ For Saussure, concepts “are defined not positively, in terms of their content, but negatively by contrast with other items in the same system,”<sup>5</sup> or in other words, the signs in a semiotic system are linked by means of ‘difference without presence.’ While fully accepting that signs are defined not by their positive content—by referring to a real object—but negatively—by phonic and conceptual differences—Derrida challenges Saussure’s notion of ‘difference without presence’ and introduces his own notion of “différance.”<sup>6</sup> It comprises both the idea of difference as distinction, as well as that of displacement and deferring, and has the advantage of taking into account the displacement of the meaning of each sign (caused by the fact that the meaning of a sign is not contained within itself, but points to other signs), as well as the deferring of meaning in time. The latter temporal element in the process of signification is introduced by Derrida: the meaning of a particular sign is delayed along an endless chain of signification devoid of a transcendent signifier. Thus, due to this special displacement and temporal deferral of the sign, the presence of the thing which the sign is supposed to substitute is also continually displaced and deferred along the same chain. Since, as Derrida points out, the sign takes the place of the referent, i.e. the present thing, it can be said to represent the present in its absence. Or, when the present cannot be presented, then it is signified following the detour of the sign. Thus, by its very nature the sign implies deferring the ‘moment in which we can encounter the thing itself.’ Viewed from this perspective, it might be said that in the avant-gardes, meeting the unrepresentable entity behind the sublime is deferred endlessly in vicious regress ad infinitum. No matter what sign is chosen to present it, it will inevitably refer us to another sign, and thus to yet another ‘signifiable,’ whereas what

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<sup>5</sup> Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Roy Harris (London: Duckworth, 1983), 115.

<sup>6</sup> Jacques Derrida, “Différance,” in *Speech and Phenomena, and Other Essays on Husserl’s Theory of Signs* (Evanston ILL.: Northwestern University Press, 1973).

is necessary for encountering the unrepresentable, is breaking free from the chain, going beyond it to the domain of the 'unsignifiable.' The situation is reminiscent of the bad eternity, where, in Hegel's words, "Something becomes an other; this other is itself somewhat; therefore it likewise becomes an other, and so on ad infinitum. This infinity is bad infinity: it is only a negation of an infinite; but the finite rises again the same as ever, and is never got rid of and absorbed."<sup>7</sup>

If, following in Lyotard's steps, we refuse to resort to the transcendental illusion of a totalizing real unity and true infinity, then the sublime will inevitably remain not only beyond the boundary of understandability, but also of representability. It appears to be possible only as an individual experience, and any piece of literary, musical or art work risks to remain incommunicable. If we go back to the avant-gardes examples we started with, it might be worth asking whether it has not been the shock of encountering them, rather than their mere 'formlessness' that invoked a sense of the sublime in their once audiences. Once the shock is gone, together with their novelty, their message can no longer be suspended by the aesthetic structure of the sublime. Not akin to the aesthetics of the beautiful in their very conception, they have no choice but to become unaesthetic.

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<sup>7</sup> Georg W. Fr. Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, trans. W. T. Harris (Hegel by Hypertext): § 93-94, accessed February 20 2016, <http://hegel.net/en/etexts.htm>.

# **The Sublime and its Connection to Spirituality in Modern and Postmodern Philosophy and Visual Arts**

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## ***Abstract***

This article reviews the notion of the sublime as it is seen in a few of the most influential texts in Western philosophy. The ancient text *Peri Hypsous* is the base, which the early modern thinkers Kant and Burke use to elaborate the notion. Later, Lyotard takes up the sublime to interpret Modern and Postmodern visual art.

The sublime is necessarily linked with art. It is the notion that presents deep existential questions such as the existence of God and the meaning of the human life. Thus, the sublime is the artistic way to spirituality, especially in works of Newman and Rothko.

## ***Introduction***

In this paper, I will trace the development of the notion of the sublime and its connection to postmodern and modern philosophy and visual art. I will first focus on philosophical views on the sublime, which I consider the root of inspiration for some Romantic and modern painters. Edmund Burke, Immanuel Kant and Jean François-Lyotard will be considered in this part of the paper. The second part of my paper will deal with concrete examples of modern and postmodern art that directly implement some of the meanings of the sublime (Barnett Newmann, Mark Rothko and Bill Viola). I will examine how, in modern and postmodern art, the sublime and spirituality become stripped of a strictly ethical function as we know it in traditional religions, but still provide spiritual meanings that can be ethical. The sublime is related to metaphysics because it refers to the beyond and these spiritual meanings that the notion of the sublime evokes are of great importance to modern and postmodern artists. I use the term spirituality in the sense that Rina Arya gives to the notion—spirituality, she says, is a vague notion, however it includes the problem of human existence and mortality on the one side, and the search for meanings, on the

other. Spirituality is also related to the mystical and the creation of a work of art as well as some themes in the work of art can be called spiritual in a sense. It can be part of religious beliefs but it can also exist separately, since, I think, it is the basic of human nature and everyone can experience and develop it. It is also related to some kind of transcendence, something that is beyond what we see and our striving to attain it.

Spirituality as a term becomes exploited in Modernity as an opposition to the materialistic approach to the world. Kandinsky's appeal to pay attention to the spiritual in art and the thriving of the theosophical movement at the end of the nineteenth century shows how a one-sided rationalistic vision of the world and human nature was insufficient. Kandinsky also emphasizes the promethean role that art and the artist have for the change of the society. He does not use the sublime to focus on spirituality, however we can see how the two notions can be analyzed together in the work of other artists.

The artists' views on the primary role of the sublime and spirituality in art and the role of the artist raise awareness of the problems of the human condition and their solutions in a globalized and technological society. The sublime can serve as the point of awakening to the spirituality that can help "uprooted" individuals find deeper meanings in their lives and feel that they belong.

### *Origins of the notion of the sublime and its modern use*

The notion of the sublime is a widespread and flexible notion. The first serious and systematic thinker thought to have dealt with it is the Greek critic Longinus. He is thought to be the author of the treatise *On the Sublime (Peri Hypsous)*, although there are disputes about the authorship. The text is a product of literary criticism, dated around the first century AD, which associated the notion of the sublime with literary works and the observance of the magnificence of nature. Around forty sections have survived from this text. The ancient text came to Modernity through the translations of French and Italian authors. In France the treatise on the sublime became popular in the eighteenth century due to the representative translation made by Nicolas Despréaux Boileau (1636–1711). This was a crucial point in the development of the notion, which influenced most of the arts, particularly poetry and visual arts.

The meaning of the word "*sublime*" is of crucial importance for our understanding of the notion as the sign and path to spirituality. It

comes from the Latin prefix *sub* that was attached to different words, thus changing the meaning and pointing to something that was “below” or “under”. Sometimes however it would imply meanings of something “high” or “above”, although this is not the common case. The noun *limen*, which is the second part of the word, means limit, boundary.<sup>1</sup> In a sense the sublime has always been referred to the boundaries—of our understanding of the world, of our nature and its ethical implications. From ancient times until the present, the notion of the sublime has always been associated with some transformative power (ethical function). Unfortunately, today it seems that this ethical function of the sublime has lost most of its power, bringing the notion closer to associations such as sweet, interesting, beautiful, beautiful-but-outdated.

Since ancient times the notion of the sublime, however, implied loftiness, higher power, grandeur, awe, fear, something that is all-encompassing (thus violating our boundaries). It was associated either with the feelings we have when facing some natural or psychological phenomena, or with the objects that produce such feelings. The sublime also assumes the feeling of pain and this, in general is what always captures the attention and provokes reaction. While pleasure might be taken for granted because it is actually considered a normal state of being, it seems that pain always appears unacceptable. The sublime, then, is what can be more deeply sensed than beauty, which is associated with pleasure only and thus attended to *in a different way*—in an engaged but still calm and sometimes even superficial way. While the sublime feeling, namely because it includes pain, cannot be ignored and attracts one’s attention more deeply. In the course of the work we will see that the notion of the sublime implies both pleasure and pain. The history of philosophy and aesthetics shows that the sublime has been associated with Divinity and with different sorts of spiritual experiences as well.

### ***Edmund Burke—Pioneer of the Modern Sublime***

The notion of the sublime became very popular in British philosophy and art through the systematic work of the Irish thinker Edmund

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<sup>1</sup> Riding, Ch., and Liewellyn, N., *British Art and the Sublime*. <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/the-sublime/christine-riding-and-nigel-liewellyn-british-art-and-the-sublime-r1109418>.

Burke (1729–1772). One of the crucial characteristics of the notion as it comes from Burke is *the feeling of terror*. Thus, landscapes with untamed nature or literary works that provided horrifying scenes such as those by Dante Alighieri and John Milton were considered sublime. Paintings that represented biblical scenes were also regarded as sublime. Biblical stories with suffering and extraordinary powers, which trespassed the boundaries of our ordinary understanding were chosen.

Edmund Burke introduced his elaboration on the sublime in the *Philosophical Enquiry Into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757). The text is considered to be the only purely philosophical work of art he made, since from a very early age Burke was inclined to political philosophy. He is thought to be the founder of modern conservatism. He was actively engaged in the social and political life of Britain. His attitude towards “pure” philosophy was shown later as he refused to expand the *Philosophical Enquiry* when he was asked to do so by his literary executors Sir Joshua Reynolds and French Laurence. The reason was that, according to his words, he didn’t want to deal with “abstract speculation.”

Burke wrote the text when he was very young (less than nineteen years old) and although he later discredited it, the treatise attracted the attention of other influential thinkers at that time, such as Denis Diderot and Immanuel Kant. This text appears crucial to Romantic art and modern philosophy as a whole. Kant himself admitted he was deeply influenced by Burke’s notion of the sublime. In turn, Lyotard drew from Kant’s philosophy and applied some of his insights. Burke associated the sublime with feelings of awe, wonder, dread, terror and fear and gave attention to works of art and natural phenomena when talking about the sublime.

Burke’s treatise is well organized, very detailed, with accessible language. Throughout the whole work the thinker elucidates the nature of the sublime and the beautiful in nature and works of art. According to Burke, the sublime is the strongest emotion possible because it touches on the passions of self-preservation, and because it is associated with pain, it has far more effect on us than pleasure. At the same time, however, the sublime provokes a feeling of delight, which is different than the feeling of pain, since it is a derivative feeling. The feeling of pleasure in the sublime comes after the pain of feeling terrified for one’s own life. Delight comes when we understand that we are not actually threat-

ened. This specific characteristic of the sublime—to feel passively terrified<sup>2</sup>—will be used by both Kant and Lyotard. Greatness or large size is not always characteristic of the sublime, for Burke, while terror is one of its essential features.<sup>3</sup> Obscurity or lack of clarity is another characteristic of the sublime that we can associate with the feeling of terror. Obscurity is necessary for the feeling of terror because if we know each detail of something that is about to terrify us, we cannot actually be amazed, surprised, caught in the sublime. We will see later how the Burkean sublime is exploited in Romantic art and later modern and postmodern art.

The sublime in Burke is directly linked to the void, which we see in late modern and postmodern art. Void is the emotion, caused by the feeling of privation. Obscurity, solitude, silence and puzzlement in Newman's paintings, vacuity in war sublime—all of them refer to and can be called the sublime. Burke deals with the feeling of the sublime as it is produced by objects in nature and in art. In its utmost form, the sublime provokes astonishment—it captures the mind completely and even overwhelms it. "In this case the mind is so entirely filled with its object [of the sublime], that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that object which employs it."<sup>4</sup> This is close to Longinus' text on the sublime where he mentions that the sublime throws a spell over us. It is a power we cannot control: "the influences of the sublime bring power and irresistible might to bear, and reign supreme over every hearer."<sup>5</sup> It can also elicit feelings of respect, admiration and reverence. The feeling of the sublime is then closer to the religious feeling of honoring the objects of nature that are all-encompassing and beyond our mind, or honoring their Creator. Sometimes as it is the case in Kant and Longinus, it is beyond our capacity to understand, to grasp things. The inability to grasp things leads to the idea of infinity. If we cannot grasp something, we render it infinite, despite of whether this is so or not, Burke says. The inability to grasp things also appeals to great engage-

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<sup>2</sup> I use this term to ascribe to the phenomenon of the sublime an experience of terror without being in real danger.

<sup>3</sup> Not only magnitude but also minuteness in its utmost and ungraspable extreme can be sublime, Burke claims, as it overwhelms our rational capacities.

<sup>4</sup> Burke, E. *Philosophical Enquiry Into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Beautiful and the Sublime*, part II, section I. Of the Passions Caused by the Sublime.

<sup>5</sup> Longinus. *On the Sublime*. Section I.

ment, to deep emotional connection with the object that appears to us as sublime. This is how we can be immersed in the sublime and moved by a poem, Longinus' text implies.

***Kant's Sublime—Toward an Awareness  
of our own Spiritual Nature***

Not much later than Burke the central figure of modern philosophy Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) gave his account of the sublime in the second book of the *Critique of Judgment* (1790) titled “Analytic of the Sublime.” Sections 23–29 of the *Critique* focus specifically on the notion of the sublime. In this treatise, Kant made a crucial difference between his notion of the sublime and the notion of Burke, although Kant renders himself indebted to Burke when it comes to analyzing the sublime. Burke's notion could be applied both to an object and an internal state of the mind. However, Kant associates the sublime only with the subject. The sublime is a feeling, a part of one's reason rather than an objective property;

For what is sublime, in the proper meaning of the term, cannot be contained in any sensible form but concerns only ideas of reason, which though they cannot be exhibited adequately, are aroused and called to mind by this very inadequacy, which can be exhibited in sensibility.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, by appointing the sublime only as a subjective property, and not as a property of the object, Kant makes a breakthrough into earlier philosophical interpretations of the sublime. Unlike other authors who claim that the source of the sublime is the object in front of the spectator, Kant claims that the sublime is produced in our own mind when we find ourselves unable to fully comprehend the object in front of us, when we find it by means of our own measure as absolutely great. Kant's aesthetic sublime is associated with formlessness, disharmony and chaos, which can be compared to Burke's vision of some of the sources of the sublime: obscurity and privation (darkness).

Kant's notion of the sublime brings associations of destruction, chaos and violence. Violence over reason, which cannot grasp what is viewed as the sublime. “For while taste for the beautiful presupposes

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<sup>6</sup> Kant, I. *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (Indianapolis/Cambridge:Hackett Publishing Company), “Analytic of the sublime,” § 23. Transition from the faculty for judging the beautiful to that for judging the sublime., p.99.

and sustains the mind in *restful* contemplation, the feeling of the sublime carries with it, as its character, a mental *agitation* connected with our judging of the object.”<sup>7</sup> Also, just like the Burkean sublime, the Kantian sublime elicits admiration and respect and brings negative feelings because it is a mixture of pleasure and pain. In referring to our judgment of an object considered to be sublime, Kant says:

since the mind is not just attracted by the object but is alternately always repelled as well, the liking for the sublime contains not so much a positive pleasure as rather admiration and respect, and so should be called a negative pleasure.<sup>8</sup>

He, just like Burke, shows magnitude to be an essential feature of the sublime. Even if we are not negatively attracted by the content of the object, we can be attracted by the size of the object and thus call it sublime, although as we pointed out, the object according to Kant, cannot be sublime. In such cases we are attracted because the size expands our imagination, Kant claims, it goes beyond our own boundaries of understanding. In sections 25 and 26 of the “Analytic of the Sublime,” where he offers an explication of the term and an estimation of the magnitude of natural things, Kant shows that we cannot render any object objectively sublime because the judgment of the sublime claims to have standards of measuring which are beyond any sensible standards and which are within us. And since we don’t refer to external standards, our judgment of the sublime can only be subjective, or aesthetic. The notion of the sublime also subjectively claims for measuring in total, it aims at totality. Kant makes distinction between our logical estimation of the sublime by numerical concepts, which progresses to infinity, and our aesthetic estimation of the sublime, which has a limit. This limit enables the feeling of the sublime indeed because when we feel it, we can feel the sublime, something that overwhelms our capacities to understand. At the same time, Kant mentions that we grasp objects of crude nature or the giant pyramids of Egypt as a whole, and this capacity to grasp things as a whole necessarily leads to the existence of a supersensible nature in us that can comprehend/intuit things as totality despite the incompatibility

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, § 24. On the division of an investigation of the feeling of the sublime, p. 101.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, § 23., p. 98.

of logical and aesthetic estimation of the sublime. However man cannot apprehend logically, mathematically the progression to infinity, he always misses something out as he goes along the process of understanding and grasping things in intuition. Therefore, his experience of the sublime is always subjective. As we shall discuss later, the supersensible substrate of nature could be a starting point or the source of spirituality.

The aesthetic sublime is linked to morality as well. The sublime causes distress of the faculties. The ideas of reason surpass human sensibility and at the same time one finds pleasure in realizing that sensibility is obeyed to striving towards ideas of reason. The sublime is an important feeling because it gives us awareness of our own superiority to nature within us and outside us, that is sublimity gives us awareness of our own spirituality, it helps us see ourselves as part of that supernatural substrate that is the source and the measure of the sublime in us.<sup>9</sup> It reveals ourselves as moral beings and it helps us not only to feel, which can be a deceitful feeling, as Burke's reflection suggested, but affirm infinity (and divinity) as real, according to Karise Elise Lokke and Kant himself.

*The mind is forced beyond perception into the realm of ideas.* Here it forms ideas of totality, endlessness and infinity suggested by the impressions which the senses are unable to comprehend. Thus the mind turns in upon itself, away from the senses, and gains awareness of its affinity with the divine.<sup>10</sup>

In her article "The Role of Sublimity in the Development of Modernist Aesthetics," Kari Elise Lokke appoints the moral and spiritual function of the sublime as one of Kant's best philosophical achievements: "It is this turning in upon the self in order to find in the spiritual world that which the world of the senses cannot provide which is the essence of Kant's analytic of the sublime."<sup>11</sup> In "General Comment on the Exposition of Aesthetic Judgment," Kant relates the sublime with the

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<sup>9</sup> It is very important to note that when natural disasters, which Kant describes as provoking the feeling of the sublime are considered to be expressions of God's sublimity (or wrath), we cannot but feel respect and prostration. Never could we feel sublimity as proof of our superiority to the given mighty nature.

<sup>10</sup> Lokke, K.E., "The Role of Sublimity in the Development of Modernist Aesthetics". In: *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (Summer, 1982), pp. 421-429. Published by Wiley on behalf of The American Society for Aesthetics, p 4.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

exhibition of morality, which I relate to the notion of spirituality and human nature. Along with presupposing a supersensible nature in us, we can conclude that for Kant the sublime was necessarily linked to morality and spirituality. He links the sublime with the moral feeling and the freedom of man. The true sublime is a matter of moral feeling, or of elevation of the mind towards rational principles. There is a different elevation, which Kant is reluctant to call sublime, and which Melissa Merrit, in her article *The Moral Source of the Kantian Sublime*, acknowledges as the “aesthetic sublime,” which is quite different from the notion of the aesthetic sublime of Kant. It is related to the elevation of mind based on affect but Kant does prefer to link the sublime to reason. Melissa Merrit make another crucial distinction between Kant’s vision on the sublime. She argues that there is a natural sublime, which is only contemplative, and a moral sublime, which is related to respect and subjugation to moral law.

### ***Lyotard and presenting the unrepresentable***

Jean-Francois Lyotard (1924-1998) was one of the most prominent postmodern philosophers who dealt with the notion of the sublime. Attracted by it through his reading of Kant’s political writings and employing the term mainly in a political context at first (Guion), Lyotard then expanded his philosophical view and elaborated on the notion in terms of aesthetics, ethics and theology. In Lyotard’s notion of the sublime we can see Burke’s and Kant’s specific vision of the term as a feeling of both pain and pleasure. In Kant’s treatise the pain is provoked by the inability of man to comprehend the vastness of the phenomena experienced whether they be of natural or religious kind. The pleasure comes when the individual realizes her superiority over the terrifying caliber of the phenomenon, her individual freedom over her animal nature and the elevation to her spiritual nature in a Kantian sense. When we feel the sublime, we can elevate over our sensible nature and realize the supersensible nature within us, we can grasp and strive towards ideas of reason. In Lyotard’s philosophy, pain is part of the sublime since the reality to be comprehended and represented is too big for the artist, it is incomprehensible as totality. This is also a characteristic of Kant’s sublime—the inability to grasp the totality of the world. However, according to Lyotard, this pain of trying to present the unrepresentable gives the unique feeling of pleasure, which comes namely as a result of the effort

of representing that ultimate and all-encompassing reality, which always remains half-represented. The relation to something which is beyond what we see can be seen as the revelation of and the possibility of spirituality in Lyotard's terms.

Lyotard is a postmodern philosopher. He tries to show how experiment in aesthetics and in all spheres of life is the motto of postmodernity. The experiment always involves obscurity in Burke's terms and thus can also be characterized as a sublime moment. The work of the artist is a sublime experience, where one does not know in any detail where his creative forces would lead him. The genuine artist necessarily works with the sublime and represents it as much as he can. "Lyotard considers 'the sublime' to be the driving force infusing transgressive and innovative artists in modernity and late modernity—that is the period from the Romantic age to now."<sup>12</sup> The artist gives form to the formlessness that he witnesses and thus tries to represent the unrepresentable. Abstract art, according to Lyotard, is the most adequate representation of the unrepresentable because it avoids figurative, phenomenal painting. It, along with conceptual art, is the realm of true innovation, which is associated with the sublime as a feeling, and with the power of creativity as a certain feature of spirituality. Lyotard interprets Newman's art especially the artist's work in the fifties, which deals with infinity and the myth of genesis as "the sublime" in terms of revealing vastness, infinity and something un-representable—the process of becoming, of creation. At some point, the traditional metaphysical connotations of the sublime have been discharged in Newman's painting, according to Lyotard, because they do not deal with something beyond, but with something that is happening now and in this world. However, we can still think of some metaphysical realm as revealing itself in the present. The feeling of the sublime refers namely to the allusion of an existing Absolute invading the present through the event. Besides, the notion of creativity is related to the notion of the sublime, and thus the sublime as the sign of the struggle of the creator is necessarily linked to the possibility of creation.

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<sup>12</sup> Bukdahl, E. M. *Lyotard between philosophy and art*, [https://www.fau.edu/body-mindculture/EMB\\_paper.pdf](https://www.fau.edu/body-mindculture/EMB_paper.pdf)

### *The Sublime in Modern Visual Art*

The philosophical idea of the sublime has been transposed to the sphere of art since the beginning of the modern age and, particularly, in art movements such as Romanticism and Abstract art. However it is used in diametrical ways in modern and postmodern visual arts. One of the most important modern movements—Romanticism—and another one, not less important—Abstract Expressionism—viewed the sublime and spirituality in opposite ways. Romantic paintings were representational, often identifying spirituality with the sublime. They referred to the existence of the Divine and the Absolute as it was elaborated in idealistic philosophy on the one side, and figural presentations of nature on the other. Landscapes and seascapes were considered the best expressions of the sublime in the Romantic painterly tradition that blossomed in Europe in the middle of the nineteenth century. This tendency set the tone for American Romantic painting as well. Contrary to this way of expressing the sublime, Abstract Expressionism dealt with presenting the universality of the world in an abstract way. The movement began at the beginning of the twentieth century and Wassily Kandinsky was one of its first most enthusiastic representatives. During his very fruitful artistic career he moved from figurative painting to abstract painting and commitment to *painterly realization of the spiritual essences of the world*, which, being noumenal, could not be depicted as direct copies of objects of the physical world. This tendency continued and other artists such as Piet Mondrian, Barnett Newman and Mark Rothko sought to move away from figurative painting in order to reveal the power of abstraction in representing the unrepresentable. Along with them the quest for spirituality and a minimalistic approach towards painting was seen in other artists as well, most of whom worked with the artists mentioned above. Theo van Doesburg worked with Piet Mondrian and they (supported by other proselytes) founded the De Stijl movement. Kazimir Malevich was one of the crucial avant-garde artists who also painted high abstraction and dealt with the question of infinity (sublime and spirituality). In his manifesto *From Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism: The New Painterly Realism, 1915* Malevich claimed abstraction was the new, modern form of painting and actually real painting. He condemned representational art as dull and automatic reproduction. Artistic experience was viewed as a kind of discovery into the new and new art was to reveal truth. Abstract art was the true art because it

was a product of true creative process (which necessarily included the feelings of the sublime as Lyotard points out) in contrast to mere representational techniques.<sup>13</sup> Paul Klee and other artists were also concerned with spirituality and the sublime.

### *The Sublime and Spirituality in Romantic painting*

Romantic painting could be easily associated with the idea of the sublime. As the curators of the Tate museum write, when presenting the emblematic picture *Gordale Scar* by James Ward—the sublime landscapes were “fashionable” at that point. The art critic Robert Rosenblum on his side claims that during Romanticism the

sublime provided a flexible semantic container for the murky Romantic experiences of awe, terror, boundlessness *and divinity* that began to rupture the decorous confines of earlier esthetic systems. As imprecise and irrational as the feelings it tried to name, the Sublime could be extended to art as well as nature. One of its major expressions, in fact, was the painting of sublime landscapes.<sup>14</sup>

Romantic painting had different expressions of the sublime and most of them were influenced by both Burke’s sublime and Kant’s philosophy on genius and the sublime. The Romantic sublime included religious art and art representing nature. The crucial moment was to represent the sublime as horrifying. Painters, however, used other crucial characteristic of the sublime, among which was greatness or magnitude. It was represented not only in the content but also in the form and size of the paintings. From 1870’s on the size of the pictures started to become larger and larger, inducing feelings of awe and respect in the viewer. Painters such as Henry Fuseli, Francis Danby, Benjamin Robert Haydon worked on large canvases. The sublime as a characteristic of spirituality was shown both in religious and natural art, which sometimes overlapped. “As the Romantics

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<sup>13</sup> Malevich, K. *From Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism: The New Painterly Realism, 1915*: “Objects have vanished like smoke: to attain the new artistic culture, art advances towards creation as an end in itself and toward domination over the forms of nature”, emphasis by the author.

<sup>14</sup> *Beyond the infinite: Robert Rosenblum on the Sublime in Contemporary Art, in 1961*, <http://www.artnews.com/2015/03/27/beyond-the-infinite-robert-rosenblum-on-sublime-contemporary-art-in-1961/>, emphasis mine.

discovered, all of the sublimity of God can be found in the simplest natural phenomena, whether a blade of grass or an expanse of sky.”<sup>15</sup> When it came to the disasters of nature with no specific reference to God, spirituality could be seen in Kantian terms as a feature of the human being, which is the only being that could *raise* above nature, while at the same time realizing its tremendous and destroying power. The possibility of death that nature opens for the human being shows him however his spiritual power over natural forces. In the experience of the sublime, the human being becomes aware of his spiritual essence.

The Burkean sublime can be seen in Fuseli’s pictures, which explored mythological, religious and poetic themes. Terror was induced through dark colors and sinister themes such as the murder. *Ariel* (c.1800-1810), *The Creation of Eve from Milton’s Paradise Lost* (1793), *Romeo stabs Paris at the bier of Juliet* (c.1809), and other works focus on the terrible in human relationships and the mystery of creation and thus provoke the feeling of the sublime. Francis Danby would paint biblical themes and heroic pictures (*The Deluge*, *The Death of Abel*, *The Crucifixion* but also *Calypso’s Grotto* and *The Departure of Ulysses from Ithaca*), which was another way to evoke respect, wonder and fear. The solitude and the chaos in his natural paintings also contribute to the feeling of the sublime (*The Shipwreck*, *Ship on Fire* and *Sunset after a Storm*). Danby is also known for his paintings based on the book of Revelation in the Bible, which definitely induces horror and thus, following Burke, are sublime. They are related to spiritual essences of the world such as they are revealed by the Christian narrative. Benjamin Robert Haydon would also explore the potential of historical, mythological and biblical themes and their relation to the sublime. The supernatural or vastness in nature along with the size of the picture would form the sublime in Romantic painting.

### ***The Sublime and Spirituality in Abstract Expressionism. Rothko and Newman***

The sublime in Abstract Expressionism was thought to reveal life’s “biggest mysteries.”<sup>16</sup> In this part, I will turn my attention to the ideas of the

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Alex Greenberger on the Robert Rosenbum’s essay *The Abstract Sublime*,

sublime and the spiritual as they are viewed in the paintings of Mark Rothko (1903–1970) and Barnett Newman (1905–1970). I will disregard Newman's and Rothko's own reluctance to accept being called abstract expressionists as most of critics do not agree with this statement. I consider Newman to be a painter who develops the idea of the sublime to its ultimate form since he moves one step forward from 'classical' Abstract Expressionism by using non-geometric abstraction. In this way, he comes closer to what he wants to depict—presence of and relationship with the Absolute. I chose Rothko and Newman because they are considered to be among the few masters of Abstract Expressionism in Rosenblum's terms.

The vocabulary of the sublime in Abstract Expressionism is, according to Rosenblum monolithic, however it has a lot of complex and mysterious effects. The more monolithic the language, the more complex and mysterious its effects. We can see this monolithic language in Newman's and Rothko's paintings as well. Rosenblum takes magnitude and boundlessness to be the leading characteristics of the sublime and he then analyzes them as he sees him in Romantic and Abstract expressionist painting. What we see as a tool and source of the sublime—magnitude—is also evident in Rothko and Newman as it was in Romantic painting as well. Romantic paintings, following Kant and Burke, would employ magnitude as an essential characteristic of the sublime. They would create big pictures (over 3 meters in both length and width) in order to surprise and overwhelm the viewer. Similarly, Newman's *Vir Heroicus Sublimis* is over 5 meters long and over 2 meters high (213 x 93 inches). Helen Frankenthaler and Jackson Pollock would also use huge canvases to create a sublime effect. Formlessness or disharmony as Kant puts them, are other essential features of the sublime, which Rosenberg traces in both Romantic and abstract painters such as Pollock himself. Boundlessness is also present in the technique of painting in some of the authors. Helen Frankenthaler talks about the limitless she experienced when she took the canvas off the easel and started painting literally from any side of the canvas she wanted. Vastness and puzzlement are the features of the sublime that I would ascribe to Newman's and Rothko's painting and they are also found in Burke's philosophy. The depth of the color and the puzzlement before the unrepresentable

are here to testify for the sublimity of modern art. Thus, some of Rothko's paintings hint of both formlessness and vastness: "Rothko, like Friedrich and Turner, places us on the threshold of those shapeless infinities discussed by the estheticians of the Sublime."<sup>17</sup>

Themes in paintings also contribute to the feeling of the sublime, along with their size. Spirituality is to a great extent revealed by the sublime in its overwhelming power that transcends our own being and feelings. Sometimes, however, it is revealed by direct referring to religious symbols or myths. Barnett Newman names a lot of his paintings with names, coming from the Judeo-Christian religious tradition (*Onement, Adam, Eve, The Beginning*). Newman represents a new type of creation and transcendence, while Rothko's paintings try to deal with the "human drama" or ultimately existential (spiritual) questions of pain, life and death. Terror is another crucial characteristic and source of the sublime in Burkean terms. While in Romantic painting terror was created by the untamed and outraged nature or by dooming mythological and religious themes, in Modern art, especially in the second generation of Abstract Expressionism, terror comes from the atrocities of war. Such evidence can be seen even in Rothko's and Newman's art, although we can think of other artists who are directly connected to what we know as war sublime.<sup>18</sup> Thus we can see the terror of war in Rothko's paintings that question death, life and human existence and in Newman's paintings that show the terror of the end. Along with giving birth to a new world (as I will show how in the next paragraph), Newman also laments or at least notices and shows the destruction of the old one. This is what Paul Crowther renders as the existential sublime, which is also related to Burke's view on the sublime and terror as the emotion that presents threat to self-preservation. However, along with the war sublime, we can see Crowther's view on the notion (based upon Kantian approach) as a path to self-apprehension and self-transcendence. Paul Crowther sees the terror of the sublime in Newman's paintings as it is discussed by the artist himself: "the self, terrible and constant is for me the great subject-

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<sup>17</sup> Rosenblum, R. *The Abstract Sublime*, <http://www.artnews.com/2015/03/27/beyond-the-infinite-robert-rosenblum-on-sublime-contemporary-art-in-1961/>.

<sup>18</sup> Orpen, W., and Nevinson, C.R.W., were the artists par excellence of sublime art of World War I and Paul Nash and Richard Eurich would depict the negative sublime of the Second World War.

matter in painting.”<sup>19</sup>

The sublime in Abstract Expressionism is thought to be a post-war myth of the Genesis.<sup>20</sup> This statement of Rosenblum could be related to the idea of the proof of the sublimity and the existence of a higher power in art, of spiritual being-ness (whoever or whatever stays behind it). I would also relate it to Newman’s own conception of the artist as co-creator of the world as Paul Crowther exposes it in his article *Barnett Newman and the Sublime* where the depicting of positive sublime could be best expressed in terms of creativity (abstract art) rather than mere representation (figurative art). The artist creates new art, non-geometric art, which lets the being *be* on the canvas, without putting it into a specific form. The geometric expressionism is too close to the phenomenal experience and thus fogs true and absolute reality. That is why Newman’s art aims at pure color and absolute purity of the represented ideas, it aims at transcendence and noumenal reality. The power of creativity is one that is the most characteristic feature of a spiritual being. Devastated by the atrocities of a de-spiritualized and dehumanized century, the sublime in Abstract art is a chance for the artist to participate in the new genesis, to reveal his spiritual powers. This bold implication is possible I think because of the shaken religious authorities and the elevation of the ego and its creative forces as characteristic for any classic modern (and postmodern) thinking. Thus, transcendence can be seen not in terms of traditional notions of spirituality but in terms of self-elevation, self-transcendence and deployment of one’s own spiritual powers.

Rothko’s paintings also deal with the sublime and spirituality but in a slightly different manner. It seems that Rothko is the melancholic figure of modern art, at least in the last years of his artistic career. It seems that throughout his whole career Rothko deals with questions of human nature, which is undoubtedly spiritual. He employs mythical figures and symbols to deal with questions of eternity. In a letter, written in 1947 as a response to a critical review of his paintings Rothko, along with his co-worker Adolph Gottlieb, exposes the aesthetic ideas, which lead their work. One of them is the problem of subject matter in art. According to Rothko, art needs to address important philosophical/existential questions.

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<sup>19</sup> Newman quoted in Crowther, P. *Barnett Newman and the Sublime*.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

It is a widely accepted notion among painters that it does not matter what one paints as long as it is well painted. This is the essence of academicism. There is no such thing as good painting about nothing. We assert that the subject is crucial and only that subject matter is valid which is tragic and timeless. That is why we profess spiritual kinship with primitive and archaic art.

Rothko's art, in kinship with Early Abstract Expressionism, looks for universal spiritual principles and themes. He uses simple forms in order to avoid the trap of delusion. His art seeks truth. In this sense his art could be ascribed deep ethical meanings.

Rothko's art deals with the spiritual condition of man—tragic and indeterminate to a certain degree. As those questions are deep and sometimes lead to the unknown (obscurity) and fear (terror) his main theme can be called sublime. Rothko confesses nihilism about human nature and yet seeks for some universal meanings that could hold and explain the world and the human being. His mythological paintings retain the fear primitive people had before nature. In this sense we cannot really say they were sublime in the proper meaning of the notion, since primitive people did not have the Kantian awareness of their power over natural forces. They animated nature and never had the contemplative aspect of interacting with it from safe distance, which is considered necessary for the experience of the sublime. The experience of “awe,” which characterizes every sublime experience was fogged by too much fear. Respect towards natural forces and awareness of one's own spirituality lacked. Thus Rothko moved away from those pictures to present the sublime in a better way.

Rothko's abstract works aim at presenting the “late modern” sublime or the sublime here and now. They do refer to transcendence and their size is very big, which automatically makes them sublime in form. The content however is also sublime. It is the happening of art viewing here and now that is the sublime, the experience of the viewer. Rothko's nihilism does let the sublime be more terrifying than pleasurable since although he admits the spirituality and infinity of essences and moral principles, he does not provide a solution to the human drama (mortality). He is obsessively fixated on it without giving an optimistic view of it as religions of salvation would do. Natalie Kosoi explains Rothko's

abstract paintings as the visual representations of our mortality.<sup>21</sup> Based on Heidegger's philosophy she interprets Rothko's abstraction as presenting life, which remains always ungraspable and slipping away. Forms and objectivity are diminished in the chaos of nothingness, in the deep color sea of our own mortality. Rothko's abstract paintings are sublime in both size and content. They are fully sublime even if we follow Kosoi's interpretation because she asserts Rothko's positive presentation of our mortality (nothingness). With the *presence* of the picture as materiality however, he celebrates life, according to her, contrasting present to nothing. However, I still think that, given his own fate (he committed suicide on February 25, 1970) and the problem he most tackled in his paintings (human drama), Rothko contributes to "negative spirituality" in late modern art. He brings awareness of but not solutions to the human drama. This is not to say that his artworks are not sublime or don't have spiritual and ethical meanings. Rothko's austere struggle against the consumerist approach towards art shows deep engagement with art as practice that directs individual and social powers to a better direction and has then deep ethical significance. It seems to me, however that the doom of human drama hovers over most of his art.

Newman's abstract pictures are also said to represent the mortality of human nature. It can be properly seen only in opposition to infinity of the Absolute, according to Paul Crowther, and thus his zip-paintings are interpreted namely as the encounter between infinity and the finite, between the Absolute, the spiritual and the sensual, the physical.

### ***The Sublime as Self-Apprehension and Connection to the Absolute***

The sublime is connected to the spiritual as long as it brings all those feelings of overwhelming power that exists over us, and as long as it, as Kant claims, brings us the awareness of being spiritual beings that at some point become aware of their superiority to any kind of natural force. The sublime is the tool of artists to bring attention to transcendence as a possibility. Sometimes it brings awareness of a spiritual Being that is at the root of the world (a Creator). Sometimes it brings

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<sup>21</sup> Kosoi, N., *Nothingness made visible: The Case of Rothko's Paintings*, [http://shortstreet.net/rothko\\_nothingness.pdf](http://shortstreet.net/rothko_nothingness.pdf).

awareness of our own nature. It is a way of self-comprehension as we already indicated as one of Kant's most important insights on the topic. It is also a means of self-transcendence as we see our own limits and (sometimes) go beyond them.

The sublime is also connection to the Absolute. It reveals the absolute in its total un-graspability and in its other-ness. That is why pictures of Abstract Expressionism are difficult to interpret. Early Abstract Expressionism exhibited geometric abstraction and supplied it with explanations of the spiritual meanings of the pictures. American Abstract Expressionism went even further. It represented even more puzzling and free-from-representation paintings. It touched and brought down the absolute, or part of it, with the help of the sublime feeling. And it could not be otherwise because the totality the artist deals with, when he creates a painting, is sublime—it is vast, terrifying, infinite, formless, and delightful at the same time. The artist forms this metaphysical reality of chaos and wonderment and brings it into the sensual dimension. This is closely related to the idea of the genius, which separates the true artist and the imitator. The true artist touches upon infinity/metaphysics, noumena and makes the rules of forming the new and bringing it down to the realm of senses. The imitator or the ordinary artist deals with reproducing effects seen in phenomenal 'products.'

### ***Contemporary Sublime and Spirituality—Bill Viola***

One of the most important artists of contemporary art, who deals with the sublime and spirituality, is Bill Viola. He works in the field of new media art and explores the artistic possibilities of video installations. Rina Arya takes two of his significant works—*Five Angels for the Millennium* 2001 and *Nantes Triptych*—to be appropriate examples of the sublime and spirituality.<sup>22</sup> *Five Angels* presents five videos with a man who is submerging in or re-emerging from water. Videos are all-encompassing and provoke fear, thrill, vastness, puzzlement and wonderment at the same time. Arya interprets Viola's work in terms of Burke's notion of the sublime and shows how dark rooms, in which the work is projected, evoke obscurity, and how the projections of the fig-

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<sup>22</sup> Arya, R., *Bill Viola and the Sublime*. <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/the-sublime/rina-arya-bill-viola-and-the-sublime-r1141441>.

ures create the perspective of infinity and show magnificence. The water shows sublimity of natural forces, while the title—religious sublimity.

The *Nantes Triptych* (1992) is also sublime because it shows the problem of mortality and infinity (spirituality). The video installation presents three videos that symbolize birth, life and death. They evoke terror and melancholia. At the same time the religious form they take—as a modern triptych—gives allusions to the possibility of salvation. The work is sublime because it gives the feeling of horror and ungraspability of this sinister and weird phenomenon of human mortality.

The sublime in Viola's work, according to Rina Arya, is exclusively about boundaries and their overcoming. However, in most cases, despite religious connotations of his art, the overcoming of those boundaries does not refer to any specific spiritual realm beyond what is here and now. Viola, like Newman and Rothko, is concerned with the human condition here and now. It does not give a consolation, it does not give a path to a spiritual impasse, although Viola is deeply interested in different religious practices. Stepping on other theories about the contemporary sublime, Rina Arya shows that Viola's (or contemporary) sublime does not lead to a metaphysical reality but with the help of thrill, shock and puzzlement refreshes our perspective on everyday life, reaffirming our hopeless mortality. This tendency could be seen back in Rothko's and Newman's paintings as well, although I consider Newman's artwork more positive. But the "new" sublime, as it became clear, is different than the Romantic sublime, which often referred to Divinity. Now the sublime is used to transform but not to transcend the individual, and keeps her within the reality we see. This, I can explain only with the grand destruction of religious narratives, which best characterizes Modernity.

### ***Conclusion—Spirituality as a Way Out in the Globalized and Consumerist Society?***

As a philosophical notion, the sublime becomes important in the artistic life of Western culture in Modernity. It is explored and exploited even nowadays, changing its connection to spirituality. While in the beginning of the Modern age the sublime was related to Divinity, it is now related to our everyday life and some minute spiritual meanings in a this-worldly perspective. The emotions to which it gives rise, however, are still deep and aim at transforming the individual. Ethical connotations could still be sought in the contemporary sublime. According to

Rina Arya the sublime in Bill Viola's art has ethical purposes.

The sublime always refers to that, which is ungraspable for us, human beings. Therefore it always touches upon our smallness and the infinity of the source of the sublime feeling, whether it be real or not, as Burke reminds us. What we know fully, we cannot call sublime. Therefore, God or metaphysics as well as our own human nature are sublime. As Rina Arya states, we know of death but we cannot know what it is to die until it happens to us. Thus, the obscurity of our mortality and the lurking Absolute are classic sources of the Sublime in postmodern and modern philosophy. They are even problems of a spiritual nature. The question of spirituality is evident in contemporary art as long as the problem of mortality inevitably poses questions of existence, purpose and a way of conduct. These are all considered spiritual by Rina Arya and by artists such as Newman and Rothko who deal with the opposition "mortality-infinity." The subjective feeling of the sublime is a way to proof the supersensible substrate of nature, according to Kant. It is a way to show us a realm beyond, an Absolute. In contemporary art world this is often omitted. The sublime can be linked to spirituality, which also has changed its meanings, but only in the sense of here and now, without a promise to any other fuller experience of reality. This is what Rina Arya sees in Viola, who also deals with the problem of mortality. He refers to religious language and he is also honored by religious communities, however, he does not give any positive religious answer to his spiritual questions about life and death. Moreover, according to Arya, he reaffirms the unresolved problem of mortality.

However, the mere feeling of the sublime can be an allusion to something bigger and different in nature that can lead us to noumenal reality beyond the one we see now. Sublimity then can be both sublime and consoling in terms of religions of salvation or philosophy of freedom if art gives a positive solution when dealing with different sources of the sublime.

It looks like spirituality of whatever source is necessary today as a direct neutralizing power to the shattered, godless world of postmodernity, where individuals have lost meanings (Bauman) and where there are no meta-narratives to build and support social ideologies. Social ideologies are in a sense helpful for one's own identity since they provide one with feelings of security and belonging. Religion also helps for social binding and appropriation of meanings (Fry). The materialistic attitude and the consumer attitude of postmodern societies that are not tra-

ditional communities but actually a group of “uprooted” people in Bauman’s terms who live together without actually sharing their lives with each other necessitates some solution. This solution can be seen in the re-enchantment of the world as Mark Fry points out or exploring spirituality in the realm of art, where new meanings and perspectives could be elaborated. Art making and art viewing must be spiritual practice, Rothko reminds us, they must be elevated above the illusions of consumerist society and shows us human nature in its tragic condition.

However, some of the late modern and postmodern visual art spiritual questions around the fate of the mortal being are asked but not answered affirmatively. In most of the cases artists only pose the spiritual questions and let the viewer answer them himself. Whatever the idiosyncrasy of the spiritual longings today, where art is considered a spiritual experience par excellence, we can see that the tendency to connect art with spirituality is growing. We can only remember a few exhibitions that were put out in the USA such as *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985* curated by Maurice Tuchman and exhibited in 1986-87, *Negotiating the Rapture: The power of Art to Transform Lives* exhibited in 1996, *Beyond Belief: 100 years of the Spiritual in Modern Art* shown in 2013 and *Being: Spirituality in Contemporary Art*, which is to be exhibited in different art institutions in the USA next year. Throughout Modernity art can be seen as substituting religion to a certain extent (Andrew Boiwi: 2003). Shusterman claims that art can successfully play a role of the sphere where true wisdom and intellectual and emotional energy are cathalysed. It can substitute religion and it is the better alternative to it because it does not provoke life-threatening arguments. Art, unlike religion is more inclusive. Atheists and agnostics, or those who have lost faith in the grand narratives are helped by art. The museum is their new cathedral, the temple where they can sit and meditate on Rothko’s paintings, for example. These paintings are devoid of specific religious command (prescription) and only call for attention to the most fundamental questions of the human being. Spirituality in art thus brings back man to his own nature, or at least to questions about his own nature. It requires experiencing of his own body in its simplicity and rawness, without any technological means, according to Rina Arya. The sublime with its function of shocking the viewer and evoking feelings of awe and respect can lead man out of the glut of information and “busy-ness” that characterize the globalized society. It can bring him to

critical evaluation of one's own life and the purposes he pursues. It helps for the development and effect of the notion of spirituality in art (Guion: 2008). For many artists the sublime and the spiritual can have positive effect on the society namely by mooring the human beings into some coherent system of beliefs and thinking, and showing them an alternative way of life to that, which is forcefully implanted by consumerism. "Now the sublime, surely we must all realize, is an experience essential to the preservation of our humanity. Especially, I would submit, since we are living in a sublimity-deprived society."<sup>23</sup>

Spirituality today is problematic since it has changed. It is also threatened to become a commodity, just like other things in the postmodern world (Nicholas Buxton: 2003). Despite all of this, however, I think it is a good solution to the existential problems that we now have as effects of a globalized society and those that are related to our human nature in general. Spiritual matters in art are soothing, while provocative and sublime at the same time. They are, most of all, natural to the human beings, who despite technological advancement, remain mortals and with some consciousness of metaphysical reality within and around them.

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<sup>23</sup> Philip Taaffe quoted in Guion, D. *A Study of Spirituality in Contemporary Visual Art and Foundations Funding*.  
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# On Translation and a Boundary of Understandability

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## *Abstract*

Translation and understanding seem inevitably to involve and imply each other mutually. But could there be a sense in which, despite appearances, it is precisely in the realm beyond the boundaries of understandability that true translation can take place?

After discussing on the one hand Schleiermacher and Dilthey's view on understanding, and on the other—Gadamer and Ricoeur's, it is suggested that the boundary of understandability is subjectivity. Then the paper draws on Benjamin and Hölderlin's understanding of translation to suggest that literalness can be, in opposition to the traditional models of translation, not a naïve approach, but a quest for a higher form of translation. The resulting almost interlinear rendition achieves a synthesis of the two languages and in the ensuing harmony of the foreign tongues, what is behind the word shines through. Of course, it is not enough for a translation to be literal in order to achieve that higher task. When the cause for literalness is not the Word, the results are of dubious value.

In the case of this 'pure' translation, understanding is sought in the ultimate authority of the Word, beyond the confines of either the author or the translator. Thus it is begotten outside the purview of subjectivity and hence—beyond the bounds of understandability. Unless language is itself a subject. Unless, as Heidegger suggests, it itself speaks.

Common sense suggests that translatability cannot possibly reach beyond the boundaries of understandability. A recourse to some of the Ancient Greek terms used for denoting the act of translation seems to corroborate this intuition: both ἐμηνεύω (explain and interpret), and μεταφράζω (paraphrase) point to understanding the original text as its first and foremost aspect. The truism that an act of translation necessarily involves also an act of understanding, has further on expanded to incorporate its mirror statement, i.e. that every act of understanding in-

volves an act of translation. As Schleiermacher observes, we are often “compelled to translate for ourselves the utterances of another who, though our compeer, is of different opinions and sensitivity,” or even “our own utterances after a certain time has passed.”<sup>1</sup> This broader concept of translation is not limited to interlingual and intralingual translation, but is a phenomenon of any semiotic system. Thus, translation and understanding seem inevitably to involve and imply each other mutually. But could there be a sense in which, despite appearances, it is precisely in the realm beyond the boundaries of understandability that true translation can take place?

The answer, of course, will depend on what is viewed as understanding and translation. Our point of departure for discussing the first one will be hermeneutics in its broader scope of an overall theory of understanding. For Schleiermacher, the father of this modern hermeneutics, its purpose is in understanding the meaning originally intended by the author. Understanding in this case may be defined as the art of reproducing the “inner thoughts” of the author as changed into “outer expression” in language “at the moment of text creation.”<sup>2</sup> A similar view is held by Schleiermacher’s major successor, Dilthey—for him, understanding “presupposes the connection between the universally human and individuation”<sup>3</sup> and consists in reconstructing alien life experiences. Thus, for both of them, the emphasis is on unearthing and restoring to its original meaning something that has already been constructed or produced by an author, the text being the way/the path leading to his/her subjective intentions and mental life. According to another hermeneutical approach—Gadamer’s, “the task of understanding is concerned in the first place with the meaning of the text itself,”<sup>4</sup> not with the intention of the author. Interpretative understanding is not “to recapture the au-

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<sup>1</sup> Friedrich D. E. Schleiermacher, “On the Different Methods of Translating,” in *The Translation Studies Reader* ed. Lawrence Venuti (London/New York: Routledge, 2012), 43.

<sup>2</sup> Friedrich D. E. Schleiermacher, Jan Wojcik and Roland Haas, “The Hermeneutics: Outline of the 1819 Lectures,” *New Literary History*, 10/1(1978): 2-3, accessed November 28, 2016, url: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/468302/>

<sup>3</sup> Wilhelm Dilthey, “The formation of the historical world in the human sciences,” in *Selected Works*, ed. Rudolf A. Makkreel and Frithjof Rodi (Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002), 233-234.

<sup>4</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 345.

thor's attitude of mind,"<sup>5</sup> but to find the meaning of the text by means of a fusion of the horizons of the author and the interpreter, who thus come to a mutual agreement, as if in a conversation, on a common meaning of the text. This perspective, endowing understanding with a productive attitude and a transformative aspect, implies that for something to be properly understood, it must be understood in a different way every time. Ricoeur carries this idea even further by excluding the author from the process of negotiating the meaning—for him "any discourse fixed by writing"<sup>6</sup> is emancipated "with respect to the author"<sup>7</sup> and assumes a life independent of him. To understand is to appropriate the meaning of the text and is inseparable from self-understanding: "To understand a text is at the same time to light up our own situation."<sup>8</sup> Paradoxically, Gadamer and Ricoeur's phenomenological perspective on understanding, aiming at de-subjectivizing the original meaning, might be said to lead to subjectivizing the interpreted meaning. Thus, in modern hermeneutics, we have, on the one hand, reproductive understanding, referring to the authority of the subject of the author, and, on the other hand, productive understanding, referring to the authority of the subject of the interpreter. Technically, in the first case understanding is restricted by the insurmountable barrier of otherness—because of the necessity to reproduce an alien mental world, whereas in the second one it opens up vast horizons and seems unrestricable—since it permits as many meanings as there can be interpreters. On an ontological level, however, both are limited by the subject—be it the author or the interpreter. In this sense it might be said that the boundary of understandability is subjectivity. What concerns us here is whether this boundary marks the end or the beginning of true translation.

The various definitions of translation differ in terms of what it involves procedurally, but seem to share a tacit agreement regarding its function: to help a reader to acquire as correct and complete an understanding of a text as possible without leaving the bonds of his or her na-

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<sup>5</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 259.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 145.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 139.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *From Text to Action*, (Evanston, IL.: Northwestern University Press, 1991), 321.

tive tongue. A notable exception to this view is Walter Benjamin who claims that translation is far from being meant for readers not understanding the original, and whenever it undertakes to serve the reader, it ends up as “the inaccurate transmission of inessential content.”<sup>9</sup> In his words, “any translation that intends to perform a transmitting function cannot transmit anything but communication—hence something inessential. This is the hallmark of bad translations.”<sup>10</sup> What else can in such a case be the true designation of translation? According to Benjamin, we have to look to language for an answer. While different tongues dramatically diverge in their words, sentences and associations, they fundamentally converge in their ultimate intentions. The invariably self-same thing meant by all languages is not achievable within any single one of them, but can be glimpsed in their supplementation and reconciliation as found in translation. The latter can therefore be said to hold the key to the otherwise inaccessible treasury “of the ultimate secrets for which all thought strives,”<sup>11</sup> but only if it is devoted to serving the language of truth, or the pure language, in the no man’s land between foreign tongues. The way to translate the original in the interest of this pure language, as in any translation, lies in fidelity and freedom. And yet in this case they are both used differently: fidelity is achieved through literalness—with words, not sentences as the primary element of translation, and freedom consists in breaking the mould of the language of translation, so as to set free the pure language exiled among foreign tongues. The hallmark of this kind of translation is considered to be Hölderlin. His rendering of Sophocles’ dramas into German is an extreme example of hermeneutic penetration by means of literalness. But paradoxically, whereas his contemporaries deemed them to be ridiculously awkward and bordering on farce, “modern commentators, on the contrary, have judged Hölderlin’s text to be not only the ultimate in re-constitutive understanding of Sophocles but an unequalled penetration of the meaning of Greek tragedy as a whole.”<sup>12</sup> Hölderlin believed that

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<sup>9</sup> Walter Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator,” in: *Selected Writings, vol. 1*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 253.

<sup>10</sup> Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator,” 253.

<sup>11</sup> Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator,” 259.

<sup>12</sup> George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (Oxford: Ox-

every piece of writing was a translation, or transcription of concealed meanings and aimed at breaking through the impenetrable and opaque envelope of words to reveal their ultimate meaning. Its revelation could be achieved by a direct transfer of words between languages resulting in a linguistic fusion, capable of partially remedying the shattered unity of logos. However, as Benjamin points out, it is important to keep in mind that “such translation no longer serves the cause of the text, but rather works in the interest of languages.”<sup>13</sup> When the cause for literalness is not the Word, the results are of dubious value. An example of this is Nabokov’s rendition of Eugene Onegin in English. In the foreword to his much disputed translation, he states: “In fact, to my ideal of literalism I have sacrificed everything (elegance, euphony, clarity, good taste, modern usage and even grammar) that the dainty mimic prizes higher than truth.”<sup>14</sup> While not “begrimed or beslimed by rhyme,”<sup>15</sup> which for Nabokov is the hallmark of any fraudulent translation of poetry, his rendition is also far from being a quest for the originary Logos. For that reason it may well end up as just “unread and hard to read.” (Barnstone)<sup>16</sup>

The example of Hölderlin’s translations discussed above shows that literalness can be, in opposition to the traditional models of translation, not a naïve approach, but a quest for a higher form of translation. The resulting almost interlinear rendition achieves a synthesis of the two languages and in the ensuing harmony of the foreign tongues supplementing one another, in their fusion, what is behind the word shines through. This fusion is the utmost approximation to the realm of the originary, or pure language a translator can reach—beyond it lies only silence. As Benjamin warns, “the gates of a language thus expanded and modified (*as in Hölderlin translations*) may slam shut and enclose the translator in silence.” The utmost significance of silence as a paramount element of language is also pointed out by Ortega y Gasset: only by tak-

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ford University Press, 1975), 327.

<sup>13</sup> Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator,” 262.

<sup>14</sup> Vladimir Nabokov, translator’s introduction to *Eugene Onegin*, by Alexandre Pushkin (New York: Bollingen Foundation, 1964) x.

<sup>15</sup> Vladimir Nabokov, “Problems of Translation: “Onegin” in English,” in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. Lawrence Venuti (London/New York: Routledge, 2000), 83.

<sup>16</sup> Willis Barnstone, *Poetics of Translation: History, Theory, Practice* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 48.

ing it into account can translation become “a bold endeavor to integrate humankind.”<sup>17</sup> Before we reach the confines of silence, however, what we can do is listen, as Heidegger suggests: listen to the essence of language, and “let it say its Saying to us.”<sup>18</sup>

We can now venture to answer the question we started with: could there be a sense in which, despite appearances, it is precisely in the realm beyond the boundaries of understandability that true translation can take place? As suggested in the first part of this paper, understandability is demarcated by subjectivity. In the case of the ‘pure’ translation discussed above, understanding is neither of the reproductive kind, referring to the authority of the subject of the author, nor of the productive kind, referring to the authority of the subject of the interpreter. It is rather sought in the ultimate authority of the Word, beyond the confines of any of the two subjects. It unveils originary meanings which are neither reproduced, nor produced by the translator: his task—tremendous and by far not easy—is to step back and let the essence of language emerge in the blazing fusion of the tongues. This true translation, paradoxically, is thus begotten outside the purview of subjectivity and hence—beyond the bounds of understandability. Unless language is itself a subject. Unless it itself speaks. Unless in our speaking we just say again the Saying we have heard by listening to it.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Jose Ortega y Gasset, *The Misery and the Splendour of Translation. Part III : Of Speech and Silence*. trans. Martin Boyd (Diálogos Intercultural Services, 2015) accessed November 20, 2016, <http://dialogos.ca/2015/05/the-misery-and-the-splendour-of-translation/>.

<sup>18</sup> Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 124.

<sup>19</sup> Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, 124.

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## BOOK REVIEWS

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**Donald Phillip Verene, James Joyce  
and the Philosophers at *Finnegans Wake*.  
Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press,  
2016. 152 pp. \$34.95**

*Pravda Spassova (National Academy of Fine Arts)*

That reading Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* is an extremely difficult endeavor is common knowledge – it arises spontaneously from the very first acquaintance with the book. Therefore, everyone making the effort to join the club of connoisseurs of complicated literature is faced with the challenge: how to deal with *Finnegans Wake*? First, of course, is the question: why do we need to make an effort?

I've tried to read this book several times for different reasons. First time was out of snobbery – I was studying philosophy and made a show of knowing about deeper levels of reality, so somebody gave me *Finnegans Wake* as a gift, believing in my ability to understand what it was all about. I tried and failed; it made me just impatient and I could not even get through the first ten pages. Then, for my part, I passed it on, giving it to a friend who translated English and American literature and claimed to be one of the best educated in the field. I wouldn't say he was very happy about it, because afterwards he never uttered a word about Joyce, at least not in my presence and to my knowledge.

My second attempt came much later: after reading a comparison between Carroll's linguistic play and Joyce's use of language in his last book. However, the attempt proved futile again: a familiarity with and liking for Lewis Carroll's puns and his playing with portmanteau words wasn't basis enough to appreciate Joyce's ... how to put it... Unbearable linguistic sumptuousness?

Joyce's *Wake* language is a work of art in itself – even the single words disclose constellations of meanings, provoking associations by the very manner of writing them. That is why I considered a joke the alleged claim ascribed to Beckett, that he had written some fragments of

*Finnegans Wake* under dictation by Joyce, while working as his private secretary. I think that such a statement might be taken at face value only by people who never tried to read the book. Beckett could not seriously think that anybody would be able to write even a single sentence of this book under dictation. Beckett's contribution to the famous collection of essays on Joyce's forthcoming *Work in Progress*, as *Finnegans Wake* was then known, *Our Exagmination Round His Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress*, states that the words in *Finnegans Wake* have to be looked to and listened to, because "his writing is not about something, it is the thing itself." Joyce had to write and certainly did so, every single word himself, no matter that he was nearly blind while finishing the book.

One has then to perceive the language in *Finnegans Wake* as a work of art. That much I understood. I could even somehow grasp the atmosphere, but the book again overwhelmed me and I could not see the sense of putting so much effort into an activity that depressed me more than it gave me pleasure. Joyce was far too idiosyncratic for me.

Now I am on my third try to "crack" the book. Professor Verene's work *James Joyce and the Philosophers at Finnegans Wake* gave me the boost, because it offers a key. A very complicated one – it turns out that in order to understand Joyce's last work, you need some close familiarity with the history of philosophy. Donald Phillip Verene certainly does. He is Charles Howard Candler Professor of Metaphysics and Moral Philosophy at the prestigious Emory College of Arts and Sciences in Atlanta, Georgia. He is also Director of the Institute for Vico Studies. I suppose that it is his capacity as a Vico expert that makes Verene such a fluent Joyce scholar. Understanding *Finnegans Wake* through philosophy and mainly through Vico's work is actually following Joyce's advice. Joyce, who knew Italian and claimed to be influenced by Vico's *La Scienza nuova*, often recommended reading Vico.

Of course, some may argue that Joyce was just making one of his jokes, being a kind of literary jester. One could even argue that the whole book is but a complicated joke. However, such a view leads to the lazy conclusion that there is no point to probe any deeper and try to reach behind the linguistic twists. There are people, like me, who, far from being experts in literature, are moved by intellectual curiosity and would want to discover at least the reasons for the worldwide fame of Joyce's last book. Snobbery would be another easy, but highly insuffi-

cient explanation. Joyce might have played to the snobbish reader, but all this play occurs on the basis of a huge amount of theoretical knowledge. This fact overrules another easy explanation of Joyce's book, that it was written and composed as a stream of consciousness. However, this assumption could be considered just a simplification and cannot get the reader beyond some false conclusions about the author.

Beckett obviously believed that some knowledge of Vico was necessary for the proper understanding of the sense and the meaning of *Finnegans Wake*. But Verene goes further. He follows all the philosophical tendencies in *Finnegans Wake*, mainly but not exclusively in the light of Vico's ideas about language, poetics and the development of knowledge and sensitivity.

I am not sure if Joyce had wanted to follow Vico's periodization of history, and if he had added a fourth period to the theocratic, heroic and humanistic ones. I do not know if the book mirrors some views of Giordano Bruno, or some other Renaissance thinkers. I am inclined to trust Verene's philosophical expertise, whose conscientious work on Joyce deserves every respect, but my gratitude for his investigation lies in his having provided a persuasive answer to my initial question about the point of reading such an enigmatic literary work.

There is no doubt that the language of *Finnegans Wake* is an artwork in itself, but there is something even more interesting. Verene helped me realize that Joyce's last book can be regarded as an intellectual puzzle. And the key to this puzzle is Vico's interdisciplinary conception of knowledge.

Now I am again on my way through the pages of *Finnegans Wake*. It is too soon to say that I'll happily reach the end, which as we know even without having read the book, is its beginning. My reason to be optimistic this time is that I now have a reliable guide, Donald Phillip Verene's *James Joyce and the Philosophers at Finnegans Wake*, a work that not only shows the way to a deeper understanding of this forbidding text, but also provides an excellent example of patience and precision, a valuable scholarly quality.

**Zdravko Popov, ed., *Myth and Philosophy*.  
St. Kliment Ohridsky University Press, 2016, 363 pp.**

*Rossen Stoyanov (University of Sofia)*

Since its first edition in 1991, *Myth and Philosophy* has been a well-known book to the Bulgarian philosophical public. This revised and expanded edition (some texts have been removed and others added) comprises 14 texts (beyond the editor's introduction) by classical authors such as Martin Heidegger, Wilhelm Nestle, Hegel, Charles Kahn, Aleksei Lossev and others, which provide different perspectives on the problematic and ambiguous relation between these two forms of the human spirit, myth and philosophy.

The question of the origins of philosophy, Popov claims in his Introduction, is the question of its legitimacy: What was this whole life of philosophizing for, what was it worth? This questioning of the validity of one's commitment to philosophy refers to the reasons, to the beginning. This beginning, however, is lost in time – like falling in love, one starts philosophizing without noticing it and soon naïve everyday thinking is left behind. Some philosophers find the point of this transition in astonishment and wonder (Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Kant), others in the borderline situations of realizing that one is going to die, to suffer, to struggle (Jaspers). Common to all humans, these indeed legitimize the philosophical enterprise but are recognized only after the fact; they are all philosophical answers. Is it possible, Popov asks, for an answer outside of philosophy to be given, can we “meet” philosophy before it has defined itself? A turn to the historical origins of philosophy, to its tradition, shows that it always establishes itself in opposition to an Other: naïve everyday thinking, religion, sophistry, politics or science. But the first Other, Popov emphasizes, was Myth, philosophy's chronological and ontological border. This first distinction and self-identification of the philosophical logos took place in an exemplary way in the Greece of the pre-Socratics, which is the focus of the majority of the texts in the anthology. However, the origins of philosophy are not only of historiographical interest. A closer look at this border, at the event of the multiplicity and variety of phenomena crystallizing into a concept, allows the philosopher to situate herself within the tradition of philosophy, to understand her own philosophy better. That is why, Popov claims,

historians turn back to the roots of philosophy but philosophers return to the essence of philosophy.

Heidegger's "What is Philosophy" is not the anthology's first text but it belongs among its central pieces since, in a way similar to Popov's introduction, it points to some of the main issues which are examined throughout the book: the exemplary character of Greek culture; the intimate connection between language and thought, and its significance as a path of inquiry; the nature of philosophy not simply as a detached theoretical discourse but as a comprehensive attitude, a perspective towards the world. Heidegger insists that question regarding what is philosophy should be given a philosophical answer. He opposes the merely historiographical collection of traditional definitions of philosophy and the "distillation" from them of a general formula. Following the path of language as revealed by the Greek φιλοσοφία and the Greek way of stating the question τί ἐστιν, Heidegger stops at φιλοσοφος and at Heraclitus, the alleged author of the word. Interpreting Heraclitus' obscure sayings the German philosopher claims that φιλεῖν (literally "to love") in φιλοσοφος meant "to speak in the same way" as the Logos, "to be in harmony" with it, and σοφον referred to the totality of all existing beings that is Being, Logos. Thus, Heidegger posits philosophy as the striving to enter into dialogue with Being, to respond to its call. He characterizes this response as a "disposition," as attuning oneself to Being, and points to Plato's and Aristotle's παθος of astonishment as such a disposition. Descartes' doubt aiming at *ens certum*, being in certainty, was another. This attunement is not just a matter of calculative rationality or emotions and sentiments. According to Heidegger, the appeal of Being affects language and language responds to it, attunes itself to it. Thus, Heidegger's approach is philosophical but not ahistorical – against the collection of definitions of philosophy he posits what he terms "destruction," that is, the listening to the murmur of language, staying open to the message of tradition and translating it into the present.

As stated in the Introduction, the Other is constitutive for the philosophical logos and the diversity which characterizes the texts in *Myth and Philosophy* can be seen as adequately reflecting this problematic and complex relation

Thus, there are texts such as those by Rudolf Otto and George Gusdord which lay emphasis on the opposition and distinction between myth and logos. In "The Idea of the Holy," Otto depicts the experience of the

divine, the “numinous” as a *mysterium tremendum*, that is, a coming face to face with a secret that shatters us in terror, excitement, fear and humility, but also in gratitude, trust, love. As such, it can only be described but not conceptually articulated. A similar model of opposition is adopted by Gusdorf in his “The Intellectual Consciousness,” where the transition from myth to logos is presented as taking place between two types of consciousness, the mythical and the historical. According to Gusdorf these are characterized by different perceptions of time – to the repeatability, stability and clarity of the mythical worldview he opposes the restlessness, doubts and insecurity of historical consciousness, which clearly realizes the contingency of its own existence rooted in the past, living in the present and anticipating an unknown future.

Hegel’s classic “The Beginning of Philosophy” (from his *History of Philosophy*) can also be seen as based on an opposition, here one between a consciousness capable of self-restraint and another ruled by the blind force of the passions, between the politically free Greeks and the peoples of the East, who are subject to the arbitrary will of despots.

As a proponent of the opposite yet complementary takes of myth and logos, Wilhelm Nestle appears in the anthology with a piece from his *From Myth to Logos*. This balance between the image-forming force of mythical fantasy and the abstractions and conceptualizations of rationality is clearly expressed in the Greeks’ conception of nature, the “exemplary people” as Nestle characterizes them, who saw the world as cosmos, a jewel crafted beautifully according to the principles of measure and proportion, the logos, common to gods and mortals alike. Those who possessed knowledge of these principles and the ability to apply them in practice were called σοφοί – the artisan, the poet, the physician, the oracle, the seven sages, Thales, the first philosopher. The collaboration of myth and logos is evident, in Nestle’s opinion, in the order of the heavens as described by Homer and Hesiod, with its clearly structured and distinguished spheres of authority of the various divinities, as well as in the use of mythical narratives by philosophers such as Plato, Parmenides and Protagoras.

Again, the intelligible order of reality is considered to be the foundation for the continuity between the mythical and the rational by Julius Stenzel in his “Pre-theoretical Metaphysics.” The Greek world was a unity combining the here-and-now of mortal existence in the center, the highly anthropomorphic Olympian realm as its shining reflection, and

the world of the dead, a shadow-like copy. It was this unitary metaphysical image of reality that made possible the transformation of the concept of Justice, which Stenzel tracks, from a goddess to an impersonal and inevitable chain of events, which can be foreseen by the wise man. Again, this unity of all reality is the ground for the characteristically analogical nature of Greek thinking – from the falling autumnal leaves as a symbol of transient human existence in Homer to the sun-like Platonic “Good” which combines the diverse dimensions of the ethical and ontological.

Raymond Prier’s “*Σημα* and the Symbolic Form of the Pre-Socratic Thought” identifies the continuity between mythopoetic imagery and the philosophical *logos* in the use by Heraclitus and Parmenides of light- and fire-related symbols such as lightning and stars. Referred to as *σήμα* (“sign of recognition,” “portent,” “symbol”) these are significant elements also in the narratives of the Homeric hymns and Hesiod’s *Theogony*.

Common to most of the other texts is their focus on language as the medium where the complex relation between the mythical and the rational takes shape.

Thus, Wolfgang Schadewaldt’s “Language as a Pre-philosophical Thought Process” emphasizes the function of language as a sketch of reality made by the subject out of the variety and multiplicity of phenomena. This sketch reveals the different ways in which different communities dwell in the world. Being a part of a bigger work, Schadewaldt’s piece in the anthology stops short of the declared examination of the Greek language as an articulation of being. Charles Kahn’s text provides an example of such an examination.

The object of Kahn’s “The Greek Verb ‘To Be’ and the Concept of Being” is the influence of everyday pre-philosophic language use on the development of Greek ontology, especially how aspects of the Greek verb “to be,” *εἶναι*, seemed to guide the formation of characteristic features of the concept of being. Rejecting as an anachronism the modern distinction between existential and predicative uses of “to be,” Kahn insists that the most fundamental use of *εἶναι* when appearing alone is the affirmative “to be so,” “to be the case” or “to be true,” what he labels the veridical usage of “to be.” Next, he points to *εἶναι*’s durative aspect. The verb forms all its tenses from its present-durative stem; it does not have an aorist or perfect stem. Finally, Kahn brings forth the locative

value of “to be” and its meaning “there is.” These three features of εἶναι’s semiotic content provide the foundation of certain features of Greek metaphysics: eternity is posited as a stable present, as an untroubled state of duration, real entities endure (Parmenides describes being as ungenerated and unperishing); whatever is is spatial and even corporeal (the nous of Anaxagoras is located in place, Plato’s forms inhabit the region of the intelligible, Parmenides’ Being is conceived as a solid mass). However, the most significant aspect, as Kahn insists, is the veridical one and its double sense of verity and fact – for Aristotle and Plato, for Parmenides, Being is what is or can be truly known and said.

The process of emergence of philosophical terminology out of everyday language in the Classical period is the subject of Sergey Averinzev’s “Classical Greek Philosophy as a Historico-Literary Phenomenon.” Carrying the ambiguity characteristic of oracular sayings, this process consists in a metaphorical shift of meaning which is of a paradoxical nature – on the one hand it is a playful loosening of established uncritical everyday usage, on the other it is a pedantic examination as exemplified by Socratic dialogical inquiries, an attempt at “distillation” and stabilization of a clear univocal meaning.

Ivan Rozhansky’s “The Idea of Nature in the Epoch of Early Antiquity” can be seen as complementing Kahn’s analysis of Being as it focuses on another fundamental philosophical notion, that of φύσις (nature). He tracks its first appearances in the Homeric works, examines in detail its various meanings in the Hippocratic corpus, its use by some of the pre-Socratics, by the tragic poets, and finally by Plato and Aristotle. This analysis reveals φύσις’s rich and comprehensive semantic content and its relation to other notions of great significance for the philosophy and science of the fourth century BC: δύναμις (inner force of development), ἀρχή (first element), αἰτία (cause), οὐσία (essence), ἦθος (character, constitution). The result is an illustration of the complex dynamics of formation of a technical philosophical vocabulary, here not so much out of everyday language but from the field of other disciplines, in this case mainly medicine.

The relation between myth and logos as one of aesthetic expression is the subject of Aleksei Lossev’s “The Symbolism of Antiquity.” He takes philosophical theory to be nothing more than language that is self-aware and self-analyzing and which articulates the deep intuitions of a people. Thus, pointing to the connection in Greek between the term

“σοφία” (wisdom) and τέχνη (art, artisanship), to the combination in Homer of γινώσκω (to recognize) with seeing, to the optical sense of Plato’s ἰδέα, Lossev argues that all these reveal the particular Greek intuition about Being as sculpture: the gods were sculptures, the cosmos itself was a sculpture. That is why, Lossev argues, Greek ontology could only be aesthetic; aesthetic, too, was Greek education, which aimed at the comprehensive shaping of the individual as a unity of character and body. This explains the lack of distinction between the aesthetic and the moral in the systems of the Pythagoreans, of Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus.

Another perspective on the material character of Greek culture is found in Aza Taho-Gody’s “The Ancient Greek Understanding of the Person.” She follows the development of the term σῶμα (literally meaning “body”) from the emphasis on its physicality by Homer, who used it often for “corpse,” then its use in Greek tragedy for the self-aware individual, who, very much like the Homeric hero, was still bound by the blood relations of family, and finally its reference in Xenophon and Thucydides to the free citizen of the polis, the farmer, the soldier, the statesman, a meaning which comes close to our own understanding of “person.”

The anthology closes with an essay by Valentin Kalinov, “Thought and Love,” which, as suggested by the title, unfolds as a study of the traditional analogy of philosophizing to being in love. However, Kalinov opts not for the rigid and dry argumentative style of an academic study, but one of free deliberation. The result is a poetic narrative of associations, evoking images and metaphors, repetitions, the spiral movement of thought. By such means, one could argue, the essay re-enacts those processes of notion formation referred to by Averinzev, attempts to break through the linearity of historical consciousness. Gusdorf writes about, strives to strike those right tones, to achieve this right attunement which Heidegger considers the aim of philosophizing. It is as if Kalinov struggles to articulate the dynamic relation of the logos with everyday naïve language, with corporeality, with myth.

To this same effect the selection, made by Savina Petkova, of Margritte’s paintings seems to contribute, as if to “articulate” in images the distance, spatial and conceptual, that separates the logos of the texts, thus engaging the reader’s imagination.

*Myth and Philosophy* successfully addresses the complex relation between myth and logos by collecting a variety of texts which examine the relation’s different dimensions. Referring to Michel Foucault’s con-

cern that sometimes commentaries dominate the original sources and take their place, Popov claims in the Introduction that the texts of the anthology pay due attention and respect to the authors and the works they take for their subjects. Indeed, the selected pieces provide a rich historical and linguistic context for the development of pre-Socratic philosophical thought. Thus, *Myth and Philosophy* will not only be a valuable companion to philosophy students and scholars with an interest in the field, but will also provoke a look back to the first texts of philosophy. Moreover, the inclusion of texts that one can qualify as “more philosophical,” those by Popov, Heidegger and Kalinov, not only balances the more historical approach characteristic of the rest but suggests to the reader an approach of philosophical engagement with the historical, an approach maybe not very different from Heideggerian “destruction” – e.g. the reader can take Kahn’s linguistic analysis of εἶναι and apply it to another language, to her own. As a result, *Myth and Philosophy* encourages what Popov in his introduction calls “a philosophical return” to the origins of philosophy. “

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**Application deadline:** September 30 (for state scholarship applications--September 15), to start in October; January 31, to start in March.

***The citizens of EU/EEA and Switzerland please check with the Program Director about the state scholarship deadline.***

**Student Visa Matters:** Sofia University in cooperation with the Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Science provides the necessary documents for student visa application to all **eligible** candidates outside the ***EU/EEA and Switzerland.***

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