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THE CRUELTY OF ANIMAL HUMANISM AND THE LAST SACRIFICE

Az animális humanizmus kegyetlensége és az utolsó áldozat

Surovost animalnog humanizma i poslednja žrtva

In my paper, I am examining the relationship among the different interpretations of cruelty and sacrifice with special attention to man as biologically given; cruelty in the age of animal humanism and the sacrifice of vulnerability. In order to understand what has led to the age of animal humanism that purely sees man as a being only capable of suffering – suffering in a narrow sense – one has to touch upon the question of the desire for a great life. As a starting point I am referring to Dostoyevsky, after which I write about the fundamental 20th century experiences regarding cruelty and sacrifice. Following this, I discuss in detail the presently characteristic paradoxes of returning to 'natural' life and the abolishment of suffering, as well as their possible consequences.

Key words: ethics, Dostoyevsky, Badiou, sacrifice, cruelty, biotechnology

1. DEATH-SACRIFICE NECESSARY FOR LIFE

The rebel heroes of the greatest writings of Dostoyevsky are characterised by the desire for great life. The aim of these heroes is to present the speciality of their selves for themselves and the tool for this might be to make order in the world, or to articulate the lack of the metaphysical order – and the purposelessness of making order in the world – through sacrificing the life and human dignity of ourselves or others. The saints and sweet-tempered ones in Dostoyevsky are the people of sacrifice following the „we are” approach. In Dostoyevsky’s world death sacrifice has an important role. In the more determinate works of his later period this is manifested as the following main versions: (1) *useless death sacrifice* (when somebody becomes the victim of a murder or an illness due to the cruelty of humans or nature); (2) *death sacrifice necessary for the self* demonstrating the

lack of order for an experiment to make sense based on the self or to a metaphysical riot against the divine order; (3) *a sensemaking death sacrifice* based on the experience of „we are”. One death case might be interpreted in several different ways; like the death of Fyodor Pavlovich might mean a necessary death sacrifice (2) for Smerdyakov but the killing of their father could lead Dimitri and Ivan Karamazov towards a new view on the world (3) (DOSTOYEVSKY 1999). During their restaurant conversations, Ivan lists the examples of meaningless death to Alyosha (1) and this is what leads him to the philosophy of ‘you are free to do anything’ in the spirit of which the death case taking place cannot be understood as the case of a necessary death sacrifice (2) by Ivan (DOSTOYEVSKY 1999). Ippolit considers his nearing death as the manifestation of the cruelty of nature (1) so he is planning to commit suicide since this revolting move could give some sense to his death (2) (DOSTOYEVSKY 2008). The riotous heroes of Dostoyevsky consider death as necessary in order to have an important, „*real*” *life* (Life from hereon); death serves Life. In a paradoxical way suicidal death also aids the prevalence of Life (this is how Kirillov looks upon his deed; the reasonless suicide), but it could also mean the impossibility of the realization of Life (this is what happens in Stavrogin’s case or with the aforementioned Ippolit who finally does not commit suicide) (DOSTOYEVSKY 1995: 2008). Captain Snegirev sees his son’s death senseless (1) while the children community of Alyosha Karamazov, on the other hand, finds meaning for life because Ilyusha’s story forces them to reject cruelty and to accomplish a Life based on experiencing the “we are” that is stronger than death (3) (DOSTOYEVSKY 1999).

Death sacrifice in Dostoyevsky’s work eventually serves to conquer death and to achieve the concept of Life. His novels make clear what is also inferred by the observations of the 20th century: Life shall not be achieved by handling the self or the other as a tool and by sacrificing it “necessarily”. The 20th century was characterized by such an aspiration for establishing an Order in society (in the communist, fascist and Nazi states) where life would finally turn into Life. However, these experiments unfortunately failed. A new Order that is built on death sacrifice and misery does not clear away but makes *violent death and pain an every-day* issue and brings the world of death factories and constant fear along that grind all those who were deemed “necessary” victims by the given Order.

Alain Badiou explains his opinion similar to the above mentioned: he thinks that the longing for *creating the new men* was a fundamental characteristic of the 20th century – from 1914 to the fall of the Soviet Union. This idea spread among the fascists and communists, and goes hand in hand

with the demand for *destroying the old men* (BADIOU 2007: 1–10). Both politics and arts relate to the present and aim at changing it radically, thus Badiou says that the 20th is the century of the passion for reality, though reality is antagonism, the reality of the beginning. The question of the cruelty of the Idea is one of the main questions of the 20th century: the soulless and universal idea is manifested in such a historic body that is made of bodies capable of suffering. Cruelty is the moment of connecting the impassive and suffering bodies (BADIOU 2007: 111–130). Badiou comments this way: “Today we know that when the Idea dies, the hangman dies with it. It remains to be seen whether from the legitimate wish that the hangman die we must infer the following imperative: ‘Live without Ideas’”(BADIOU 2007: 117).

All that has been discussed above is worth supplementing and specifying by relating to the analyses of Jörg Baberowski on the connections of ideology and violence: according to this there is *no causal relation* between the modern idea of creating a new world and the violence of the first half of the 20th century that exceeds all imagination. The most horrifying violence was raging in the “violence spaces” of the times preceding modernity without the security of the modern statehood, and the birth of these were brought about by the unusual war situation and the leaders who alluded to the ideology and all the *cult of violence* surrounding them (BABEROWSKI 2015: 13–32, 209–218).

It is the fundamental experience of the 20th century that *senseless death cannot be overcome by death serving Life* and thus considered to be meaningful and that rationally justified cruelty does not lead to the seizing of irrational cruelty but rather to its further spread.

2. SACRIFICING LIFE: THE AGE OF ANIMAL HUMANISM

It is obvious that the cruelty of the creation of the new Order that degrades humans to victims and brings about spaces of violence is unacceptable. In our times the rejection of the miseries of the last century goes together with the loss of the desire for a new Order. With the end of the Cold War period the desire for a new Order that makes Life possible was liquidated for good. Humans are again *only beings who have no hope for eliminating death*. But facing this would be far too painful: *suppressing the desire for Life contributes to the “elimination” of death, and to it becoming a cultural taboo*. Humans are only vulnerable animals and the humanism that is based on this view aims at reaching the minimization of suffering. While facing death also means suffering, it is better to have this as much “tucked away” as possible.

According to the famous line of Richard Rorty, one can be considered liberal who thinks that cruelty is the worst of all things we do (RORTY 1989: 44–69). For a liberal ironist person, the moral subject is someone who can be humiliated: the sole social bond that we need is the *understanding of our common character that we can be humiliated* (RORTY 1989: 91–95). For Rorty human is a “specially smart animal” that is only distinguished from other animals by that the former is not only capable of suffering but can be humiliated as well. Alain Badiou on the other hand opposes *animal humanism* that is so characteristic of today’s democracies that present humans as pitiable animals. Nowadays we cannot speak about Idea, the 20th century ended with the obsession of security and this also characterizes the 21st century (BADIOU 2007: 66). We are trying to get back to human as biologically given, it is only the biological body that matters and the aim is to reach harmony with nature; natural human rights are presented as the rights of the natural being. Animal humanism is only related to the humiliation of humans reduced to their own present. According to Badiou, it is a philosophical task to rebel against animal humanism as a “formalized in-humanism” (BADIOU 2007: 165–178).

Perhaps a view that considers Rorty’s and Badiou’s views at the same time is necessary. Let us begin with the concept of freedom that is important for both authors. For Rorty, human freedom has only one fundamental limit, the possibility to humiliate people. Badiou states that the democratic “formalized” freedom is unreal without equality and brotherhood that have become swearwords by today. It is a dehumanizing freedom and purely means that all of us can only do the same things along the same rules. Real freedom, the freedom of the beginning is a cruel freedom: in the 20th century equality as a program and brotherhood as the reality of “we” limit freedom or even eliminate it in many instances. It is not too difficult to admit that, based on historic experiences, the source of the worst cruelty is when *freedom is interpreted in such a way that it can give a possibility to ignore the autonomy of the human person and to use them as tools*. We can surely accept the concept that in the society of a formal freedom where “negative” freedom (freedom from something, the lack of outer limitations) is basically respected, “positive” freedom (freedom for something in the sense of achieving human possibilities) is damaged in several ways and this is also humiliating. We can talk about this phenomenon when the accomplishment of the personal opportunities is obstructed by poverty, grave social situation, ignorance or just the lack of real meaning of life, goals and life values. It is absolutely clear that in the 20th century it is the grievances of the positive freedom that gave the base of the desire for a new order and new men and this has

led to the radical violation of negative freedom. Today's animal humanism looks upon restricting negative freedom without the proper reasons as clear cruelty, and does the same with extreme poverty. But it accepts social inequalities because – as Badiou also implies – it emphasizes the natural order of things as market economy so the presence of the few rich and the many poor are also natural just like the fact that humans aim for safety and survival. Changing the world with an ideology failed, there might only be a slight chance to the *biological-genetic development* of humans. Badiou also points out the controversy that the politics of creating new men failed but in the same time the radical changing of a person by genetics became possible (BADIOU 2007: 9, 169). Even though human genetics is the interference with nature so there are arguments about it, it is uncertain whether it would disrupt the inequalities that are considered natural or it would just strengthen them (e.g. genetic modification carried out by private companies for lots of money; see the related alternative scripts). The supporters of the new human biotechnologies see a repairable machine in people: *an animal that can be bred better*. The common acceptance of Badiou's and Rorty's approach means that we have to regard cruelty resulting from both negative and positive freedom; we cannot turn away from compassion. It is rather in need for its spread because even a man could awake compassion in us who lives on the animalistic level, who does not strive for transcending oneself anymore and who has already bowed to the actualities.

An ideology that could be connected to animal humanism that is the *biotechnological elimination of human misery* paradoxically based on the idea that by the sheer strive for unity with nature and by providing the “natural” rights misery cannot be eliminated, just decreased. And for the termination of suffering the “reprogramming” of human nature would be needed. Changing humans from the “outside” by force in order of a social idea failed, thus it is thought today that this could only be done from the “outside”, violence-free, and by the application of manipulative mechanisms. However, biotechnological (especially genetic surgery) transformation implemented from “inside” has the greatest importance.

Getting rid of misery in this case also means that ‘suffering’ results from self-identification and the risk of freedom is eliminated, so this is the radical infringement of positive freedom. Only those human opportunities remain which mean the less danger to the termination of vulnerability so the risks coming from the human nature will not be natural any more (like the susceptibility to addiction or destructive and self-destructive behaviour). Who knows what further human behavioural forms fall victims of this struggle just casually. Perhaps even art – at least as we understand it today – will disappear.

The mechanisms characterising the era of animal humanism – that the aim for decreasing vulnerability goes along with the downgrading of men, and that natural glamorization have unnatural consequences – are not visibly caught in the human biotechnological processes just yet nowadays. These are visible in the politics of compassion or in the cult of body formation. The operation of the politics of compassion that is the political effects of the humanitarian reason and empathy was unfolded by the works of Didier Fassin. Fassin uses the concept of *biolegitimity* to describe the widely spread phenomenon that people in disadvantageous situation who ask the government for help, or the immigrants seeking residence permit in many cases do not even allude to their rights but try to reach their goals by “showing” their suffering bodies and relying on compassion. It became so evident that the petitioners were trying to rely on compassion that after a while people making the decisions in their cases became immune to the misery stories so it led to the “*banalisation of suffering*” (FASSIN 2005: 362–387, TAKÁCS 2015: 67–85). Here we talk about the tighter sense of compassion that is linked to providing the most basic habits, because in animal humanism man is seen as a simple being capable of suffering – in its limited sense – and individuals also present themselves such if their interest has it. ‘Limited’ compassion only prevails in such methods that get rid of compassion that is understood like this, and such an approach does not support the search for the reasons behind the social injustice and the real handling of the problems.

Let us take a look at the problems arising from the cult of beauty. In our days a “natural” body is ideal again if conforming to a kind of a barbarian beauty ideal: physical strength is not only upgraded by men but the ideal woman is also like an Amazon, muscular, sun-tanned, “combative”, surely not a fragile or a pale beauty in need of protection. Researches concluded that the body weight of women considered ideal beauties constantly dropped along with the circumference of their waists (the waist-hip proportion became higher thus the “hourglass shape” changed to “tube” body shape). The visibly muscular female body is considered more and more aesthetic in the West (thanks to the globalization processes, this ideal is more general all around the world even if there are cultures in which it stays less effective) (MESKÓ 2012: 156–158, 223–224, 237–239). The fashion of thinness and a sporty build with great breasts resulted in such an ideal that is different from the shape of most women. In case of male bodies, it is the unnaturally and disproportionally muscular build that is ideal today (MESKÓ 2012: 229–231, 169). The idealised body picture that is presented to us from the mass media can only be achieved by its radical change. But the overtanned, overtrained

body after too many plastic surgeries is not natural at all. So basically what we call ideal today is the artificially created “natural”, i.e. the *seemingly natural*. In many cases the objectification of the body and discontent towards it lead to psychic disorders and the deterioration of physical health. Instead of having a decreased vulnerability, *new manifestation forms of suffering* have to be faced: those with physical disabilities are shut out and the unlimited beauty treatments, diets and body deforming practices sooner or later lead to painful consequences.

3. THE LAST SACRIFICE

The failure of eliminating vulnerability might lead to “radical” biotechnological solutions and to the termination of our ability to suffer. Furthermore, the final goal is the *termination of death*; the fulfillment of this earthly and eternal desire of humanity. We might not even be too far from having man defeat death by its own strength via biotechnology and thus becoming God themselves. This would also necessitate, besides eliminating ageing and various illnesses, – an improved stem-cell therapy shall make the replacement of the “used” and ill organs available in the near future – to have men unable to destroy each other and to wage wars in the new nature of humans. No “genetically” faulty individuals shall remain who wish for the death of any others, or rebelling against the “eternal life” wish for their own deaths. Along with the elimination of death and suffering, our ability to revolt and questioning things shall also be extinguished. Without these, self-creation and the development of our personalities cannot be imagined. Biotechnologists may produce “gods” who are unable to do self-creation. A being that is invincible, who does not depend on the care and support of others, and who is technologically perfect will not be able to love. Slavoj Žižek writes in relation to Saint Paul: „Only a lacking, vulnerable being is capable of love: the ultimate mystery of love means, therefore, that incompleteness is in a way *higher than completion*” (ŽIŽEK 2001: 147). The real achievement of Christianity – according to Žižek – is that it elevated the imperfect and loveable being to God’s place (ŽIŽEK 2001).

The final elimination of death could result in the world of “gods” who are unable to love, to experience togetherness, who are lonely, and who cannot experience their own seclusion. In order to eliminate the vulnerability of man, actually the human nature, shall also be sacrificed. The *age of radical animal humanism* will be replaced by the *age of biotechnological anti-humanism*.

The last sacrifice; that of men capable of suffering, is seemingly the only really “necessary” sacrifice since this leads to the elimination of

victimization. Men shall never *again become a victim* because they cannot create themselves opposing others; there is no place for rationally reasoned violence or such that brings the beauty of crossing the borders. But with men that make victims or humiliate others extremely men of sacrifice also disappear. It is not just the realization of Life that sacrifices others arbitrarily but also a Life that depends on making sacrifices for others that become impossible. Coming back to Dostoyevsky: there will not be any more Stavrogyns, but no Alyosha Karamazovs either. Based on the view of these types that pursue security and comfort in animalistic humanism, that refer to the “natural” and that glorify the average, they do not even have a place today. Affection and acting for others in our age that aims at ‘technically’ terminate misery presents itself in an unnatural way just like loyalty to an *event* in the Badiouian sense. In case of Badiou the extraordinary character of the event brings about new methods of activities, and the same could be said of the events, common humanity and the experience of our togetherness in Dostoyevsky’s world. The person accepts a kind of a general truth in both cases remaining loyal to it by advertising the event through an action aiming at ceasing all kinds of differences. Badiou wrote a book on Saint Paul who in his interpretation starts out from an event; the resurrection of Christ and the actions and miracles of Jesus are not important for him (BADIOU 2003). For Saint Paul real affection lies within an event that is subjected in faith „since only the event allows the subject to be something other than a dead Self, which it is impossible to love” (BADIOU 2003: 90). In the sense of Paul’s order “love your neighbour as yourself” first we shall love ourselves in order to be able to love others and it is our faith in resurrection – that is not the denial of death, but the ability to get out of its rule, saying yes to a new life, the victory of a new person over an old one – that enables us to do so. Therefore, in case of Saint Paul it is not the “mystic” love in which two become one (and during which we forget about ourselves) that is important (BADIOU 2003). In case of Dostoyevsky it is seemingly this latter one; the mystic affection is on the agenda: the empathy of common experiences triggers the change, so it is the “mystic” event of experiencing love that starts the changing of life. Nevertheless, this event also helps the person to be able to love himself too. The experience of “we are” leads to self-affection and also to the understanding of “I am” (because whoever is unable to do this will fall like Ivan Karamazov, or will commit suicide just like Stavrogin). In Dostoyevsky, the affection-activities as an event is the prerequisite of faith. For Badiou faith in an event (resurrection in the case of Paul) is the basis of affection and the universal advertisement of the event. We could say that in the first case *sacrifice* lies in the *experiencing of*

affection, while in the latter case sacrifice is rooted in the *faith in an event*. It does not matter which way we consider valid, we chose life against death, or more precisely *despite death*, so we do not aim at covering or technically terminating it.

Besides the ‘suffering bodies’, ethical and moral discourse shall be engaged about the *other methods of becoming a victim* and about the *real sacrifice* over the actions carried out by ‘limited’ compassion. It is essential that we become sensitive towards the less spectacular modes of misery, but compassion in itself does not necessarily lead to acting right. *Moral discourses* could form the fundamentals of such public politics that is based on a more complete understanding of social sacrifice. The *ethical discourses* could drive the individual towards their own understanding of sacrifice (affection). One thing is undisputable: sacrifice for another person or for a better society shall never be against humans because the recognition of our interdependence would be expressed by it. Furthermore, it could only be based on the *fullest consideration of the human necessities and abilities* because it supports the individual to be able to create oneself in harmony with others. The last victim in such a sense shall not be sacrifice.

We have to think about the human that is *still present and capable of making sacrifices*. Will time come for a last sacrifice? If yes, then the person who eliminates himself along with his vulnerability does not make a sacrifice in reality but just simply falls victim of his own perfectionist endeavour.

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Az animális humanizmus kegyetlensége és az utolsó áldozat

Írásomban a kegyetlenség és az áldozat különböző értelmezéseinek összefüggéseit vizsgálom, különös tekintettel az emberre csupán mint biológiai adottságra, az animális humanizmus korának kegyetlenségére és a sérülékenység feláldozására. Ahhoz, hogy megértsük, mi vezetett az animális humanizmushoz, amely az emberben csak egy szenvedésre képes lényt lát – szűken értelmezve a szenvedést –, érintenünk kell a nagy élet vágyának kérdéskörét. Kiindulópontként Dosztojevszkijre utalok, majd a kegyetlenség és az áldozat problémájával kapcsolatos alapvető 20. századi tapasztalatokról írok. Ezután tárgyalom részletesen a „természetes” élethez való visszatérés és a szenvedés felszámolásának napjainkra jellemző paradoxonait, ezek lehetséges következményeit.

Kulcsszavak: etika, Dosztojevszkij, Badiou, áldozat, kegyetlenség, biotechnológia

Surovost animalnog humanizma i poslednja žrtva

U svom radu posmatram veze među različitim interpretacijama surovosti i žrtve sa naročitim pogledom na čoveka u svojoj biološkoj datosti, na surovost doba animalnog humanizma i na žrtvovanje ranjivosti. Da bi shvatili šta je dovelo do animalnog humanizma koji u čoveku vidi tek biće sposobno za patnju – interpretirajući patnju u svom užem smislu – treba da dotaknemo pitanje koncepta težnje ka velikim životom. Kao polaznu tačku navodim Dostojevskog, nakon čega govorim o fundamentalnim iskustvima 20. veka vezanih za problem surovosti i žrtve. Potom detaljno razmatram paradokse povratka „prirodnom” životu i eliminisanja patnje karakteristične za našu današnjicu, kao i njihove moguće posledice.

Ključne reči: etika, Dostojevski, Badiju, žrtva, surovost, biotehnologija

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