Axiological Illnesses

About the Dangerous Dimension of Values

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Foreword

In this book, 11 essays published in various specialized journals are brought together. The common element among them is the explosive nature of values that, unfortunately, have been written about so little until now. Therefore, this book serves as a warning that such sublime things as values can sometimes become so dangerous that they can destroy lives or even entire civilizations.

Chapter 1
The Axiological Bankruptcy of Life

Abstract

The meaning of life is not just some ordinary old philosophical problem, but also a practical one that, in some form, everyone wonders about. The whole meaning of life has always been linked with belief in higher values that form the incentive for the spiritual uplift of humanity. Even if spiritual values are illusions, they are absolutely necessary in order to give life meaning. When they disappear, it causes a serious disease of the axiological consciousness of man. The characters that are involved in the cultural stage hosting this drama are *the idealist*, who sets values as necessary illusions of the human spirit, and *the wise man*, who shatters any illusion of salvation through faith in values.

Keywords: eudemonology, idealism, the meaning of life.

A new praise of folly

Perhaps not coincidentally, the great philosophers and writers have used 'madness' to highlight the 'wrongs of the world', as Don Quixote, 'the most amusing madman' in the world, puts it many times. Also Prince Muishkin, from Dostoevsky's famous novel *The Idiot*, is an amusing madman, as is the character chosen by Friedrich Nietzsche to announce the death of God. The 'madness' of the latter is in fact the interpretation of this statement, especially in that it expresses metaphorically a truth so bad that it is impossible for the public ever to accept it. The entire speech about the death of God is like a diagnosis given by the philosopher as a doctor of the civilised world. He suffers from a disease that can be called the axiological bankruptcy of life, a

The Axiological Bankruptcy of Life was originally published in *Praxis Filosófica*, núm. 39, julio-diciembre, 2014, pp. 197-208.

disease that occurs when confidence in all values is fully lost and thus no sense of life can maintained.

Posdnicheff, the main character in *The Kreutzer Sonata* by Leo Tolstoy, suffers from this axiological illness. He considers himself a kind of madman, not because he is out of his mind, but because he is too lucid. Normality implies a minimum of illusions. 'I am a wreck, a cripple. I have one quality. I know.'[1] Posdnicheff *knows* that values are only illusions necessary for life to be imbued with meaning. It is, moreover, the interpretation that Tolstoy himself provides in the Afterword to *The Kreutzer Sonata*: it is not rules but ideals that people need for their being not to degenerate.

The fact that *The Kreutzer Sonata*, published in 1889, had huge success throughout the world does not represent a symptom of decline or degeneration of the civilised world, Max Nordau[2] says, but rather is a cause for concern about the impossibility of living in a world completely free of illusions.

As long as there is faith in divinity, the meaning of life is not even questioned. It is self-evident. But when 'the madman' announces that 'God is dead', he means that the higher values, symbolised traditionally by God, thus fall into desuetude and so the life of the individual, of the society where he lives and the entire universe, loses any sense. 'Where is it moving to now? Where are we moving to? Away from all suns? Are we not continually falling? And backwards, sidewards, forwards, in all directions? Is there still an up and a down? Aren't we straying as though through an infinite nothing? Isn't empty space breathing at us?'[3] The madman, in the words of Nietzsche, was greeted by the crowd with a laugh, as has happened in history with all idealists. 'The madman' is actually the most lucid of mortals. In fact, the crowd who believed in

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[1] Lev Tolstoi, *Sonata Kreuzer*, Bucureşti, Editura Minerva, 1971, p. 57.
[2] Max Nordau, *Entartung*, I, pp. 263–264.
[3] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, translated by Jisefine Nauckhoff, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001, p. 120.

nothing was seized with madness. In a dramatic manner, Friedrich Nietzsche expressed in this parable the axiological bankruptcy of life.

'It is still recounted how on the same day the madman forced his way into several churches and there started singing his *requiem aeternam deo*. Led out and called to account, he is said always to have replied nothing but, "What then are these churches now if not the tombs and sepulchres of God?"'[4] What does Friedrich Nietzsche really mean by his 'madman'? That, already long ago, a transformation was made of the religion *of* Jesus into one *about* Jesus. Or, in other words, that we do not have to replace the ideal of Jesus with external ordinances, as Tolstoy stated via his hero in *The Kreutzer Sonata*.

Jesus himself, as mentioned in the *New Testament*, is taken, when selecting his twelve apostles, as one for whom it is true that 'He is out of his' (Mark, 3.21), even by those in his own family. But one who is not only the creator of a new table of values, but also believes in them and acts according to them, has always been regarded as one who is not exactly sane. Don Quixote is the embodiment of such an 'idiot.' But the 'madman' in Cervantes's novel is the most lucid of mortals. He 'sees' what the spirit of any man should essentially 'see.' Fascinated to delirium by the light of truth, goodness, love, beauty and all positive values, Don Quixote is different from other people who are blind from an axiological point of view. For them, reality is only what they can grab with their hands, as Plato puts it; by contrast, he lives, rather, in the world of Ideas, so he becomes a laughing stock.

Precisely this *laughing stock* is invoked by Plato in the famous myth of the cave when describing the reunion of the one who 'saw Ideas' with ordinary people, citizens of the 'world of shadows.' In the *Republic*, Plato distinguishes, as we know, an intelligible world, or one of Ideas, and a sensitive one, metaphorically called the 'world of shadows.' Let us imagine, says Plato, several people sitting in a cave, facing a wall projecting the *shadows* of different objects that pass behind them. For

[4] Ibidem.

them, 'reality' is nothing more than this shadow. Their world is therefore 'the world of shadows.' 'Take a man who is released and suddenly compelled to stand up, to turn his neck around, to walk and look up toward the light; and who, moreover, in doing all this is in pain and, because he is dazzled, is unable to make out those things whose shadows he saw before. What do you suppose he'd say if someone were to tell him that before he saw silly nothings, while now, because he is somewhat nearer to what is and more turned toward beings, he sees more correctly?'[5] Finally, the person who has been released not only acquires a correct perception of what is in the cave, but he leaves 'the world of shadows' to stand up in the sunlight. After enduring all the pain of turning, metaphorically rendered by Plato, he gets to contemplate the world above. 'In applying the going up and the seeing of what's above to the soul's journey up to the intelligible place, you'll not mistake my expectation'[6] The sun symbolises the Idea of Good such that, if you manage to contemplate it, it will fascinate you to a such an extent that you will never be able to commit evil. This is the meaning of the famous saying of Socrates, that no one does evil other than from ignorance. It is known that people have always perpetrated hurt knowingly; there have always been evil plans to do harm. But there is a deeper meaning to the saying of Socrates. The 'ignorance' refers only to not knowing the Idea of Good. Those who come to contemplate the Good, being ecstatic, 'aren't willing to mind the business of human beings, but rather … their souls are allways eager to spend their time above.'[7]

Such an idealist 'looks up', even when he is back down in the world of shadows; but then comes something that particularly interests us in this essay about a new praise of folly: he is mocked by ordinary people and considered a *madman*. 'And what about this? Do you suppose it is anything surprising, ... if a man, come from acts of divine contemplation to the human evils, is graceless and looks quite ridiculous when – with

[5] Plato, The *Republic*, translated by Allan Bloom, BasicBooks, 1991, p. 194.
[6] *Ibidem*, p 196.
[7] *Ibidem*.

his sight still dim and before he has gotten sufficiently accustomed to the surrounding darkness – he is compelled in courts or elsewhere to contest about the shadows of the just or the representations of which they are the shadows, and to dispute about the way these things are understood by men who have never seen justice itself?'[8] Therefore, in the sensitive world, the only reality recognised by most people, there is no good, justice, love; in short, there are no values, but only their pitiful shadows. Obviously, whoever has once known true love or the Idea of love cannot be complacent anymore in the 'barbaric bog' of the relations that people establish 'as the world', but will always 'look up', as Plato says, to the world of Ideas and another love that is described by an expression that made history: platonic love. It is understood that in the 'world of shadows', such characters will be 'laughing stocks' because they are really unlike

the world. Plato says bluntly: it is not the one who 'sees' Ideas or values in modern language who is the 'madman', but the people who laugh at him. 'But if a man were intelligent, he would remember that there are two kinds of disturbances of the eyes, stemming from two sources – when they have been transferred from light to darkness and when they have been transferred from darkness to light. And if he held that these same things happen to a soul too, whenever he saw one that is confused and unable to make anything out, he wouldn't laugh without reasoning but would go on to consider whether, come from a brighter life, it is in darkness for want of being accustomed, or whether, going from greater lack of learning to greater brightness, it is dazzled by the greater brilliance. And then he would deem the first soul happy for its condition and its life, while he would pity the second. And, if he wanted to laugh at the second soul, his laughing in this case would be less a laugh of scorn than would his laughing at the soul which has come from above out of the light.'[9]

[8] *Ibidem*.

[9] *Ibidem*, pp. 196–197.

Between Don Quixote de la Mancha and the world that laughs at him there seems to be the same relationship as that experienced by Plato's character who 'sees' Ideas and then returns among his peers in the world of shadows. The common element is that of the *laughing stock*. Because Don Quixote is a loser idealist, and only from this point of view, he is a *Sad Figure*. The bachelor Samson Carrasco woke him up to reality, brought him down to earth and so destroyed him. 'My reason is now free and clear, rid of the dark shadows of ignorance that my unhappy constant study of those detestable books of chivalry cast over it. Now I see through their absurdities and deceptions, and it only grieves me that this destruction of my illusions has come so late that it leaves me no time to make some amends by reading other books that might be a light to my soul. Niece, I feel myself at the point of death,'[10] says Don Quixote, serenely, when he realises that absolutely all his great illusions are lost forever. Death comes as something natural, because nobody could live without a certain naivety. Without a minimum of illusions we are all lost. It is precisely what the death of Don Quixote symbolises. And just to save him from the death of lucidity produced naturally painful, Samson Carrasco and others close to the dying do all that is possible for Alonso Quixano to be again the knight errant who he had once been. But 'now I perceive my folly', says Don Quixote, shortly before he dies. But to postpone this death, coming without any portent, once the famous hidalgo has forever lost its illusions, the one who has caused all this drama, the bachelor says: 'What? Senor Don Quixote! Now that we have intelligence of the lady Dulcinea being disenchanted, are you taking this line!'[11] But any attempt to restore his lost ideals proves to be doomed to failure. He, who had the most illusions, ends up with none.

The fact that this work of Cervantes passes as a comedy confirms the truth that 'madmen' are those for which the romance of the Knight of the Sad Figure has no value. But only those who sincerely believe in

[10] Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *Don Quixote*, Translated by John Ormsby, eBooks@Adelaide, University of Adelaide, Australia.
[11] *Ibidem*.

values and struggle for ideals push the world forward. Only through these aristocrats of the spirit does humanity 'looks up', as Plato says.

The epitaph composed by Samson Carrasco is in anticipation of the extraordinary adventure of Cervantes's character in the culture of humanity. Death is not able to kill Don Quixote. Moreover, 'at his feats the world was scared.' After all, why should the world be scared of an idealist, a romantic, so fragile through his romance itself? Because Don Quixote is like a mirror in which the reader can see his true face, his pettiness, selfishness and meanness. For this reason the idealist is a public danger. He must be murdered through laughter. He should be made a *laughing stock*, defamed, annihilated at any price. Or if any of this is not possible, then he is allowed to pass as 'a poor madman', who must not be regarded by 'normal' people when he says, for instance, that 'virtue is of herself so mighty, that … she will come victorious out of every trial, and shed her light upon the earth as the sun does upon the heavens.'[12]

Don Quixote's perception of values is absolutely correct until it is completely ripped from the world of the highest values and thrown by the loss of all illusions into 'normality' or a 'barbaric bog', to use a phrase of Plato's.[13] The idealist expects the world to be tailored by a good God rationally, according to the highest ideals, or at least to be easily transformed in such a direction, but is ultimately forced to conclude that it 'has no God', as they say – no sense. Hegel once gave a reply, now very well known, to a student who noticed that his theory was perfect, but did not quite fit reality: *Um so schlimmer für die Wirklichkeit*![14] – *so much the worse for reality*. If the world does not fit with the ideals of Don Quixote, so much the worse, you might say, paraphrasing the author of *Phenomenology of Spirit*, he also being

[12] *Ibidem*.

[13] Plato, op. cit., p. 212.

[14] Cf. Eduard Spranger, *Lebensformen. Geisteswissenschaftliche Psychologie und Ethik der Persönlichkeit*, Max Niemeyer Verlag, Halle, 1930, p. 139.

obsessed by the Knight of the Sad Figure[15], similar to the whole romantic generation who saw in *Don Quixote* 'a highly philosophical book.'[16] It has been said rightly that the germ of modern philosophic idealism is found in Don Quixote[17].

The delirium perception that Don Quixote has of an infinite devotion to the highest values is the price paid for the correct axiological perception. But this *madman* whom Dostoevsky took as a model for the hero of his famous novel *The Idiot* is much more worthy of esteem than all other 'normal' people who suitably perceive the material world but are 'blind' to the world of spiritual values. Before losing his illusions, Don Quixote can say what Goethe would later state in the Roman Elegies: 'See with a feeling eye: feel with a seeing hand.'

A painful axiological dilemma: idealism or wisdom

Despite the noble values he is trying to achieve, the idealist is everywhere ridiculed and considered a madman, but nobody laughs at the wise man; on the contrary, he has been esteemed and respected in all societies and in all ages. The wise man is the opposite of the idealist and romantic embodied by the 'knight of virtue', as Hegel calls Don Quixote in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*.

The wise man, as Arthur Schopenhauer depicts him in *Aphorisms on Wisdom in Life*, is in his essence infinitely less worthy of respect than the idealist destined to become a laughing stock. Why are wise men, then, valued so much? Because their wisdom has something of the chameleonism of the world, a world for which the spirit truly noble

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[15] See Michael Kirn, *Hegels Phänomenologie des Geistes und die Sinneslehre Rudolf Steiners. Zur Neubegründung der Wissenschaft aus dem Wesen des Menschen*, Urachhaus Verlag, Stuttgart, 1989, pp. 292–295.

[16] Cf. Sebastian Neumeister, *Der romantische Don Quijote*, în: Christoph Strosetzki (Hrsg.), *Miguel de Cervantes' Don Quijote. Explizite und implizite Diskurse im ‚Don Quijote'*, Schmidt Verlag, Berlin, 2005, p. 310.

[17] Alexander A. Parker, *Die Auffassung der Wahrheit im ‚Don Quijote'*, in: Helmut Hatzfeld (Hrsg.), *Don Quijote. Forschung und Kritik*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt, 1968, p. 18.

always 'was the scarecrow', as they say in the epitaph of the *knight of virtue*, while the wise men did so that the shortcomings from an axiological point of view to *beseem* some virtues. The wise man bets everything on *essence*, the wise man – on *appearance*.

The wise man of Arthur Schopenhauer is really a coward, a paltry, a ruthless profiteer, a barbarian who perfectly plays the comedy of the civilised man. He embodies positive values only to a very limited extent and he is in no way an apologist for them. Otherwise, would he be worthy of the crowd's esteem? The wise man is a selfish man because the ultimate goal of his 'wisdom' is his own well-being, not the good of others.

Not honesty, as a positive value, but dishonesty is what the wise man counts on; this is more reprehensible as it *appears* to be something else from a moral point of view. The wise man of Schopenhauer is the man of mask and a genius of disguise. 'To fight windmills' is, for him, really madness. He sees the world as a show, so all that matters is the 'staging.' From this perspective nothing matters other than the reaction of the 'public', and the 'public' can be won over to giving him what satisfies his petty pride.

The wise man is an exceptional administrator of opportunities. Compared to quixotic idealism, wisdom is an art of human misery. It teaches you only how to hide your own weaknesses and how to take advantage of those of others.

Yet we should not be so critical of the *wise man* and his *masks*. Friedrich Nietzsche says that every profound spirit needs a mask. The wise man is a profound spirit. He knows better than anyone that it is madness to put yourself on the world stage without wearing the suitable mask. In addition, he chooses either to live away from the unleashed world, or to slip through it and take advantage of its weaknesses, knowing also this essential fact: that it's pointless to fight for ideals because you will be defeated anyway and you become, like Don Quixote, a 'laughing stock.' *Virtue* has no chance against *the progress of the world*.

The wisdom in life preached by Arthur Schopenhauer in *Aphorisms on Wisdom in Life* is that of one who sees his life as being like a small business. Moreover, it is easy to note that most of the maxims from eudemonology are expressed in economic and financial terms: profit, price, capital, gain, bankruptcy, etc. You do not have to be a great psychoanalyst to realise that Schopenhauer was concerned to the point of mania to protect his own capital and increase the interests that would ensure him a peaceful life.

As a *wise* trader sells his goods below the purchase price in a time of crisis to avoid bankruptcy, so the wise man, as the author of *Aphorisms on Wisdom in Life* conceives him, feels the need to 'sell' himself below his value when he must show himself to be 'inferior' or conceal his merit.

The *eudemonology* of Arthur Schopenhauer, presented in an accessible, popular form in *Aphorisms on Wisdom in Life*, comes, as the name itself indicates, from the Greek *eudaimonia* – the art of being happy[18] – but it is about a strictly personal happiness, indifferent to others. *Eudemonology*, this 'guide to a happy existence'[19] teaches you essentially that you do not have to design ideals to put the world in motion, to lift it, trying to adjust to them, but that, to have a quiet life, you must adapt to the 'crookedness' of the world, against which Don Quixote and idealists throughout time have reacted. Schopenhauer's observation that 'men are like children, in that, if you spoil them, they become naughty'[20] is fair, but, when convinced that nothing could ever change human nature, the only wise thing to do is adapt to it, slip unnoticed through life. In this case, the rule of life formulated, like so many others, in mercantile terms, sounds like this: 'it is well not to be too indulgent or charitable with any one. You may take it as a general rule that you will not lose a friend by refusing him a loan, but that you are very likely

[18] C f. Jürgen Mittelstrass, (Hrsg.), *Enzyklopädie Philosophie und Wissenschaftstheorie*, Verlag J. B. Metzler, Stuttgart/Weimar, 1995, vol. I., p. 600.
[19] Arthur Schopenhauer, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
[20] Arthur Schopenhauer, *The Wisdom of Life*, translated by Thomas Bailey Saunders, Burt Company Publishers, New York, 1902, p. 148.

to do so by granting it; and, for similar reasons, you will not readily alienate people by being somewhat proud and careless in your behavior; but if you are very kind and complaisant toward them, you will often make them arrogant and intolerable, and so a breach will ensue.'[21]

Apparently, wisdom in life is always achieved through an axiological sacrifice. You can live peacefully, or even happily, only to the extent that you can effectively manage your cowardice. Wisdom is nothing but the art of being sneaky. The wise man does not ever intend to 'align the crookedness', as Don Quixote said many times, but to take advantage of it. Only a 'madman' such as the Knight of the Sad Figure, or Prince Muishkin of Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*, may be unconditionally sincere and generous, and always align his thoughts to 'high targets that are to do good to all and harm to anyone'[22]. Midsummer madness, as the wise man would say. He knows that even when you really cherish someone it is better for you to be dishonest, to hide your true feelings. 'It is advisable to let every one of your acquaintance – whether man or woman – feel now and then that you could very well dispense with their company. This will consolidate friendship. Nay, with most people

there will be no harm in occasionally mixing a grain of disdain with your treatment of them; that will make them value your friendship all the more. Chi non istima vien stimato, as a subtle Italian proverb has it – to disregard is to win regard. But if we really think very highly of a person, we should conceal it from him like a crime. This is not a very gratifying thing to do, but it is right. Why, a dog will not bear being treated too kindly, let alone a man!'[23] If this is wisdom, then, from an axiological point of view, it is a catastrophe. It is true that the wise man is not naive; on the contrary he has a merciless lucidity. He sees better than anyone else the 'crookedness' of the world, but he indulges in it.

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[21] *Ibidem*, pp. 148–149.
[22] Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *op. cit*., vol. III, p. 351.
[23] Arthur Schopenhauer, *op. cit*., p. 149.

The wise man knows that our world is hopelessly bad, the worst of all possible worlds, so it would be crazy to attempt to change it.

Comparing the *wise man* of Arthur Schopenhauer with the 'madman' of Cervantes you are faced with an axiological dilemma: lucidity without grandeur or greatness without lucidity, because it is clear that someone who sees his own life as a small business that is somewhat profitable cannot sacrifice himself for ideals. The wise man knows, for instance, that 'Politeness is a tacit agreement that People's miserable defects, whether moral or intellectual, shall on either side be ignored and not made the subject of reproach; and since these defects are thus rendered somewhat less obtrusive, the result is mutually advantageous.'[24] Schopenhauer resumes in this way an idea common to most moralists, adding, as his own contribution, a mercantile comparison: 'For politeness is like a counter – an avowedly false coin, with which it is foolish to be stingy. A sensible man will be generous in the use of it.'[25] There it is – how low the wise man can be, how perfectly duplicitous, compared with the idealist as aristocrat of the spirit. In his politeness, he is generous with the fake currency and stingy beyond measure with the true one.

Opposite to *the wise man* is the idealist embodied by Don Quixote. He exaggerates in the direction of good. If this world is not the best of all possible worlds, it *may* become so. The natural goodness of Don Quixote that Cervantes repeatedly emphasises is projected onto the world. Unlike the wise man, whose fundamental concern is to sneak in a cowardly fashion among people, fitting his mask well, without even trying to change anything for the better, the idealist endeavours with of all his powers to become what he should be and also to change the world, to put in motion his ideals – to make of it, despite the pessimism of the wise men, the best of all possible worlds.

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[24] *Ibidem*, p. 164.
[25] *Ibidem*.

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Immanuel Kant emphasises *die großeMacht der Illusion*[26]. Illusions are a part of human beings. A man without a certain amount of delusion would be unthinkable, or, if there was one, he could not survive more than a few moments. Without the faculty of delusion, not only the happiness of a human being but his very survival would be practically impossible. However, when it exceeds a certain limit, *the colossal power of illusion* that Immanuel Kant refers to turns on you and crushes you, like a medicine taken in too high a dose which turns into poison.

Conclusions

The meaning of life has always been linked to a higher set of values that each man, according to his ability, tends to realise. The paradox is that all creators of values, without exception, were regarded as madmen. But their 'madness' is actually the symptom of decadence and the madness of the world itself.

The opposite of the idealist who always passes for a 'madman' in the eyes of most people is the *wise man*, as he is presented by Schopenhauer in *Aphorisms on Wisdom in Life.* It is understood that, to avoid the axiological bankruptcy of life, the idealist, with his 'madness', deserves more respect than it is usually granted.

[26] Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Felix Meiner Verlag, Hamburg, 1993, p. 568.

Chapter 2
The Demonism of Creation in Goethe's Philosophy

Abstract

The philosophy of Goethe's creation revolves around what he called *das Dämonische*. This essay is not meant as a definition or an explanation of the creation demonism, it presents instead a demonic work *par excellence* as this term is defined by Goethe: *Elegy from Marienbad*. The creation process of this work as it is described by Goethe represents also a strange exorcise, the entire daemonic creative force of the author being transposed in this lyrical masterpiece of German and universal literature. After writing the *Elegy* Goethe is no longer demonic.

Keywords: philosophy of creativity, Goethe, demonic personality, Faust, genius

About a strange exorcise: *The Elegy from Marienbad*

In one of his discussions with Eckermann about the demonic, Goethe makes the following mentioning which is often quoted in the works dwelling upon this subject: "In poetry, especially in that which is unconscious, before which reason and understanding fall short, and which therefore produces effects so far surpassing all conception, there is always something dæmonic."[1] The demonic as Goethe repeatedly maintains should not be confused with the diabolic. It represents the mysterious power which can be manifested not only in certain personalities but in things, events or entire epochs. In *Poetry and Truth*

The Demonism of Creation in Goethe's Philosophy was originally published in *Trans/Form/Ação*, 2012, 35 (3), pp. 67-80

[1] Johann Peter Eckermann, *Conversations of Goethe by Johann Peter Eckermann*, Translated by John Oxenford, George Bell & Sons, London, 1906, Tues., Mar. 8., 1831.

the author says "this demoniacal element can manifest itself in all corporeal and incorporeal things, and even expresses itself most distinctly in animals."[2] We can't but be surprised by the fact that Goethe asserts that the demonic may take the *strangest forms* in animals since a fragment of the *New Testament* chosen by Dostoyevsky to serve as an epigraph for his famous novel *The Daemons* is about this. Based on the *Gospel According To Luke* a demonized person was healed by Jesus because "had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man" (Luke, 8.29). Demons pass from humans to animals, they rush to a cliff towards the sea and get drowned. "Then people came out to see what had happened, and when they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid. Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons had been healed." (Luke, 8.35-36).

In order to support the idea underlined in the present essay the fact that the daemon or in Goethe's vision the demonic manifests itself both in humans, animals and things it is not so important as it is its *shift* from one to another. It goes without saying that both Goethe's *demonic* and the *exorcise* dwelled upon further on have almost nothing to do with the ones related in the New Testament passages mentioned above nor with the mystical and occult practices originating there, nevertheless this analogy is necessary. Like the *unclean spirit* from the biblical story, Goethe's *demonic* comes out of him and passes this time not into an animal but into a thing, being found in the fascinating *Elegy from Marienbad*.

People moved by this mysterious force called by Goethe *das Dämonische* behave like actual instruments in the hand of a mighty force which fatally traces the road to be followed in order to reach a certain goal. Goethe himself says that "something Dæmonic prevailed, which was not to be resisted"[3] determined him to write the *Metamorphosis of Plants*,

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[2] Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Poetry and Truth*, vol. III, E.P.L., București, 1967, p. 386.
[3] Johann Peter Eckermann, op. cit., Sun., Mar. 20, 1831.

to meet Friedrich Schiller in a certain circumstance or to travel at a certain time to Marienbad. He is fascinated by demonic personalities such as Napoleon or Byron, nevertheless Goethe specifies that demonic people "always the most eminent men, either morally or intellectually; and it is seldom thai they recommend themselves to our affections by goodness of hear!: a tremendous energy seem.-, to be seated iu them; and thej exercise a wonderful powei over all creatures, and even over the elements; and, indeed, who shall say how much farther such influence may extend? Ail the moral powers combined areof no avail against them."[4]

We will try to illustrate the daemonic element in the artistic creation by one of Goethe's works. We will refer particularly to the *Elegy from Marienbad* in order to highlight the extraordinary relation between a daemonic author as Goethe and his work. "Generally when a work was finished, it became uninteresting to me; I thought of it no more, but busied myself with some new plan."[5] Nevertheless Goethe had a special relation with two of his works. The first one is The *Sorrows of Young Werther*, the other one which is *par excellence* a demonic work is *Elegy from Marienbad*. Although both saved Goethe from desperate situations these two works represent at the same time two extremes of the way in which their author saves himself by transposing suffering into poetry.

A book like a "postponed suicide"

The Romanian philosopher Emil Cioran said that "any book is a postponed suicide." *The Sorrows of Young Werther* is a perfect illustration of Cioran's idea stated above. If we refer strictly to the epic plan this book *about suicide* is the one which really saved Goethe from the *suicide* which could be not "postponed" otherwise. This is not an *interpretation* or a *speculation* but Goethe's testimony in *Poetry and Truth:* "By these convictions I freed myself, not so much from the danger as from the whim of suicide, which in those splendid times of peace, and with an

[4] Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Poetry and Truth*, vol. III, E.P.L., Bucureşti, 1967, p. 387.
[5] Johann Peter Eckermann, op. cit., Wed., April 14. 1824.

indolent youth, had managed to creep in. Among a considerable collection of weapons, 1 possessed a handsome, well polished dagger. This I laid every night by my bed; and, before 1 extinguished the candle, I tried whether I could succeed in plunging the sharp point a couple of inches deep into my heart. Since 1 never could succeed in this, I at last laughed myself out of the notion, threw off all hypochondriacal fancies, and resolved to live."[6]

At this turning point in Goethe's life the masterpiece *The Sorrows of Young Werther* is born. Of course, this is what Schleiermacher called using a term difficult to render in another language *Keimentschluß*,[7] that seed which will germinate and give birth in the author's soul to the next work. *The Sorrows of Young Werther* represents as it results from *Poetry and Truth* a real "postponed suicide", because according to Goethe only the "suicide fixation" was thus defeated without the suicide "project" for he will need this plan at a certain moment in his life as part of the survival strategy.

In order to detach himself temporarily of the "suicide fixation", Goethe determines Werther to commit suicide for him, creating thus a character who decides to die so that his creator may live. This is one of Goethe's shocking testimonies regarding the origin of *The Sorrows of Young Werther*: " But, to be able to do this, with cheerfulness, I was obliged to solve a poetical problem by which all that I had felt, thought, and fancied upon this important point should be reduced to words."[8]

If we make a distinction like Goethe does between the "suicide fixation" and the "suicide project" which is nothing else but a less fix idea we should accept that the last one plays an essential part in keeping the human's dignity until the very last moment of his life. For when dignity it is brutally cancelled the "suicide project" must be put in application so that life could maintain its sparkle until the very end. This is the

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[6] Goethe,. *Poetry and Truth*, Bucuresti, 1967, vol. III, p. 167.

[7] Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutik und Kritik*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1995, p. 189.

[8] Goethe, *op. cit*., vol. cit., p. 167.

main idea of the Stoicism and of other several philosophies which gave suicide the place deserved in the human's axiological universe and reflected profoundly on it. By means of his character, he does not reflect only on the suicide but he also suicides imaginarily or better said aesthetically. The *Sorrows of Young Werther* expresses the strange tragic joy produced by the thought that somebody sacrifices in you place, that a dear person dies so that you can continue living. That is why the author's relations with this work have always been tense. Goethe will come back to *The Sorrows of Young Werther* like a criminal to the crime scene. He often talked about his weird disposition when he was forced to reopen the pages he had written in order to get rid of the "suicide fixation." Unlike usually, Goethe tells nobody about this creation during its becoming. It is like a secret that is why Goethe's friends are surprised when they are offered the manuscript of *The Sorrows of Young Werther* in order to read it at the end of creation process, i.e. the four weeks "For by this composition, more than by any other, I had freed myself from that stormy element, upon which, through my own fault and that of others, through a mode of life both accidental and chosen, through design and thoughtless precipitation, through obstinacy and pliability. I had been driven about in the most violent manner. I felt, as if after a general confession, once more happy and free, and justified in beginning a new life."[9] A tragic reality had thus become a masterpiece of German literature.

After he had saved Goethe from suicide, the book about the miserable Werther has still a rather perverse effect: it drives people crazy and makes them sick, the "wertmania" becoming a malady which pervades the spirit of the time. By a mysterious process the "suicide fixation" of which Goethe freed himself by writing *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, is transferred to the public. Here it is the author's confession in this respect: " But while I felt relieved and enlightened by having turned reality into poetry, my friends were led astray by my work ; for they thought that poetry ought to be turned into reality, that such a moral

[9] *Ibidem*.

was to be imitated, and that, at any rate, one ought to shoot oneself. What had first happened here among a few, afterwards took place among the larger public; and this little book, which had been so beneficial to me, was decried as extremely injurious."[10]

As Madame de Staël said, Werther caused more suicides than the most beautiful woman in the world. How were the persons with suicidal tendencies supposed to react to *The Sorrows of Young Werther*? It was not Goethe's character the one who should have been imitated but the author of this character. In *Poetry and Truth* Goethe dedicates many pages to *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, as if still amazed by the devastating effect of the book on the audience. But the amazing success of a book tells always more about the audience itself than about its intrinsic value or about its author. Goethe himself was aware of the fact that the success of the book was due to the fact that it appeared at the right time, that age being hunted by the idea of suicide. Therefore not *The Sorrows of Young Werther* had caused the massive wave of suicides, instead many self-murderers wanted probably to be associated with Werther, their gesture acquiring thus a highly spiritual connotation "The effect of this little book was great, nay. immense, and chiefly because it exactly hit the temper of the times. For as it requires but a little match to blow up an immense mine, so the explosion which followed my publication was mighty, from the circumstance that the youthful world had already undermined itself: and the shock was great, because all extravagant demands, unsatisfied passions, and imaginary wrongs were suddenly brought to an eruption."[11] The suicide of Jerusalem which had a great echo in that time also contributed to this, people believing that they found more about this by reading *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. But Werther had almost nothing in common with Jerusalem for it was Goethe himself the one who

[10] *Ibidem*, pp. 170-171.
[11] Goethe, *op. cit.*, vol. cit., p. 173.

actually led the suicide to the very end in the poetic plan so that he could continue living.

But what is there to be done when you are not capable of postponing your suicide by a masterpiece the way genius do? If you are not capable of creating a Werther who could commit suicide in your place the way the fabulous character did with its creator, Goethe's *Werther* remains the only chance to survive. The really strong characters seem to have understood this since "Napoleon read this work 7 times and in his campaign in Egypt, he did not leave it aside."[12] Maybe all the people who wish to go beyond the veil could postpone their decision or even drop it for good by reading *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. In fact this is the abstruse meaning of the author's preface to this thrilling book: " And thou, good soul, who sufferest the same distress as he endured once, draw comfort from his sorrows; and let this little book be thy friend, if, owing to fortune or through thine own fault, thou canst not find a dearer companion."[13]

Therefore, I shall quote again from Emil Cioran's, using his subtle formulation not only from the author's perspective but also from the one of the reader, a great book is a postponed suicide or, at least, it should be. The ones who committed suicide with *Werther* in their pocket would have done anyway. For them the jeopardy came from another direction, not from this book which should it be understood deep down could have been for most of the suicides the only possible salvation. Goethe saved himself by creating a masterpiece; the suicides affected by "werthmania" could save themselves by admiring it.

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[12] Friedrich Gundolf, *Goethe*, vol. I., Editura Minerva, Bucureşti, 1971, p. 299.

[13] Goethe, *The Sorrows of Young Werther* , E. S. P. L. A., Bucureşti, 1960, p. 1.

The demonism of creation[14]

The second work with which Goethe had a special relation is the *Elegy from Marienbad*, but the author's reaction is totally opposite to the one he had in *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. It is notorious that Goethe avoided any reencounter with this work for a reason clearly stated in his discussions with Eckermann: "Besides, as I have often said, I have only read the book once since its appearance, and have taken good care not to read it again. It is a mass of congreve-rockets. I am uncomfortable when I look at it; and I dread lest I should once more experience the peculiar mental state from which it was produced."[15]

In what concerns the *Elegy from Marienbad* Goethe's reaction is at the opposite pole. He returns to it often and moreover he is completely fascinated by his own creation as of something demonic. And indeed the *Elegy from Marienbad* is a demonic creation for a very special reason which we shall dwell further. Goethe's last love story which gave birth to this unique work in universal literature is well known. The poet age 74, falls in love with Ulrike von Lewetzov whom he had met a year before when she was 18 years old in the same balneology resort in Bohemia. Goethe meets Ulrike in the summer of 1821, at Marienbad, in her grandparents' house where she was lodged, he sees her again in 1822 in similar circumstances and in 1823, through the agency of prince Karl August, Goethe officially asks her to marry him, his request being accompanied by a medical certificate which attested his physical capacity of fulfilling possible matrimonial obligations.[16] The comic side of this situation was never overlooked by the ones who handled this episode in Goethe's life. Considered in a larger context, this scene is worthy of Don Quijote, because Ulrike von Lewetzov never acknowledged in her long life (1804-1899) that there existed any love

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[14] A first version of the text that is to be published in Italian as *Goethe e il potere demonico di Ulrike*, în vol.: *Muse ribelli. Complicità e conflitto nel sentire al femminile*, Ombre Corte Edizioni, Verona, Italia, 2011, pp.52-62.

[15] Johann Peter Eckermann, op. cit., Fri., Jan. 2., 1824.

[16] See, Dagmar von Gersdorff, *Goethes späte Liebe. Die Geschichte der Ulrike von Lewetzow*, Insel Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 2005.

story between them. Even towards the end of her life she used to say about her relationship with Goethe: "keine Liebschaft war es nicht."[17] This sentence– *there was no love* – expresses the essence of Ulrike's constant attitude towards Goethe's last love. When asked by her friend Malwine von Höfler, about what had happened in fact between them at Marienbad, she answered: "I can assure you that Goethe gave me but a goodbye kiss."[18]

Nevertheless for Goethe this is a love story lived in a totally different manner not because it is the last one but because it becomes a creation which will free him from the *demon* for good. Both the creation of this poetry and its effects on its author are of miraculous nature. Here it is Eckermann's description of the almost magic atmosphere in which Goethe reveals for the first time his demonic work *par excellence*: "Stadelman brought in two wax lights, which he set on the table. Goethe desired me to sit down, and he would give me something to read. And what should this be but his newest, dearest poem, his *Elegy from Marienbad*.!"[19] Eckermann remarks the fact that Goethe's love affair in Marienbad was well known and that "in this excited state, written a most beautiful poem, which, however, he looked upon as a sort of consecrated thing, and kept hid from every eye."[20] Several elements related not only by Eckermann, but by other people in Goethe's entourage prove that "it was obvious that he prized this manuscript above all the rest."[21] At the same time this elegy gave Eckermann a totally unusual impression, causing him trouble deep inside. This happened on October 27th, 1823. According to Eckermann's notes on November 16th the manuscript of the *Elegy from Marienbad* is presented again in the same magic atmosphere, in the trembling candle light. The poetry is read and reread "with rare a delight."[22] It is difficult for Goethe to detach himself from this poetry he loves as if it were the woman who

[17] Ibidem, p. 108.
[18] Ibidem, p. 109.
[19] Johann Peter Eckermann, op. cit., Mon., Oct. 27., 1823.
[20] Ibidem.
[21] Ibidem.
[22] Ibidem, Sun., Nov. 16., 1823.

inspired it. The *Elegy* remains unpublished for a long time and it is kept carefully together with other couple of objects which remind him of Marienbad. Wilhelm von Humboldt relates how during the visit he made to Goethe at Weimar, in November, 1823, he showed him this work telling him that it was the only one kept with his handwriting, thus underlining the special meaning he conferred to the *Elegy from Marienbad*.

In a splendid essay dedicated to Goethe, Stefan Zweig metaphorically places the appearance of the *Elegy from Marienbad*, among those *astral hours of the human kind*, when the human spirit is really creative. This piece of jewellery of German lyric is explained by Zweig by Goethe's theory on the "repeated puberty" of the genius. Goethe alleged that the erotic exuberance manifested in most people only when young is recurrent in geniuses. Moreover, the connection between the eros and the creation makes the object of numerous studies dedicated to the author of the *Elegy from Marienbad*. When very sick, his friend Karl Friedrich Zelter heals him by reading him his own poetry."His grief was gradually assuaged, his last tragical hope was laid to rest, his dream of a life together with his beloved 'little daughter' had come to an end. He knew that never again would he go to Marienbad.."[23] Ulrike gave his puberty the occasion to manifest itself for the last time and this determines according to Stefan Zweig the deep pain expressed directly and "with great sincerity" [24] in his poetry.

Nevertheless we consider that a psychological explanation like Zweig's, the one who has a real *Menschenkenner* gift and who is at the same time a stylistic conqueror is not enough in order to understand Goethe's special relation with this poetry he had always considered a sacrosanct object. For the idea of liberation from demonism through the *Elegy from Marienbad*, which makes the object of this thesis highly illustrative are two quotations from Goethe: "You see the product of a highly impassioned mood," said he. "While I was in it I would not for the

[23] Stefan Zweig, *Elegy from Marienbad*, Editura muzicală, București, 1978, p. 116.
[24] Ibidem, p. 115.

world have been without it, and now I would not for any consideration fall into it again."[25] It is about the same feeling of liberation from a mysterious force 'so rich in wealth, with danger far more fraught' (Elegy) also expressed in Faust, in the last moments of his life: "It's hard I know to free oneself from Demons, / The strong spirit-bonds are not lightly broken." When Eckermann tells him that when reading it he had the feeling that the *Elegy from Marienbad* is nothing like other poetry of Goethe's, he says: "That," said he, "may be, because I staked upon the present moment as a man stakes a considerable sum upon a card, and sought to enhance its value as much as I could without exaggeration."[26]

The Elegy from Marienbad requires a philosophical or, more precisely a metaphysical approach. There is no question about it: Goethe was a demonic man. This thesis is thoroughly substantiated by Gundolf so that there is no point to insist upon it. What we wish to underline here is the fact that of all the demonic people evoked by Goethe or who could easily be identified in history as being like that Goethe himself is the only one who manages in the end to defeat his barbarian and destructive demonism in a titanic manner. It is true that Goethe underlines the fact that the demonic is a creative, positive, not negative force like Mephistopheles, nevertheless creation inevitably brings along destruction and quite often self-destruction. ""The higher a man is," said Goethe, "the more he is under the influence of demons, and he must take heed lest his guiding will counsel him to a wrong path."[27] The outrageous tension every reader of the *Elegy from Marienbad* feels would have destroyed Goethe himself or at least would have deviated him on wrong ways if he would not have managed to liberate himself through creation. Many other predecessors and successors of Goethe have done it. But what makes this poetry unique in the cultural history is the fact that the entire demonic force of the author is transferred on the work like in a strange process of exorcism. The moment Goethe starts to write it down on paper *The Elegy from Marienbad* becomes a

[25] Johann Peter Eckermann, op. cit., Sun., Nov. 16., 1823.
[26] Ibidem
[27] Johann Peter Eckermann, op. cit., Tues., Mar. 24., 1829.

demonic work *par excellence*, and Goethe, its author, who is now liberated from the demon will continue to live and create like a simple genius if I may say so. After the Elegy inspired by Ulrike, he gravely takes an overview to his work built along his 60-year life and it appears fragmented and scattered. And since he can no longer build he decides to gather it; he concludes the contract for his *Collected Works*, he can now count on royalties, ...he returns to his first companions of his youth *Wilhelm Meister* and *Faust*."[28] This remark is found in most of Goethe's biographies. For instance Friedrich Gundolf says: "Almost everything Goethe will write from now on will consist of moral reflections and applications which are either calm, almost rigid or severe, energetic approvals and disapprovals uttered with superiority."[29] In other words all the works Goethe will write after the *Elegy from Marienbad* lack demonism.

However he will continue to be attracted by the *Elegy* as by a demonic work all his life. A series of confessions belonging to some of Goethe's close acquaintances may be invoked in order to support this idea. Marienbad started to have a miraculous effect on him from the moment he felt in love Ulrike von Levetzow in that place from Bohemia. At the beginning of 1823 Goethe was so ill that the doctors thought he would not live much longer. Goethe himself confessed doctor Huskhke: "I am lost" and the news of his death had already spreas in Jena.[30] When in agony Goethe uttered a redemption word: Marienbad! He wished to drink water from Marienbad and said that: "If I have to die, I want to do it my way!"[31] both this water he drinks with all his being and the arnica tea (Arnikatee), flowers that Goethe says he found in Bohemia worked wonders.[32] Naturally, after this "diet" followed by an improvement in his health condition not only imaginary but also

[28] Stefan Zweig, op. cit., p. 116.
[29] Friedrich Gundolf, op. cit., vol. III, p. 331.
[30] Dagmar von Gersdorff, op. cit., p. 47.
[31] Ibidem, p. 47.
[32] Ibidem.

confirmed by reliable person, Goethe suddenly rejuvenated wishes ardently to return Marienbad.

On June 26th, 1823, earlier thus than the previous years, the poet leaves for Bohemia where not only does he feel completely recovered after the severe illness he had suffered but he also lives the love story which gave birth to the *Elegy from Marienbad*.

In order to understand better what we called Goethe's exorcise by analysing this work we should take a short look to the way the genius was perceived during those times. Although both are creative faculties, they have little in common. With his well-known synthesis capacity, Immanuel Kant defined the genius as "the innate mental predisposition (ingenium) through which nature gives the rule to art"[33], drawing attention at the same time on the danger which results from the spontaneity and originality of the genius. The counter-weight of the genius as creative faculty is according to Kant, the taste, the one which tempers the impetus of the genius of creating works which can be placed in a certain cultural tradition despite their originality. "Taste... consists in disciplining (or training) genius. It severely clips its wings, and makes it civilized, or plished; but at the same time it gives it guidance as to how far and over what it may spread while still remaining purposive."[34]

If the genius finds its counter-weight in taste as Immanuel Kant pointed out in the *Critique of Judgment*, the demonic as it appears in Goethe must also have a counter-weight in order not to deviate on wrong ways as he says in one of his conversations with Eckermann. This time the counter-weight of the *demonic* is not taste but *wisdom* (*die Weisheit*). It shall not only calm the impulses of the demonic of which Goethe is possessed, but will substitute it for good after the exorcise represented by the *Elegy from Marienbad*:

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[33] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, București, 1981, p. 202.
[34] Ibidem, p. 214. & 50