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Želimir Vukašinović

POST-PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY AND THE AUTHORITY OF DIALOGUE – ON FREE FAITH, ATHEISM AND THE MEANING OF LANGUAGE –

ABSTRACT

The paper is an attempt at understanding the historic nature of the transition to postmodernity, metaphysically reflected in Nietzsche's words "God is dead", as it is, in its various aspects, manifested through the form of post-patriarchal society. Post-patriarchal society is interpreted here as an order of values anchored in the empty place previously held by original and ultimate authority. Within the context of the (un)certain end of metaphysics, it is, implicitly, necessary to explore the presuppositions on which religion and the meaning of language are based today. Thus, Nietzsche's experience of the epoch will be considered in relation to Žižek's perception of "a genealogical desert between man and God", which provides a theoretical framework for the reinterpretation of our understanding of the relation between religion, atheism and modernity.

KEYWORDS

faith, atheism, authority, thinking, post-patriarchal society, dialogue

Historical transition to post-modernity¹ manifests itself as the form of a post-patriarchal society anticipated by Nietzsche's words "God is dead".² A post-patriarchal society is understood here as an order of displaced values which, after

1 *Post-modernity* is, in the context of this interpretation, primarily related to a condition caused by the completion of traditional metaphysics and, equally, to an experience of a disintegration of the logocentric perception of Being itself. This condition, recognised as a state of mind, conceives an epoch of transition as it is, in its initial force, a state of nihilism which, necessarily, requires understanding and, by the creative power of philosophy and art, needs to be overcome. Thus, as much as nihilism has a negative meaning ("passive nihilism"), it can be recognised as a possibility as such ("active nihilism"). Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche's statement "God is dead" would certainly be of central importance in a possible, more detailed, analysis of this theme (see Heidegger 1977: 53–71).

2 "Haven't you heard of that madman who in the bright morning lit a lantern and ran around the marketplace crying incessantly, 'I am looking for God! I am looking for God!'"



the “death of God”, gravitates toward an empty place of the original and ultimate authority. This also implicates that the existential possibilities of humanity cannot be restored on the basis of traditional metaphysics. Within the context of the (un)certain completion of metaphysics, it is, implicitly, necessary to explore the presuppositions on which religion and the meaning of language are based today. By the nature and manner of such questioning, Nietzsche’s initial experience of the epoch could be re-considered through Žižek’s interpretation of the relation between religion, atheism and modernity. In principle, our discussion will be shaped by the framework of this interpretation.

The restoration of humanity through the activity of spirit or through the dialogical power of dialectics, is a historical fact that legitimizes the true, self-reflexive knowledge, whether it appears in the form of science, religion or art. In the seventh book of *The Republic*, Plato indicates that dialectics is a method (μέθοδος, *methodos*) which leads us to the clearness of being by which Beginning itself is conceived:

The dialectical method is the only one which in its determination to make itself secure proceeds by this route – doing away with its assumptions until it reaches the first principle itself. Dialectic finds the eye of the soul firmly buried in a kind of morass of philistinism. Gently it pulls it free and leads it upwards, using the disciplines we have described as its allies and assistants in the process of conversion. We have generally followed convention in calling these disciplines branches of knowledge, but they really need some other name. Something clearer than opinion, but more obscure than knowledge. We may have used the term ‘thinking’ at some point earlier on. (Plato 2000: 533d; 242)

Evidently, dialectics is a pathway, a method which is not hypothetically conceived. In fact, it directs us toward Beginning as It is which, through the being itself, we desire to understand, and, by which, the soul ascends or liberates itself from a primitive, primal, instinctive, consequently, violent life. This

Since many of those who did not believe in God were standing around together just then, he caused great laughter. [...] The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his eyes. ‘Where is God?’ he cried; ‘I’ll tell you! *We have killed him* – you and I. We are his murderers. But how did we do this? [...] What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Where is it moving to now? Where are we moving to? Away from all suns? Are we not continually falling? And backwards, sideways, forwards, in all directions? Is there still an up or a down? Aren’t we straying as though through an infinite nothing? Isn’t empty space breathing at us? Hasn’t it got colder? Isn’t night and more night coming again and again? Don’t lanterns have to be lit in the morning? Do we still hear nothing of the noise of the grave-diggers who are burying God? Do we still smell nothing of the divine decomposition? – Gods, too, decompose! God is dead! God remains dead! [...] The holiest and the mightiest thing the world has ever possessed has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood from us? With what water could we clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what holy games will we have to invent for ourselves? Is the magnitude of this deed not too great for us? [...] This tremendous event is still on its way, wandering; it has not yet reached the ears of men [...]” (Nietzsche 2001: 119–120).

liberation of the soul, as it is a revelation of the being itself, is enabled by a cathartic force of dialectics: it cleanses the soul of “morass of philistinism”, implicitly, of common belief. In this context, dialectics, as a method, is the pathway to beauty itself, to true life, to goodness, and, as it is indicated by Plato, all the sciences are its assistant skills. Finally, as I already elaborated this in the paper “Spirituality, Community and Life – An Essay on the Cultural Industry and the Limits of Contemporary Science” (see Vukašinić 2017: 103), dialectics (διδασκαλία) is a skill that Plato perceived as *thinking* (see Plato 1993: 242).

Education, therefore, should be understood as a *methodos*, as a pathway *through* and *by* which soul learns the art of catharsis. This also means that reasonability should be understood as a pathway of conceiving the meaning of human existence, reflectively, through the experience of the truth of existential upheaval witnessed by the history of philosophy. As it is not explicitly objective, the truth of being is not an event that can be detected or archived by historical or social science, but it is, as an event initiated by Socrates’ maieutics,³ a heritage of philosophical practice. Thus, if (post)modernity implicates a transition to post-patriarchal society, then the reevaluation of the dominant, but evidently discarded historical values of Western culture, can only be initiated within the openness which is founded by absence of the original and final authority. However, principles of reevaluation are firstly introduced by Socrates who, insisting on the statement that *he knows that he knows nothing*,⁴ already vacated the place of the unquestionable authority. Implicitly, an ironic force of Socrates’ maieutic method liberates thinking from an authoritative charge of presumptuous knowledge or conviction. Contextualised by the social order of his time, Socrates is a heretic who corrupted beliefs of the youth by introducing a false god (a new deity, *daimonion*). Namely, from the perspective of common belief, Socrates’ *daimonion* is either a false god or god is not (t)here where, by a common belief, he is presupposed or placed to be. In this context, the *daimonion*, the inner voice that Socrates clearly recognises and follows,⁵

3 The noun *maieutics* derives from *maia* (mother, midwife) and the related verbs *maieusis* and *maieonuai* mean “giving birth” and “easing childbirth”.

4 In *Theages*, Plato shapes a dialogue that clarifies the nature of dialectical education in contrast to any form of sophistry: “Socrates: Moreover, if Theages here refuses to associate with the politicians and seeks some other men, who claim to be able to educate young people, there are a number of such men here: Prodicus of Ceos, and Gorgias of Leontini, and Polus of Acragas, and many others, who are so wise that they go from city to city and persuade the most aristocratic and wealthiest of the young men – who can associate with any of the citizens they want without charge – these men persuade them to desert the others and associate only with them instead, to pay a great deal of money up front, and, on top of that, to be grateful! It would be reasonable for your son and you to choose one of these men, but it wouldn’t be reasonable to choose me. I know none of these magnificent and splendid subjects. I wish I did! I am always saying, indeed, that I know virtually nothing, except a certain small subject – love, although on this subject, I’m thought to be amazing, better than anyone else, past or present.” (Plato 1997: 128a, b; 635)

5 The *daimonion* or “the inner voice” by which the life of the soul is established, discloses itself in negativity: it responds, in a double sense (it revokes the action and

could be understood as dictate of the being itself. According to Kant's terminology, the categorical imperative is the basis of Socrates' autonomy and the starting point of dialogue. Dialogue is, prior and after all, a cathartic pathway of the soul, a skill of self-clearance of the being. As it clarifies the inner voice, dialogue is a pathway of logos, an active force of unifying power of thinking and language. Implicitly, dialogue is a relation itself through which *methodos*, as the pathway of truth, is revealed. Thus, the activity of the spirit is recognised as an immanent capacity of existence which persists on its humanity. In that immediate activity, history of the truth of being takes place in the world, in the history in which renunciation, not acquisition, is decisive. After all, that renunciation is a renunciation of presupposed values, that is, of values which are postulated by everyday thinking. The history of spirituality is a testimony of overcoming *doxa*, as well as it is, from a perspective of everyday thinking, an impractical leap into the void, into nothingness, into the abyss, a leap by which an existence is risked, exposed to the danger of openness as such. That leap, a leap into the emptiness and uncertainty, is a necessity of questioning, as it is an act of philosophical faith, a dedication to the credibility of experience witnessed by the history of spirit which preserves the meaning and origin of asceticism:⁶ an overcoming from a primitive, affective life, platonically, from the world of shadows. Implicitly, from Socrates, through the Old Testament, to Nietzsche, the history of spirituality can be seen as a history of continuous betrayal of authority, so to say, as a history of heresy. But, if we take a closer look at that heresy, we can recognise a life force that establishes an autonomous existential faith. This life force is, through history, constantly radiated by personalities who witness, as Jaspers nominates it, philosophical faith, the faith of a thinking man. In this context, the practice of philosophising means that *I do not accept anything simply, unexamined, as it is imposed on me* (see Jaspers 2000: 10, 11).

responds to the dictate of being), and thus constantly returns to the dialogue, namely in an inquiry that corresponds to the very thing that is being asked... "Socrates: There's a certain spiritual thing which, by divine dispensation, has been with me from childhood. It's a voice that, when it comes, always signals me to turn away from what I'm about to do, but never prescribes anything. And if some one of my friends consults with me and the voice comes, it's the same: it prohibits him and won't allow him to act)" (Plato 1997: 128d; 635, 636). On the basis of an understanding of the nature and purpose of a negativity of the "inner voice", in the climax of Western culture, as it is a consequence of the fundamental concern of Kant's *critique*, Hegel's idealism reflects the decisive value and power of the activity of spirit by which fundamental principles of humanity are restored, by which the ideal of life is restituted: namely and concretely, the freedom which is philosophy itself.

6 In his writing on late antiquity and early Christianity in *Technologies of the Self*, Foucault states that Plato's teaching can be basically understood as a request for the soul *to turn to itself in order to know its true nature*, and then, through Plutarch's and Seneca's interpretation of this (over)turn *to* and *by* the self, three essential points of asceticism are, according to Foucault, recognised as foundational for the process of revealing of the truth itself: 1. The importance of listening. 2. The importance of writing. 3. The importance of regular self-reflection (see Foucault 1988: 30–34).

Unconditional faith, therefore, unexamined conviction abstracted from doubt, just like any faith separated from its atheistic foundation, potentially turns into an act of repression, and, most drastically, into terror. Contemporary science is, by presupposition, positivistic as much as it eradicates its dialectical foundation. As such, it is equally an expression of unquestionable, unexamined faith... Technicism, for example, mandates an idea of education without philosophy and, thus, it destructs a spiritual foundation of humanity. Therefore, even it sounds heretically, instead of judging the betrayal of authority, the ultimate spiritual challenge of our time is to affirm this betrayal as the starting point of any research that, through the maieutic power of dialogue, reveals the way of learning the truth of reversal. Thus, Nietzsche's ultimate overturn of the sacred points of platonism should be understood in the light of thinking which is generated by an ironic force of the active nihilism, without which, in the era of post-humanism, a rebirth of the (over)man cannot be initiated.

For this reason, Nietzsche's religious atheism can be understood as an example of challenging search for God, in the era defined by the negative will to power. In other words, materialism and pragmatism already mastered contemporary Western culture, as they are, basically, forms of nihilism whose psychological consequence is pessimism. Implicitly, it could be said that Nietzsche was the last man for whom the death of God seemed disturbing. In a post-patriarchal society, while religious practices and social activism flourish, nihilism is not detected nor recognised as a disturbing experience. Even more, it is re-presented to be enjoyed. In the 329th paragraph of *The Gay Science*, titled "Leisure and Idleness", Nietzsche, in his specific manner, writes:

There is something [...] of the savagery [...] in the way the Americans strive for gold; and their breathless haste in working – the true vice of the new world – is already starting to spread to old Europe, making it savage and covering it with a most odd mindlessness. Already one is ashamed of keeping still; long reflection almost gives people a bad conscience. [...] 'Rather do anything than nothing' even this principle is a cord to strangle all culture and all higher taste. Just as all forms are visibly being destroyed by the haste of the workers, so, too, is the feeling for form itself, the ear and eye for the melody of movements. [...] For life in a hunt for profit constantly forces people to expend their spirit to the point of exhaustion in continual pretence or out-smarting or forestalling others. [...] If sociability and the arts still offer any delight, it is the kind of delight that overworked slaves make for themselves. [...] Well, formerly it was the other way around: work was afflicted with a bad conscience. A person of good family *concealed* the fact that he worked if need compelled him to work. The slave worked under the pressure of feeling that he was doing something contemptible: 'doing' was itself contemptible. (Nietzsche 2001: 183–184)

The state of nihilism, taking the form of vulgar materialism, exposes the fact that Western culture has abandoned its metaphysical foundation. Žižek's well-known phrase "don't act, just think!" addresses the post-metaphysical reality of the West. On the one hand – religious fatalism, namely faith separated from any doubt, and, on the other hand, hyper activism alienated from

ideas, create a schizophrenic culture. In the spirit of liberal capitalism, symbolic order re-presents materialistic perception of humanity which is conditioned by dominancy of the logic of capital. Liberalism, implicitly, deviates from its foundational, idealistic, presuppositions and so it becomes an expression of the negative will to power, it creates a framework for exploitation of basic human needs and, consequently, it transforms itself into a rational force of repression. It becomes clear that paganism of the post-patriarchal society is rooted in the absence of dialectical education, in convictions produced by an interest of the free market, by faith which is separated from the free will. Such reality is ideological in a sense that, after “death of God”, it tends to be a re-invented as the Absolute itself. Ideological reality, thus, relies on a primitive, naive perception of faith. Consequently, the possible liberation of faith through an authentic atheism necessarily leads to existentialism as an enlightened humanism, just as the liberation of faith, through religion, overcomes the desert between God and man only if a relationship itself is established. Always specific, unique relation between God and man cannot be generalised, it actualizes the world on the basis of ideas (universality) which, in a form of knowledge, generates and preserves a factual possibility of love and peace as it is the meaning and final purpose of human existence. Beyond any concept, God, even as an idea, dis-places itself to an openness by which relationship itself needs to be conceived. This concivement revitalizes substantiality, it is an eternal re-discovery of that what is sacred⁷ and takes place in the language

7 a. The *sacred* is understood here as something that is valuable, as something we treat with an attention, care, consideration, concern... Derrida’s interpretation of religion etymologically reflects its omitted essence: “For example, in pretending to know what is the ‘proper meaning’, as Benveniste says, of words such as repetition, resumption, renewal, reflection, reelection, recollection – in short, religion, ‘scruple’, response and responsibility” (Derrida 2001: 74). This interpretation, in its further elaboration, insists on a reference to Benveniste: “In sum, *religio* is a hesitation that holds back, a scruple that prevents, and not a sentiment that guides an action or that incites one to practice a cult. It seems to us that this meaning: demonstrated by ancient usage beyond the slightest ambiguity, imposes a single interpretation for *religio*: that which Cicero gives in attaching *religio* to *legere*” (Derrida 2001: 68). Caring attitude toward that what is valuable for us is, basically, shown as a characteristic of human development through dialectical education, which also includes literacy and the constant refinement of sensitivity through reading. This is why Heidegger is also resolute here: in order to avoid ambiguity, thinking *about the matter itself* necessarily needs to ask language. In other words, it is necessary, for thinking, to follow the path of language. Finally, through the practice of thinking, the essence of language is realised as dialogue.

b. The words of Nietzsche’s “madman”, stated in the 125th paragraph of *The Gay Science*, are evidence of that what is obvious but deliberately overlooked in contemporary Western culture: there is nothing sacred among people anymore. Values are devalued. Namely, by the persistent denial of values, the existential potential to produce, to create new values is exhausted. The desecration of the sacred is a symptom of irreversible nihilism before which Nietzsche collapsed: a destruction of beauty and joy upon which everyday grumpiness, envy of mediocrity and the spirit of decadence fell. Such a condition grows into pessimism, a denial of life itself; it, finally, branches into the destructive force of passive nihilism. Therefore, it is both sad and frightening that the

as much as it is, in its essence, dialogue itself. Thus, dialog is revealed as the form of love, immanently, as the will and power to beauty, implicitly, as the pathway toward a desired, necessarily good life.⁸ This, forgotten, fundamental meaning of language (as dialogue), reflects

[...] the age-old dispute between Socrates and the sophists (rhetors), which is primarily witnessed by Plato's dialogues *Gorgias* and *Phaedrus*... According to these dialogues, it would seem that one side is the representative of truth, and the other is an illusion, or that one is the defender of philosophy and the other representative of anti-philosophy. Nevertheless, this division, no matter how accurate and correct it may be at first glance (even terminologically), is not without objections and is not acceptable without a serious and relatively extensive discussion; actually, a careful conceptual clarification is needed, since the dispute had far-reaching consequences that last until our time. (Tadić 1995: 69, transl. Ž. V.)

It is certain, however, that it is decisive for a person, at any time, to understand that the meaning of language is established as dialogue itself. Looking at the historical reality, ruled by the absence of such understanding, equally by an absence of the true knowledge by which love and peace can be postulated as the fundamental principles of life itself, humanity is exposed to its tragic existence in order to reach beauty. On the basis of this experience, we are initiated to retroactively understand authoritative and, in its ironic vitality crucial for the beginning of dialectical education, Socrates' statement that *he knows so to speak nothing*, except a certain small subject of knowledge: what pertains of erotic love. As it is examined in the earlier part of the work, Socrates was, considering this subject of knowledge, *better than anyone else, past or present*. Eros, as desire for the Ideal itself (immanency of beauty, truth and goodness), is the guide of the soul that determines the purpose of the dialogue (see Tadić 1995: 89). The separation of Socrates' method from rhetoric and polemic discourse is, starting with Plato's dialogues and then the Academy itself, an initial and historically decisive movement toward a discussion which is dictated and cherished by the openness of love. It is a resolute separation from sophistry as such and, in its ultimate form of life, a separation from an everyday perspective of the world. On this basis, Plato's academic activity is initiated, and later established, the way of being which tends to overcome habitual, taken for granted form of life. Plato's overturn is, therefore, directed and legitimised by Socrates' life and death. The nature of this overturn keeps us within the framework of the heretical theme discussed here and, thus, it returns us to a more thorough understanding of the relationship between doubt and faith. The concluding part of Žižek's book *Islam, Atheism and Modernity: Some Blasphemous*

civilized world of the West, in its historical maturity, did not overcome the paradoxes of modern paganism and belief in the power of the occult... This is, in conclusion, the downfall of the sacred.

8 Peace is a substantial value of the good life; it is produced and preserved by true knowledge which is understood as the highest manifestation of love itself.

Thinking provokes this re-turn. “Doubt”, writes Žižek, “is immanent in authentic religion: not an abstract intellectual doubt about the existence of God, but a doubt about our practical engagement that makes God himself exist” (Žižek 2015: 111, trans. Ž. V.). In other words, doubt itself prevents a transformation of faith into an ideological projection of the existential experience of being, it separates us from reckless pragmatism and fatalism. Evidently, the origin of evil in history, by which a desired goodness of Beginning is deviated, requires an investigation of human nature which, immanently and consequently, deconstructs a prevailing ignorance of what is being done in time on the basis of an ignorant, unquestioned (self-presupposed) knowledge. After all, believers are not the only ones who doubt God, but God also finds himself in doubt... In an unbearable pain as the most challenging moment of existence, Christ’s words are heard: “Father, why have you forsaken me?” Reflecting on this moment of doubt, Žižek justifies a difficulty of thinking such moment: things that are dark and terrible should not be easily judged or formally discussed. Even more, *in that terrible story of the Passion there is a clear emotional suggestion that the Creator of all things (in some unimaginable way) has passed, not only through agony, but also through doubt itself* (see Žižek 2015: 112).

In the light of Žižek’s remark, a concluding twist becomes clear: *even God doubts and fears that the connection between reflection and human engagement, that makes him exist, will be diminished and that there will not be true atheism that goes through that experience* (see Žižek 2015: 112). Resuming, a possible understanding of this twist can prevent us from detaching ourselves from dialogue as an essential meaning of language and, implicitly, within a framework of the post-metaphysical reality of contemporary culture, to a resolute rejection of an existentially authentic, free faith on behalf of religion itself.

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Želimir Vukašinić

Post-patrijarhalno društvo i autoritet dijaloga – o slobodnoj veri, ateizmu i smislu jezika –

Apstrakt

Rad polazi od nastojanja da se razume priroda istorijskog prelaza u savremenost kojeg metafizički evidentiraju Ničeove reči „Bog je mrtav“, a koji se, u različitim svojim svojstvima, ispoljava u obliku postpatrijarhalnog društva. Postpatrijarhalno društvo se ovde interpretira kao poredak razmeštenih vrednosti koji ima svoje težište u praznom mestu izvornog i krajnjeg autoriteta. To će značiti i da istina preporođenja čovekovog nije na mestu na kome je tražimo ili očekujemo, pa je nužno za raspraviti šta je i na čemu se, u (ne)izvesnosti kraja metafizike, vera i smisao jezika danas zasnivaju. Ničeovo iskustvo epohe će se, iz navedenog konteksta, razmatrati kroz Žižekovo poimanje „genealoške pustinje između čoveka i Boga“, jednako kroz reinterpretaciju odnosa između religije, ateizma i modernosti.

Ključne reči: vera, ateizam, autoritet, mišljenje, postpatrijarhalno društvo, dijalog.