

The Limit and the Burden: Around the Significances of the Finitude of Life

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Abstract: The paper links the concepts of *limit* and *burden* from the standpoint of the human understanding of the *finitude of life*. However, this finitude is not felt by humans as burden, but only as an *obstacle*. The importance of the contents of life as “antidote” to death is highlighted. They are relative since death is a natural phenomenon, but since the consciousness of death means sorrow just because *its stake is life/the highest value is life*, it results that in order to “oppose” death one needs lives full of the *values* (the good, the truth, the beautiful) worth to be realised. *The meanings of life are arrived at when people judge the contents of life they face*. Since humans are both unique and very similar, their attitudes towards death depend on the manners they consider this situation. We must not forget the *dialectic* of the human as both *individual* and *member of society*: according to first aspect, people feel sorrow when the individual dies, but they think that death is only a *relay race* since the community the individual belongs to does not die. However, and certainly because of historical and social causes, people differentiate between their appurtenance to a particular cultural community and their appurtenance to the human species. The paper proposes just the necessity of the consciousness of the appurtenance to the *human species* and the factor of *social ideal* as a construct and vector of this consciousness.

Keywords: limit, burden, finitude of life, obstacle, death, life, contents of life, man as species being

INSTEAD OF INTRODUCTION

Beyond the Greek etymology (*per*, *peratoo*, *peras*, *peirao*, *peiraino* etc.)¹ that suggests – precisely, from Aristotle² – a spatial identity of

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¹ See Gabriel Liiceanu. [1994] 2009. *Despre limită [On Limit]*. Anexa ‘Semantismele radicalului *per* ...’ [‘The significances of the radical *per*...’].

things, therefore the preliminary objective constraints of margins, the *limit* belongs to the dowry of concepts relating to the *subject-object relationship*: and let link it expressly to the modern (Kantian) revolution (constructivism), to the *constructed character of concepts*. Accordingly, in this short article the focus is not on the objective aspects of the limits of things but, based on the above mentioned problems – the *subject-object relationship* and the *constructed character of concepts* –, on the human attitudes towards the social limits which frame their feelings of their own limits.

THE LIMIT

It seems that, from old, the limit was not only a cold *signal* of the *form*, or *essence* of things, and not only – as in cosmology – a theoretical abstraction for huge and far away from us entities (as the world or the sky with the planets), but also the *guarantee of the human existence/being as such*. The humans – obviously, as all other beings from our perceived and perceivable *mezzo-world* – exist insofar as they experience their own physical limits: meaning what is *beyond* their physical limits; and just this “beyond their physical limits”, beyond their eyes and skin, is which enriches the individual (Bazac 2015). Indeed, the human *experience* begins with the sensorial and reflective consideration of the limits within which the person exists and from which it changes the view on that which is outside its being. It’s interesting that the Greek word *experience* has the same root as the limit: *peirasis* meant attempt, trial, endeavour, and thus, *peirasmos* was the answer - proof, trial, and experience (Bazac 2013). Obviously, the humans experience also their cognitive abilities: in Latin, the root of *experientia- ae*, (assay, effort) is *pererro – are*, to cross, to look, to go from one to the other, to wander, thus in this process the man is also stopping in order to think, to reflect, to know; the result is *peritia- ae*, knowledge, skill, talent, and this means a respite to think, to turn them

² See [1933] 1989. *Metaphysics*, 1022a: ““Limit" means: (a) The furthest part of each thing, and the first point outside which no part of a thing can be found, and the first point within which all parts are contained. (b) Any form of magnitude or of something possessing magnitude. (c) The end of each thing. (This end is that *to* which motion and action proceed, and not the end *from* which. But sometimes it is both the end from which and the end to which, i.e. the final cause.) (d) The reality or essence of each thing; for this is the limit of our knowledge of it, and if it is a limit of the knowledge, it is also a limit of the thing. Thus it is obvious that "limit" has not only as many senses as "beginning" but even more; because the beginning is a kind of limit, but not every limit is a beginning”.

all over and, of course, to treat things, so to act; *peritus- a- um* being that person who knows, as well as *experior*, the one who supports, resilient, active, enterprising, courageous.

As habitually, the concepts have many meanings, here *the experience* relating the individual – who is absolutely conscious of his own limits/or where “the others” and the world begin, outside him – to this external world³. What is important is that in this relation, the humans are aware of the two aspects they face: one is the relation as such; the other is the *standpoint* this relation is seen /experienced from: “if the experience is given in a first-personal mode of presentation, it is experienced as *my experience*”⁴.

But if so, from the beginning the human’s limits have involved an enthusiastic evaluation of these limits: which are tantamount to the good⁵. We feel good when we feel comfortably in our own skin – as this is expressed in Romanian – or we are comfortable *as if* we would be *at home*, i.e. in an intimate relationship with the space we fill with our being, or in a relationship of appropriation of the place *where* (the adverb *oi*, where) we are in the most secure state, or in a relation where we are reconciling with both ourselves and the surrounding milieu: this is the Stoics’ *oikeiôsis*⁶ as the true form of the certainty Descartes

³ Richard Sennett - in *The Craftsman* (2008, 287) - has mentioned in passing the difference between *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung* as two faces of the human experience: the first is that of rather individual occurrences where the person is involved and which caused him affects, valuating attitudes, and the other is the life the person has lived and the knowledge he gained (as, for example, *wissenschaftliche Erfahrung*, scientific experience).

⁴ See Zahavi. (2003, 60): Or, “this first-personal givenness (is) that makes the experiences *subjective*”.

⁵ Aristotle. 1934. *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1106b: “evil is a form of the unlimited, as in the old Pythagorean imagery, and good of the limited”.

⁶ Everything belonging to this element of certainty is *familiar* to it, one’s own *affinity to himself/herself* deriving from this *awareness* of constant and familiar appropriation of an identity, while that which is alien to oneself is because it does not take part of this identity. The Greek Stoics have used *allotriôsis* for *alienation*, opposed to *affection* for its own being – *oikeiôsis* –: “An animal’s first impulse, say the Stoics, is to self-preservation, because nature from the outset endears it to itself, as Chrysippus affirms in the first book of his work *On Ends*: his words are, “The dearest thing to every animal is its own constitution and its consciousness thereof”; for it was not likely that nature should estrange the living thing from itself or that she should leave the creature she has made without either estrangement from or affection for its own constitution. We are forced then to conclude that nature in constituting the animal made it near and dear to itself; for so it comes to repel all that is injurious and give free access to all that is serviceable or akin to it” (see Diogenes Laërtius, Book VII,

dreamed of and found in the existence of the individual cogito, thus within the physical limits of the person.

This first criterion of feeling good in our own finitude was the psychological basis/tacit presumption that as I am “the centre” because I am who sees, evaluates etc., as the humans are “the centre” for all the living beings on the Earth, and certainly the Earth is for the whole universe. The ancient *geocentric* theory was intuitively understood and assumed just on the above psychology.

In the same token, the *power relations* were assumed – letting here aside the physical and spiritual constraints – on the tacit equivalence with the ontological dependence of the ruled on “the centre” represented by the rulers; “the centre” was the centre of Power (but we know that the power relations are domination-submission relations). But obviously, this psychological feeling was *intertwined* with the above-mentioned constraints: because without them, neither the feeling

85). And all of these, in spite of the complicated and contradictory human self. The Neo-Platonist Plotinus has transmitted to us that “every man is double, one of him is a sort of compound being (συναμφοτέρον) and one of him is himself” (quoted in Samellas 2010, 92).

Some commentaries on these concepts – *affinity to itself* and *alienation* – have to be retained. First, that “from the first years of the origins of society and human history, humanity began to pose questions on issues such as: · its distancing from the deeper meaning of existence, · its distancing from that which was previously familiar and innate, · the painful perception of a loss of the original elements of their identity as a species, · the consciousness of the existence of a void between individual existence and its internal essence, · the consciousness of the dominance of an object or property which is hostile and aggressive” (see Fotopoulos 2005, 88). Second: that these concepts are related to that of *order* as the most important characteristic of the entire natural and social world. And since in the Hellenistic era the experiences of social disorder, with cosmic relevance, were preponderant, the Stoic reflection upon them has led to the terms of *oikeiōsis* and *allogriōsis*. The first meant that man, in order to preserve himself, should have “a ‘good disposition’ toward itself” and that this disposition “is self-acquaintance... The one who has an adequate awareness of what he is, is, in the way in which he is, well disposed to himself, and accordingly, is able to preserve himself in a specific existence”, while a being “who is not well disposed to itself... lacks the capacity to preserve itself adequately” (Henrich 2003, 89). Third: that, in the absence of cosmic order, people tried to find order at least in their own persons, and this focus has emphasised the dependence of reason on external conditions to the self. The Stoic alienation meant “a state of withdrawal from one’s own self” and, since the ground of existence is “*logos* or the source of order in this world, the withdrawal from one’s own self as constituted by this ordering force is a withdrawal from reason in existence. The result will then be *the use of reason*, which man has after all, *for the purpose of justifying existence in the state of alienation*” (Voegelin 2011, 102; my emphasis).

of dependence on “the centre” represented by other humans – and not by “Me” – would have developed; the proof is that *this feeling was not the only related to the power relations*, but it was only their submissive versant; the other one was the questioning of and opposition to these relations, even the revolt.

Further, apart from the inter-human relationships more or less compensating the power relations, that which has contributed to the human *oikeiōsis* was the *object*. Used in a way or another by humans, created by them, having *meanings given by them* – thus existing according to them – the objects were *instruments*: even the natural and unprocessed objects, once they entered in the human horizon of interest – and thus receiving *meanings* – became instruments, i.e. *means* of humans, *mediating* their relations with other humans and with nature, but as means – *subordinated to humans*. Thus, the objects became *extensions* of the human limits: with instruments/tools, the human being became much larger, taller, bigger, and lasted more, and it began to consider its extensions as belonging to its being, taking part within its own limits. He was the gist of things, but thus the things themselves were felt as pertaining to it.

This is the reason of the general treatment of tools with *care*⁷: only the power relations have put their mark on the relations between the subject and the objects, transmitting *on the one hand*, the image of subordination of objects towards people until annulling the care towards objects (and towards animals which, here, are also objects and tools) and until inducing cruelty towards objects, despising them; while *on the other hand*, the power relations have manifested through the *separation* of the human beings from the objects and the transformation of these ones in the dominant element in the subject-object relationship: because of the private confiscation of tools, these ones became for *the ruled* (from *extensions* of their limits, thus empowering the humans) *means to amplify their submission, as if* the existence of these means would have supposed the diminution, until the destruction of their being and their humanity; and because for *the rulers* the objects became *means to increase their power of domination*, the quest for objects became for them the emblem of their human value; but the forms of this quest or the significances of objects are different according to the realm where his quest occurs: only at

⁷ See Orlov (2017, 3): “but they were mere useful objects – not fetishes – and they did not rule our passions”.

personal level this quest for objects is, mainly, for their *use values*; outside the personal luxurious life, the reduction of objects to their *exchange value* was and is essential for the rulers.

Therefore, the power relations have generated the consciousness marked by the separation of the subject *from the object*, for this separation is tantamount to their separation – in both the common understanding and the professional (and philosophical) analysis of objects and subject-object relationships – *from the social relations*. Just because of the exclusion of social relations from the approach of these elements, the object was considered in the dominant narratives as without limits and being transmitted in unlimited manners to the (picked) individuals.

History or the objective course of time means, *inter alia*, the process when the humans acquire knowledge of limits: both of the subject and of the object. This knowledge was/is the result of many and manifold concrete experiences: where the humans inherently have had different, even opposed, social places. Consequently, the knowledge of limits reflects these different types of social *situatedness*⁸. But, since there are limits and limits – some ones *directly* depending on the polar social places, other ones, *indirectly*, and even when the persons situated in a certain social place assume the cognisance and values of an opposed social place – and since the “situational awareness”(Suchman 1987; Bazac 2017a, 103-158) is extremely important in order to know the limits generated in different social places, history is full of intentional distorted social communication, and fake suggestions of knowledge and values. These suggestions consist just of the above-mentioned ideas that the possession of objects would empower and prolong the human life and thus the striving for objects *would be* the only reason to be of humans, would give the main, if not the only, meaning of the human life.

THE BURDEN OF THE FINITUDE OF THE HUMAN LIFE

We thus have arrived to the concept related here to the human limits, that of *burden* on the shoulders/heart/soul of humans. Namely: the burden is taken here figuratively, as “the shoulders” are taken here figuratively, because it signals only a moral sorrow, the (unbearable) pain *felt* by humans in front of their own deeds. There are, certainly, many limits – as outlined before – and, thus many burdens, generated

⁸ As Marx has explained long before; but see also today the theory of situated cognition (Suchman 1987).

by people's facts which contrast with the values which even these people share, and both the limits and burdens are marked by the concrete pattern of power relations manifested in almost all the social/inter-human relationships, facts and values. From all of these limits and burdens, the article chooses that mentioned above as the *limit of the human finitude*.

This limit is *natural*, of course. But for humans – whose dramatic regret for the finitude, that often occurs “too early”, leaving behind unfinished projects and happiness, is due only to their *consciousness*, to their “artificial” *differentia specifica* erected on natural needs and forces but constituted as socially/culturally multi strata of reflective and constructed reality – the limit of life is *felt* and *lived* as an *unnatural*, foreign accident towards the “natural” human image of a perpetual life/of a long lapse necessary for fulfilling their intentions and goals.

Yes, everyone knows that he/she will die. But not only that everyone *hopes* to live a long life – that seems to be infinite, since one both does not know when will the last moment occur and, because of the situation of this moment in a future indefinite horizon, the living human person feels his/her lapse of time as “infinite” or indefinitely generous – but the moment of death itself is not a (permanent) preoccupation for the individual's consciousness. Obviously, we exclude here the very old or ill people, rather in a terminal phase, who know/expect their impending death. But even the very old persons who certainly know that the last moment is inherently soon *are thinking to life, and not to death*: to their bygone, to their relatives, to past events and to present problems. Opposed to Heidegger who considered the thought of the human death/of “my” death as the most irrepressible, thus permanent feeling and criterion of the human consciousness and life, it is rather better to remind here the ancient wisdom where until living, the humans may successfully postpone the idea of their own death⁹.

⁹ Diogenes Laërtius, Book II (Socrates): “in his old age he learnt to play the lyre, declaring that he saw no absurdity in learning a new accomplishment”... “being once asked in what consisted the virtue of a young man, he said, ‘In doing nothing to excess’; Book VI (Diogenes of Sinope): “To those who said to him, ‘You are an old man; take a rest,’ ‘What?’ he replied, ‘if I were running in the stadium, ought I to slacken my pace when approaching the goal? ought I not rather to put on speed?’..... Being asked whether death was an evil thing, he replied, ‘How can it be evil, when in its presence we are not aware of it?’”.

Psychologically, this wisdom is based not only on the commonsensical idea that death, as life, is/are natural and inevitable phenomena, and more, *interdependent*, and thus one's own death, as sure as it will be, is improbable in *present*, since the human lives, while one's own life, just because it is lived, *is* and *seems* to be eternal, by prolonging itself toward an indefinite and long future; but also on the fact that everyone looks to the world from the *point of view* of his/her moment of life, then of his or her life that becomes the unique and first criterion of judging: what else, than life/lives. The final moments of these lives, the death, *appear only as related to lives*, interrupting them "just when" the turns (the facts, the understanding) have become interesting or valuable, or simply reflecting them.

The finitude of life was seen as a stake that must be tamed and controlled, and *from this standpoint* the entire history is that of the struggle to *taming* and *controlling* death. In this process, the stake was also the "enemy"/death as "the enemy" that brutally fought or might insinuating itself in the most sweet life, an enemy that always won, but whose defeat consisted only in the postponing of its victory as long as possible. However, to characterise death with these general words means to transform philosophy into a horoscope show, when the statements are always so general that they fit to everyone, without throwing any light on the human problems supposed to be solved in that show.

The problem of the finitude of life belongs to humans, and thus the *contents* of life and the *concrete social positions* of humans are the *criteria, conditions* and *frames* of the attitudes towards the finitude of life.

To put it briefly, the main interest and problem of humans is the *content* of life – thus the *concrete life* they live – not their death; or their death only as a continuation of the problem of *content* of their life. When this content was considered beautiful, when an old person arrives to be grandpa/grandma having raised their grandchildren, they are reconciled with themselves: certainly, they want to live more, to postpone their death, but they assume it, knowing that they did not live a meaningless life, but one full of endeavour, love and activism. They were not passive receivers of the gifts of life.

I do not speak here about the final fatigue when death seems to be an assuagement of their both funky and alert consciousness, and neither about the religious veils which enwrap this consciousness and translate and deform the original psychical attitude towards death.

According to these veils, the death is followed by other life, that of the soul and/or even new lives, as in Plato and Hinduism: thus, people deplore the loss of the existing life, but when all is told, things are not absolutely lost, aren't they?

But, as mentioned before, the imagination and attitudes of humans in front of both the *content of life* and *death* depend on their concrete social positions. The ideas of humans are *ideological* – made from a *precise viewpoint of the individual's concrete or only assumed social position within society* –; the ideas may arise from his own social position, or not, but at any rate they reflect social positions, interests and experience. However, is the attitude towards the finitude of life ideological, since both the finitude and the attitude towards it are universal?

EPISTEMOLOGY OF THE BURDEN OF THE FINITUDE OF LIFE

First, we should stop a moment on a concept that would not seem to having an “ontological” flavour: what does a *burden* mean, or which are its significances? This concept too falls under the subject-object relationship, that is, strongly suggesting that the object as it is *is* for the subject. The burden is not only the objective, “technical” difficulty to carrying a load or solving or understanding something, but mostly a hardship, thus *felt* by humans. The traditional ontology (as a branch of metaphysics, we should not forget) was interested – in its subterranean tendency to answering the concrete research of the physical world with its *meta* look – to show the principles or concepts emphasising the ultimate constitution or logic of the world, somehow excluding/ignoring the humans who gave the names and meanings of the elements of this world. For example, the quantity, quality, substance, relatives – as the main *categories* of Aristotle – are only *as implied* said-of (or not said-of) relations of beings/within the being; we remember that Aristotle did not define and elaborate the said-of relation, but only the objective one, the present-in/ not present-in relation. Things have qualities, are in certain quantities and so on. More: the said-of refers to universals (universal concepts, as man, horse etc.), opposed to the particulars where the general is present-in), thus the interest of Aristotle was not here to discussing the problem of subjective construction of concepts, but rather their objective denoted.

But the concept of burden directly reflects the “translation” of the objective world through the feelings and thinking of humans. Actually, it reflects – as an “occasion of experience” generating “actual entities”,

as in the terms of Whitehead – even the ontological condition of these humans, i.e. the long and painful process of hominisation, of the constitution of this exceptional species within the natural world. Everything was difficult, involving much effort and even jeopardising their existence. The task to survive and resist was so overwhelming that people felt not only the physical hardship, but also the heaviness that seemed even to pressing and putting in torpor the mind of the vulnerable creature.

But this entire process, being social, was marked too by the power relations. Consequently and briefly, for the rulers the concept of burden was used rather as a metaphor for the troubles of the soul, while for the rules – as both literally and figuratively. Generally, the burden – transfigured in many literary metaphors – has signalled the concrete historical state of the social relations. However, it had/has this power to, willy-nilly, indicate the real state of things only for those who have considered society and the discourses about the burden in a *critical* manner: either being exceeded by the physical burdens or/and understanding that the discourses, however universal values and situations may they address, always reflect the concrete situation of the speaker/of those he represents; and that this speaker, though it speaks for/instead of those who have no public voice, has no justification to do this confiscation of the “universal view”.

Yet the finitude of life is a real universal limit. Thus, is it the same limit for all? Certainly: not. It depends on the *content of life* it margins. But, as – because of the power relations – the pattern of *separation* of the *subject* and *object* and *subordination* of the former to the latter has been constituted and in present it seems to be “normal” (this pattern meaning separation and *fragmentation* of the efficiency “for the object” and the efficiency “for the subject”, of efficiency on short and long term, of efficiency for the individual and for society/communities, and “the object” being the veil of those who control it while “the subject” being just those who control the object and speak in lieu of the ruled), as the paradigm of *separation* between the *content* of life/the attitude towards the *content* of life and the *finitude* of life/as the attitude towards the *finitude* of life has been formed and is strongly influential in philosophy; *as if* the finitude of life would have the same significance for every content of life.

The finitude of life is, obviously, equal for all as *potentiality* – a possible state before its actualisation – throwing light on both death and the content of life. This finitude has *contents* too: it may be more

generous or stingier, being the result of accidents or, with all the bad occurrences, rather the result of the trajectory of life constituted from the responses of the individual's will to conditions strengthening this will. As Schopenhauer has showed, the will is the *inner force that is pushing to existence as such* (Bazac 2018), but, although the will may transcend many limiting landmarks of the conditions the individual is framed by, in fact it is dependent on these or, generally, the conditions he lives within. The content of his life, the types and openness or closing of his social relationships, his aspirations *and* ideals, depend on the material and spiritual conditions he lives within and processes in his mind. Consequently, his death may end a richer or poorer life, and the idea of inherent finitude may be seen in different ways, but in any case when the real end occurs, one may more clearly view that: when it is about a subjected trajectory, outside the necessary creation man is able to fulfil, the unique and unrepeatable life is *wasted*.

INTERMEZZO: ARISTOTLE AND HEIDEGGER

The idea of finitude of life is thus more than the impersonal warning that frightens the individual, transforming his life into a permanent *Angst* that, irrespective of his thoughts and deeds, the end will come, all that may to remaining him being this anguish and care for the different acquaintances and everyday striving in an environment where the objects are more and more inimical. *In Heidegger, the idea of finitude of life does not lead, au fond, to any transformation in the human thinking, nor in the human action*: since the milestone of life is the inexorable death, that's all! Why this? Because: what is human in every human being – the *Dasein* is the humaneness– is constituted from fundamental structures *beyond* the presence-at-hand (*Vorhandenheit*); so, and as Heidegger himself has insisted, the human/humaneness is appraised in a strict ontological key, without connections with the real life (that is “the present” life). Not life and creation – and nor creativity – are discussed by Heidegger, perhaps because they are connected to the real life, while *Dasein*, possible to be manifested, has as *the most proper possibility* “that cannot be surpassed”: the death, not life.

Opposed to Aristotle who thought that only *actuality* – and not potentiality – may be defined and that the core of the definition is life and activity, Heidegger has definitely moved his focus on possibility (thus not on potentiality) and refused the analysis of the *ways* of living and dying because for him not these ways were philosophically

significant, but only the death as such, as the only characteristic of the human being in virtue of its inevitability.

[We now understand the difference between Aristotle's *potentiality* and Heidegger's *possibility*: the latter was tantamount; and here we discuss only the determined possibility of death, not Heidegger's entire conception of possibility (Hanley 2002) to the inherent supervening of *death* – that is only “not-now” but nevertheless it is underground present – while in Aristotle the concept of potentiality (*dynámis*) shows the inherent development of *life*, as actuality (*energeíta*, so *force*), *existence* having its concrete forms resulted from the movement/transformation/actualization (*energeía*) that is at the same time *entelécheia*, because it has in itself the finality of that movement, and the result of movement /actualization is the complete and stable state/thus again *entelécheia*; this is the reason of both the logical/epistemological and in the order of being priority of actuality over potentiality. This difference between the two concepts of the two thinkers is, obviously, related to their distinct ontological principles (for Aristotle the reason aims at comprising the *eternal* – and the eternal cannot be but *actual* – according to the scientific explanation that emphasises the causes, thus for him the *species*, and not the individual, is *actual* and must and can be understood in its eternal processes of becoming, this meaning also transforming, improving, as in the finding of the mean way (Bazac 2017b); for Heidegger, the grasping of everything starts from the individual's understanding of itself as having a finite interval of existence: therefore, the priority is the *finite*, the *Dasein* manifests only as finite *individual* – not as species – and thus not the causes would be relevant, but the *phenomenological description of the finite experience of the individual*); however, just these differences – and now we all know that, in order to tackle the human being, *we must unite and use both types of explanations, the causal and the phenomenological* – show that the problem of the limit of life *cannot be put in the simple temporal key of death* that in fact would explain only the permanence/continuity of the model of action and preoccupation of man (model reduced by Heidegger to that of the conservative German intellectuals of his time) but, somehow continuing Aristotle, only in connexion with the concrete life it delimits].

The idea of finitude of life had, indeed, a limiting power for man, since it was considered by Heidegger as the most genuine manner of accomplishment of the humanness. It is already known that the German philosopher has arrived to the above conclusion as a result of his experience of the Great War: still for a philosophy not the occurrences favouring its birth, but the logic is important. Death is common to man and animals/living beings: what then is the difference between man's death and the animals'? Heidegger did not answer, but we all know that, obviously, the differences are the *human significances* man creates, for death too. Therefore, to put death, and not life – and its equivalence with activity – as a main criterion of human thinking (as if only man would die) is at best childish. The putting of this natural limit of the living beings as the main criterion of the humanness was thought to being formidable only by those who exclude from the understanding of man the concrete *social relations and aspects*. From this perspective, the finitude of life was thought as the argument for *separating, fragmenting the aspects of the content of life*: since anyway “*venit mors velociter*”, what would be important would the different manners to “killing one's time”, as Schopenhauer (1909, 402-403) has revealed – and criticised (before Heidegger and more pointedly) – the malignant ways of treatment by the modern and polarised society of the own time of both those who have too much time and those who have no time at all. Therefore, the finitude of life was considered in the horizon that disregards the social conditioning of man, as generating the “objective” *separation and fragmentation of the content of life* and the *subjective fragmenting attitudes towards the content of life*. Just at the level of attitudes, we did witness the translation of human responsibility on the objects/as the power of objects, the focus on short term efficiency and the passing over the long-term efficiency, and the consideration of the *different* contents of life as “objective data no one may question”.

Heidegger is here the model of the exclusion of social relations from the analysis of both the subject and the object. Obviously, there is not about the technical tackling of the object in order to achieve a deeper understanding and fulfilment of the efficiency of its use value; but about the ontological one, where technology would be like an incontrollable living being. As Hegel has considered the estrangement of the subject from the object (and somehow from the subject itself) as the result of the objective creation of the object by the subject (thus, an absolute and permanent estrangement), Heidegger too has thought the

alienation of the object from the subjective intentions and logic as an objective process, opposed to the helpless humans. All of these: because the human society was for them a gathering of individuals, or individual + individual + individual. They did not understand the social relations as *mediation* between the subject and the object, or as the transfiguration of the subject.

DEATH AS AN OBSTACLE

As the illness – a painful phenomenon in the human life – is considered by the ill person as an accident, absolutely opposed to his intentions, plans and the whole trajectory of his life, the death is considered in a similar manner. Both the illness and death are natural adverse limits, but “outside” the life as such/activity and opposed to it. Both may occur (as the illness), or really do, as death, but both disturb the plans and exploits of the individual – if we consider the person whose feelings are here important – and of many individuals related to the first.

Consequently, both the illness and the finitude of life are limits of and *obstacles* for the human trajectories of life, but *they do not constitute a burden*. An obstacle is something *external* to the human person or, if not, to its intentional consciousness: it is involuntary, unintentional – when it is an epistemological impediment, as Bachelard’s *obstacle épistémologique* (prejudices, clichés, the “normal science” inducing conformism and stopping and diverting the scientific desire/curiosity in front of its object of knowledge)¹⁰ generating an epistemological rupture¹¹ –; or objective, as the illness and death that definitely stop the plans and existence of the person. However, the Latin etymology – the obstacle is something standing *in front of* the person who intends to see and act/proceed (the preposition *ob*) and thus it signals the changing of the former plans of considerations and actions (*ob* meaning also *in exchange for*) – suggests not only a *turning* in man’s thoughts and deeds after his meeting with the obstacle, but also an inherent *resistance* to the obstacle, as if man too

¹⁰ According to Bachelard ([1971] 1974, 158, 159) “the real is never ‘what one would think about’, but it is always what one ought to think...in fact, one *knows* against a previous cognisance, by destructing improper ones, surpassing that which, in the spirit itself, opposes to spiritualisation... getting to science means, spiritually, rejuvenating, accepting a sharp mutation that gainsays the past”.

¹¹ The rupture means when science constructs itself *against* the evidence and illusions of the immediate knowledge, while the philosophy supporting this process is the *philosophy of the no*.

would be the obstacle to the undesired obstacles¹²: perhaps except death, man considers all the other obstacles as challenges to which he answers; he always adapts to the conditions limiting him and thus – and certainly letting aside the painful or unpleasant character of these conditions – they are “received” as changing frames of his experience.

Has the finitude of man’s life a place in this representation of the obstacles as generative points of the human experience? It has, indeed: since one’s own death is inevitable, what a person may do is the *filling* of his/her life with the denser and, at the same time, worth *content* of life: as both experience of self-expression and moral action for the sake of the other human beings/for the sake of their freedom of moral self-expression.

Once more, the finitude of my own life and of the others’ has no the power to paralyse my intentional consciousness (or the others’), but on the contrary, it only pushes me and the others to live in a *more intense* manner. What this “more intense manner” means it depends on the values/purposes/social ideals *or* individual aspirations one assumes, thus on the *content* of life: and concretely, on the *frames* of values, ideals and aspirations the individual meet/is forced to live within. He/she may think that the individual self-expression of his/her body, his/her permanent thirst of entertainment and *psychic* experiences through drugs in a “consumptionist imaginary” as well as objective process of “commodification and spectacularization”(Clark 2015; Bazac 2017c) would be the only antidote to the finitude of life. But as Heidegger’s model of the post-war disillusioned German intellectual’s anguish was but an historical model, as the above egotistic and disoriented model is historical: and neither of them solve the problem of one’s own finitude of life; as Ivan Ilyich – in Leo Tolstoy’s 1886 *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* - arrived to think, but when it already was too late, that his life was *wasted*, as the lives subjected to the above models are *wasted*.

Where the waste is supplanted with achievement and understanding is on the terrain of assumed *social ideals* supporting the values of dignity and social equality of all (see Guevara 1960). In this line, not the finitude of life is the burden of humans, but the harmful deeds they have chosen to fulfil. *What do you leave behind you* is, in fact, the commonly expressed wisdom of the individual’s *responsibility* for and

¹² Like in physics where matter itself is a “positive obstacle” to the movement or the rest (see Du Phanjas 1781, 218).

consciousness of one's own choices, clearly disclosed by the moment of death.

The finitude of life involves limits of the body as well as of the mind. More often, the limits of the body are felt painfully by the old individual whose mind is lucid and “young” from the standpoint of his/her perspicacity: this situation seems to be right about Descartes' theory of distinct *res extensa et res cogitans*; “if the ugly *res extensa* would not be so important!”, the joke being the last support of the old thinker. Therefore, the (physical) limits exist, but although they are viewed with sadness and even revolt, they do not distress the individual *as if* they would be a burden of the soul. *The burden is only the judgement of the consciousness according to the most advanced/social values over the choices and deeds of the person.*

The difference between the limits and the burden is obvious when we compare the physical limits of the human body with the spoilage of objects. We regret their impairment, especially when they are familiar or have a sentimental value. For this reason, we search for ways of their repairing or reconditioning (see Bazac 2017d) and we are upset when we cannot prolong their “life”, i.e. their presence near us. We compare their repairing with our own body repairing – that we do with their aid, enhancing the physical and mental capacities at incredible levels but nevertheless finite – and we once more feel as if we would be the absolute masters of both the objects (but our body too is an object here) and the technical procedures to use them. But alas, we die and the objects we thought we master remain. This is certainly a limit of the living in front of the inorganic, as well as a limit of the finite in front of the trans-finitude of things; not an obstacle and not a burden: only a limit showing the vulnerability of life towards the inanimate world. But does this fact not push us to be more careful with life: meaning with *every* human life and *every* living system?

IN LIEU OF A PREAMBLE: WHY ANOTHER TYPE OF THINKING IS NEEDED FOR THE TACKLING OF THE FINITUDE OF LIFE?

Philosophers have deplored the random appearance of the finite in the infinity. Is it random? The discovery of physical and chemical laws has led to the understanding of an objective process as ground of the living. But the encounter of the persons who will be the mom and dad of the unique human individual, their decision or chance to conceiving him, in a while or another, the concrete constraints of their milieu –

were/are accidental. The finite human being seems to be a haphazard, a not very important being. However, its *consciousness*, its *understanding* of its own creativity and uniqueness, are opposed to the melting of their finitude within the Great Whole. This revolt against death is pair with the consciousness of the limit represented by death: thus, it is about the (consciousness) of the limit, not about a burden.

The finite-infinite/transfinite dialectics is similar to the coexistence, in logic (that only theorises the common knowledge), of *contraries* and *contradictions*. As we know, the former may coexist and do not lead to the dissolution of the system they are aspects of. People accept the contraries: for example, they know that an apple is first, green, and then, red, and then rotten, but it is still an apple. But the existence of contradictions means that the system as such will transform, sooner or later, compulsorily: this process prefiguring the ‘fade away’ time of the system is the mirror of the clear idea of man about its own individual disappearance (if not even the extinguishing of the species). And this is very difficultly borne. The humans have concocted “useful fictions” – as Vaihinger called them, but for him all the concepts and theories were “useful fictions” – in order to erase the impression of irremediable loss and evanescence; but also multi-value/modal logics, as if these logics would have annulled the inherent finitude of all things. Nevertheless, *these logics did surpass the Aristotelian logic* – Aristotle was the first discussing the problem of contraries and contradictions – only quantitatively/as quantities of relations leading to the *complication* of situations of the system. But in the last instance, the pattern of coexistence of contraries and contradictions remains.

In front of this pattern, i.e. in front of the irreversible disappearance of the finite in the ocean of the infinity, the humans have reacted/react as in front of cancer: the five stages of cancer grief are denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance (Kübler-Ross 1969).

The well-known “blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew, 5:3), signifying the model of the submissive mind of the Christian, may sound as an irony, but it describes the model of acceptance of social contradictions as “normal” and assuring to the finite, but submissive-minded, individuals, an infinite individual life. Actually, the model does not reveal the simple fear towards the individual death. It puts the problem that humans bear difficultly not the limits of the individual life, but the burden of malignant social relations which limit – not life as such, but – the

content of life so as the life as such not be wasted: but this interpretation is only a critical one.

Because people have already experienced that the objects are not the guarantee of the annulling of limits, they have a complex attitude towards them/ they do not relate their own existence/contents of life to the objects. However, this complex attitude was forged in historical conditions and, especially, in the frame of power relations. For instance, on the one hand, capitalism has induced to the poor the idea that the objects do not matter – see nowadays the development of *minimalist* way of life – and on the other hand, capitalism has continued the alienation of the rich, imposing their *self-defining* as according to the quantity and quality of objects they possess actually and virtually; these two ideas *coexist* and we witness this by looking at the proximity of slums and palaces. These power relations are too the condition of not experiencing the *access* to objects for the widening of limits in the most possibly objective way: a huge part of the scientific research is focused on arms and means of subjecting the humans, and thus, with all mobile phones one uses, these objects do not really widen the limits of the human action. For this reason, the problem of limits and burden framing man urge to the change of the present system, by shaking its dominant tenets.

In their turn, the limits of natural resources are tackled within the problem of subject-objects relations. People became aware of the limits of natural resources when these ones really became to be proved to be exhausted or on the threshold of exhaustion. Concretely, the scientists began to call into question the theories based on the presumption of both infinite resources and possibility of nature to dissolve within itself the human mistakes and the conscious and unconscious human-made havoc; while the private ownership leadership has continued to imposing the fragmenting private interests, the above theories and the supplementary presumptions that a capitalist growth – ultimately meaning the growth of profit – would generate a universal well-being and the integration of ecological requirements into the mechanism of capitalist economy. Or, as at least the last three decades show, both the impoverishment of the “middle classes”, on the background of social polarization and economic and cultural backwardness of the majority of wage earners/fishermen of jobs, and the deepening of the world ecological crisis, with all the local programmes to salvage species etc. are the results of the above-mentioned dominant attitudes of the private property. Accordingly, the

limit of the power of nature has to enter within the logical system of the limit of the individual life in correlation with the eventually unlimited life of the human species: i.e. within the logical system/dialectics of the human being as both finite individual and a member of the infinite human species.

THE LIMIT AND THE CONTENT OF LIFE

Well, if the ideas about limit as the finitude of the individual life are, as it was shown, indirectly ideological, and if the idea of the finite individual life in the framework of (apparently) infinite objects is felt as a burden, how can we manage these strong feelings and unbearable ideas?

We can manage them in a way of thinking absolutely opposite to the traditional one. In this new thinking, life, and not death is the criterion / stake/ highest value of the human consciousness mean. But what does life as criterion / stake/ highest value of the human consciousness mean? It means the *conditions* under which life is worth to be lived. Namely, life is precious, not death, but: in order to be precious, life must evolve/emerge/being full of values worth to be realized.

These values are: the *good*, the *truth*, the *beautiful*, as the ancients have discovered long ago. Therefore, life is worth to be lived when it develops the good, the truth, and the beauty.

Consequently, 'life vs. death' is not abstract metaphysics, but the dialectics of the *concrete*: its core concept – the *content* of life.

The human individual is finite, but the bearer of trans-finitude is the *human species*. Actually, trans-finitude means *meanings + values* (both are the result of trans-generational human experience, and both constitute – directly/as immaterial, and indirectly /mediated by relations, institutions, material culture – the result and premise of individual experience). The individual is both finite and transfinite: by creating meanings and values decanted and sedimented in the trans-individual human endowment (which is culture/civilisation/ 'world 3', as Popper said) and by bearing the trans-finitude of the species.

We may observe that, since truth is the consciousness of *meanings*, these meanings are *ideas*, constructed in/after the human experience (so, they refer to real facts, they are not only imagined worlds).

As a result, the meaning of life is the *reason to be* of life (or, why would be a life worth to be lived). The reason to be of the human life is formed by *n* reasons to be of the human events/experience. But if so, these reasons or meanings are forged and attained only in the whole

life (with its young, mature and old phases). The “Truth” of life (that – as it is written – is a metaphor) can be but the *whole life of a person*, because Truth is only the wholeness, as Hegel has demonstrated. Accordingly, all the meanings of life, in *every* moment and *all* the moments and experiences, give/constitute the meaning of life. The Truth of life must not be judged at the end of a life, and nor according to a moment or another¹³. The *fragmentariness* and *isolated* manner of tackling the problems of life are the causes of this approach of the meanings of life as meanings of some privileged moments (as that of love or of the end of life).

So: the amount of experiences forming a certain life/ the whole experience/ the *concreteness* of experiences is that which gives our real understanding of the meanings of life.

If we retain and analyse the main concepts promoted here, we may grasp that the *concreteness* (of life) is the *form*, in order to understand what is needed for the comprehension of meanings of life: the *concreteness* (of life) is an epistemological condition for introducing the ontological basis. This ontological basis is the *content* of life. People arrive to the meanings of life when they judge the contents of life they face, i.e. the concrete form of this content.

In this frame, if we consider the idea of death – and not of life – as stake/criterion/non-perishable value, it means that death signifies:

- either an end point emphasising the meaninglessness of life and the value of relativity and *lack of criteria to judge life* (as in the “post-modern” vulgar view),
- or a promise for something better, righter and more beautiful than the unique and non-repeatable terrestrial life (as in Christianity).

But in this second alternative, because people are taught to accept the inevitability of death, they equate (they are taught to equate) this acceptance with the acceptance of the socially determined suffering.

Anyway, because of the *ontological* (rarity, low level of productive means, domination-submission/power relations, *mixture* of commons, altruism and solidarity within the domination-submission systems) and *epistemological* factors (*fragmentary* thinking and the difficulty (and habit) to *not analyse all the way*, *splitting of* knowledge in *what would*

¹³ The Faustian saying about a moment or another of life – ‘Stay a while, you are so beautiful’/ ‘*Verweile doch, du bist so schön*’ – means just this denunciation of a moment (whatever may it be) towards the meaning of the whole life as addition of meanings of its moments.

be essential from the knowledge of *phenomena*), the contents of life of the many was/still is full of *socially induced sufferings* and *irreversible waste*.

INSTEAD OF CONCLUSIONS

Well, what is the consistent theoretical representation of this huge contradiction between the waste of life of the many – just because of the socially induced sufferings – and then, the sophisticated theories about death as first preoccupation of humans but not related at all to the concrete contents of life?

As we know, these theories are ideological, and more, they bear the interest of the dominant strata for which the worth of man is not a universalistic assumption but refers precisely to the members of these strata. Without this cut out and focused image of man, it would have been very difficult for these strata to bear the results of a permanent cognitive dissonance. But the humanistic theories which made their way through the snow of the dominant prejudices have promoted, contrariwise, the *universal* values of the equality of the human beings on the basis of their reasonability, thus of their ability to judge and separate the good from the evil.

The modern society has been legitimated just with these universal values. And once these values became dominant in the legitimating ideologies, it is no longer possible to erase them from the general social conscience: though the legitimating ideologies tried in different ways to joking and annulling the universal values in the name of relativism. Accordingly, the general view punishes the policies and behaviours of the ruling strata which, on the one hand, support universal values (as freedom and democracy, for instance) and on the other hand, mock them. In a critical theory that promotes this general view, one counters the theoretical perspective of the *every human as unique and unrepeatable* – thus, of infinite value that must be realised – and *the dominant practice* where the allocation of resources halts this realisation.

When this critical theory – from Schopenhauer to Camus, for example – has developed just in order to demonstrate the logic of the every human as unique and unrepeatable, and when it has confronted an opposite reality, it has generated lighted theories about this confrontation: that of the pessimistic denouement of the individual and that of the absurd character of the world for this individual. Indeed, when things were and seemed to be too absurd, when there were no

correlations of the inputs and outputs of the human actions from the standpoint of the multiple, including moral, limits, when the consequences of “normal”/expected actions were too absurd, either the individual did and does not endure the burden of this absurdity – and the mental disorders, till suicides, and proportion of chronic diseases witness this limit of the individual who does not bear with the social absurdity – or he defends himself by wrapping himself in the donut of indifference and self-centred life.

As we also know, the philosophers were interested to reveal the phenomenon of clinging on life: this was the *conatus* – as the post-Platonists and later on, Leibniz and Spinoza, have showed – the tendency of every being (and obviously, of every living being) to last. Concerning the human being, the philosophers struggled and strove between the extremes of the dialectics of this human being: that every human individual is unique and unrepeatable, but *finite*, while humanity/the human species is *forever living*. Their entire approach was and is *historical*, reflecting the problems and their tackling in different intervals and spatial frameworks, i.e. the concrete relations of forces in these intervals and frameworks.

For instance and concerning the above-mentioned dialectics, the two traditions [one: the pre-Christian/pagan, non-Christian (Buddhism, Islam, Hindu etc.) where the individual death is a normal transition and *transmission of relay* because the community does not die, thus in the dialectics/unity of contrary phenomena, the community/society is more important – and the other, European/Christian, where the individual death is more important than the dialectical relation within community] are marked by the historical *power relations*.

Actually, the power relations have distorted the theoretical dialectics. It's significant that, in the European tradition, Plato has excluded the collective element of this dialectics: only the individual death was important for him, and the solution against the irreversibility of the individual death was the immortality of the individual soul. Later on it was more and more evident that the *appurtenance of the individual to the human species* was forgot and transformed into appurtenance to local, national, religious, *close* communities (the world was not yet globalized, was it?).

Today, this tradition is strong (for indeed, the appurtenance to communities is more mobilizing than the individual aspirations) and manipulated by the dominant strata as opposition between

communities / appurtenance to the community and that to the human species.

If so, once more the solution is the *social ideal*: that means more than imagining a better future for one's own community; assuming the social ideal, the individual feels *responsible* for the species (and not only for him and his community).

If this solution is rejected, the individual brings out from his thoughts the human community, the contents of life is narrowing, the understanding of the dialectics of individual death and trans-individual eternal life of the species becomes opaque.

And finally: the individual-community-species dialectics does not mean any unilateral approach; it must suppose *mutuality*: respect of both the individual uniqueness and of community and species.

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