

## CHAPTER 1: FRIENDSHIP

If Nietzsche declared almost a hundred years ago that God is dead, and Marx's statement that religion is the opium of the people led to the ban of Christianity in Socialist countries, God nowadays experiences a grand revival. And if modernist economists declared friendship an unproductive passion, my aim in this article is to achieve the resurrection of friendship.

What is happening to friendship these days? In my golden times, which I named so in view of the preferences to be developed below, we would meet without any concerns and share our visions, aspirations, hopes, loves and worries without economic, status or any other calculations. Above all, we were open, playful, passionate and creative. I must not forget, of course, that we also had time, all the time in the world which we would stretch like a rubber band and fling into the air, hit against the wall and sometimes even drag to the dump in black bags, all out of sheer boredom.

I miss those times, I long for them. Even more than this visionary, creative, playful and passionate atmosphere I miss the simple socialising – but not in the sense of revelry. Because revelry means the devaluation of genuine friendly entertainment. When Alcibiades enters the feast in Plato's Symposium in the company of a flute-girl, the symposium turns into something "vulgar" as friends can no longer be entertained by listening to one another, paying to listen to the flute instead; today this would equal paying for a private DJ.

No, what I mean is the socialisation that makes us simply feel good in our hearts, souls and bodies, that makes us feel relaxed and unpretentiously good in the company of people around us with whom we openly share our opinions about the acute problems of our time and/or personality. Nothing special, nothing can be simpler, you may say. Yes indeed, but it is precisely the "nothing simpler" part that is so difficult to achieve because of its indefinability. As I mentioned earlier, I love to socialize in a playful, passionate and creative way. Today, however, most people socialise only for various tangible reasons, either economic and political or status and professional.

I miss the socialising that makes one feel that he or she is one of the many, lost in the congregation of a small community. I miss the feeling of getting lost while feeling that you gain much more – being overwhelmed by an unrivaled feeling of living as floating on an invisible carpet called 'All of us together joined in friendship'. At that moment, things become clear and life acquires a forgotten joy and meaning. The preliminary pondering upon the meaning of all manipulative, egoistic quests for profit and one's own pleasure is gone. Also gone, is the feeling

of emptiness of individuality and loneliness, and what sneaks into the soul and body is a simple fondness for once fellow men and women.

You may say that we have all experienced these golden times, usually in our childhood or student years, but that one has to grow up, begin to take (material and general) care of oneself and become responsible. Yes, yes, all this is clear, but what is also clear is that the wish for socialising and friendship does not fade with adulthood. It is clear, however, that people (as a matter of routine) suddenly do not have time for anything; for a serious discussion about ecological, economic or social crises, or for lending an open and sympathetic ear to a suffering friend. In this case, if we again take Plato and *Symposium* as an example, a feast is a symposium of beautiful and good people who test one another in clever and mutual arguments, in my view also in the exchange of authentic emotions and personal afflictions.

I am certain that there is more to my longing than just longing for the lost times of carefree "childhood" or the right-wing feeling of the lost "domesticity". I believe that my feeling is more a result of the changes in ideology and devaluation of certain values that all people feel at the third stage of the global capital. It is true that the valuation of values is one of the central human conducts on which civilisation is based, and that civilisation survives by changing its values. There is a difference, however, in whether it is revaluation or devaluation of values that it is after. The latter is probably an indicator of a civilisation's condition—whether it is on its peak or in decline.

Therefore I dare to argue that the democratic neoliberalism, which is only about the victory of interests over the "passions and emotions", has devalued friendship (and not only friendship but human bonds in general, including family bonds). Neoliberalism, which implies the almighty calculated care of oneself with the use of one's own reason and will, reflects in endlessly competitive and brutal individualism that bears the slogan 'All for the benefit, power and pleasure of an individual!'

Does it really have to be like this? I once came across a statement by Marjetica Potrč that goes approximately like this: the making of science and art, politics and friendship is based on our understanding of each other. There is no external, objective reality forcing us to adopt an egoistic, calculating and operational behaviour and knowledge, as we are being convinced by Smith, Malthus and today's neoliberal economists Hayek and Friedman and sociobiologists such as Wilson, Dawkins and others. This is about decisions, the decisions of our ancestors in the 18<sup>th</sup> century as well as the decisions of our contemporaries.

The decision that our lives (including friendship) are driven solely by interests and benefits and that we could live differently is proven by our other two, much older predecessors. In Book VIII

of *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle stated that "friendship seems too to hold states together, and lawgivers to care more for it than for justice. And when men are friends they have no need of justice, while when they are just they need friendship as well, and the truest form of justice is thought to be a friendly quality".<sup>1</sup> Although Plato and Aristotle are theoretically mostly on different sides, they ardently defend friendship for the sake of friendship (*philia*); they see it as the highest form of spiritualised love and the highest spiritual value. It is the friendship among equals that knows of no external interests and is driven solely by mutual affection, support and encouragement in values and in spirit. All affection is based on good or on pleasure, either absolute or relative to the person who feels it, and is prompted by similarity of some sort. But this friendship possesses all these attributes in the friends themselves. /.../ Also the absolutely good is pleasant absolutely as well; but the absolutely good and pleasant are the chief objects of affection."<sup>1</sup> It is true that we cannot have many such friends because we are limited with available daily time as well as with the length of our lives. But when Aristotle says in *Nicomachean Ethics* that man should abandon the *philia* he fosters for his friend if the latter changes and becomes evil, this does not mean that a friendship towards another ends for the reason of one's own interest. Rather, believes Aristotle, this happens because one of the friends realises that he cannot do anything more to contribute to the other man's good for his sake. Aristotle also puts it clearly what true friendship is not. This is friendship for the sake of utility and pleasure. In friendship for the sake of utility, friends are good insofar as they can be used as a means to an end (a commodity). In friendship for the sake of pleasure, friends are good insofar as they are pleasant and entertaining. "Therefore those who love for the sake of utility love for the sake of what is good for themselves, and those who love for the sake of pleasure do so for the sake of what is pleasant to themselves, and not in so far as the other is the person loved but in so far as he is useful or pleasant."<sup>2</sup> Such friendships, then, are easily dissolved, because friendship disappears along with the reasons for which people are friends. Because such people have never been friends with each other, but with utility or pleasure.

In Plato's fashion, the notion of friendship is further radicalised by Montaigne in his short essay *Of Friendship*, defining it as a kind of ideal spiritualised love: "Friendship, on the contrary, is enjoyed proportionably as it is desired; and only grows up, is nourished and improved by enjoyment, as being of itself spiritual, and the soul growing still more refined by practice."<sup>4</sup> It is a "divine" bond led by virtue, reason and strong character in which equal and mutually respecting friends give themselves entirely to each other. For a true friend does for the other what the other

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, 247.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 251.16 17

most desires for himself. "Our souls had drawn so unanimously together, they had considered each other with so ardent an affection, and with the like affection laid open the very bottom of our hearts to one another's view, that I not only knew his as well as my own; but should certainly in any concern of mine have trusted my interest much more willingly with him, than with myself," enthuses Montaigne.

He also says that everything is common in a true friendship: the friends' wills, goods, "wives", children, honours, and lives; and that absolute concurrence of affections being no other than one soul in two bodies, they can neither lend nor give anything to one another. "This is the reason why the lawgivers, to honour marriage with some resemblance of this divine alliance, interdict all gifts betwixt man and wife; inferring by that, that all should belong to each of them, and that they have nothing to divide or to give to each other. /.../ For each of them contending and above all things studying how to be useful to the other, he that administers the occasion is the liberal man, in giving his friend the satisfaction of doing that towards him which above all things he most desires."<sup>5</sup> To Montaigne, a friend is therefore somebody who is another self; a friend is actually our "double". We may conclude that Montaigne wanted friendship that is inseparable and even resembles a marriage. We may actually presume that friendship is even more than marriage if we take into account that Montaigne draws upon Plato's *philia*, the highest form of love, as expressed in *Symposium* and *Lysias*.

Today we find the thought of friendship as the highest form of love unusual, even unacceptable, although the ancient times distinguished between friendship and love, too. Aristotle, for example, says: "Now it looks as if love were a feeling, friendship a state of character. /.../ But mutual love involves choice and choice springs from a state of character; and men wish well to those whom they love, for their sake, not as a result of feeling but as a result of a state of character. And in loving a friend men love what is good for themselves; each, then, both loves what is good for himself, and makes an equal return in goodwill and in pleasantness. For friendship is said to be equality," which means that friendship exist among the equal and that two friends give or want the same. If they are bad friends, however, they confuse one value with the other (this applies to friendship based on pleasure and utility). It is interesting to note, however, that Aristotle measures equality in terms of quantity and not in terms of proportionality of value. The fact is that today's global capitalist world of fast profits and exploitation of man by man, as Marx would put it, does not leave much time or will to socialise for the sake of socialising.

It seems that noble friendship without any economic, status or any other calculation is disappearing from the turbo-capitalist menu. It is interesting to know that this is also the result of the fact that theoreticians of capitalism in the 18<sup>th</sup> century dealt mostly with passions and

emotions such as greed, envy, power-thirst and similar. As calculating interest and pleasure became the main objective of the human life and the contemporary society (and politics) as early as in the Enlightenment period, which is the intellectual and emotional basis of our times, we have to take a look back in time when political philosophers and economists such as Montesquieu, Shaftesbury and Smith lay the foundations for such behaviour. The union of the interest (economy) and the politics (ruling) first emerged in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries with the aim of enabling good politicians to rule the country on the basis of true knowledge of the nature (passions) of people. Even Hegel thought that human passions such as greed, ambition and envy could be harnessed by using the trickery of the mind to turn their destructive power for the general benefit of the society and country. The general opinion in the 17<sup>th</sup> century was therefore that passions should be harnessed rather than suppressed and that the exploitation of the power of passions should be done by the society or the state. Which is, of course, a paradox of sorts.

On the other hand, the thinkers of those times came up with another solution in fighting the destructive passions. Instead of trying to transform the harmful passions into benevolent passions as if by a mystical, alchemical process, they decided to use the destructive passions by substituting them for other passions of more positive character. Or in the words by Spinoza: "An emotion cannot be destroyed nor controlled except by a contrary and stronger emotion."<sup>7</sup> Thus it resulted from the opposite between the interests and the passions that a series of passions earlier known under different names - greed, disproportion, gainfulness, self-interest - may be beneficial in opposing and curbing other passions such as ambition, power thirst or lust. "At this point, then, a junction is effected between the previously developed train of thought on countervailing passions. /.../ the promotion of avarice to the position of the privileged passion given the job of taming the wild ones and of making in this fashion a crucial contribution to statecraft. It is a junction of economy and politics," says Hirschman.<sup>4</sup> What is more, Smith went so far in his seminal work *The Wealth of Nations* as to equalise passions (greed, gainfulness, ambition, power thirst) with interests and thus undermined the idea that a passion could be opposed to other passions, or interests to passions. "It is thus that the private interests and passions of individuals naturally dispose them to turn their stock towards the employments which in ordinary cases, are most advantageous to the society. /.../ Without any intervention of law, therefore, the private interests and passions of men naturally lead them to divide and distribute the stock of every society among all the different employments carried on in it."<sup>9</sup> Smith therefore states that the material welfare of the society as a whole advances when everybody is allowed to follow their private interests, and thus sets the *modus operandi* of the market society.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 42.

An interesting fact is that avarice and gainfulness were still considered one of the main sinful and immoral passions in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, so long as gaining money was not marked as interest, which no longer made it a passion but merely a prudent effort for one's own and thus for the social benefit. Back then it was simply believed and advocated that interest in the sense of reasonable deliberate self-appreciation – for this never fails – would enable us to realise our desires for power, influence, status and wealth in a peaceful and reasonable manner. Interest thus became the key to understanding all human acts in politics and economy; even the moral universe became subject to the laws of interest. The theoreticians of the time were so convinced about the reasonable power of the interest that they naively (as we can see today) believed that it would bring welfare and peace in the world. An even more interesting fact is, however, that (economic) interests were defined as the foundation of gentleness, civilisation and friendship. "Divine Providence has not willed for everything that is needed for life to be found in the same spot. It has dispersed its gifts so that men would trade together and so that the mutual need which they have to help one another would establish ties of friendship among them. This continuous exchange of all the comforts of life constitutes commerce and commerce makes for all the gentleness of life."<sup>5</sup>

But it was already in those times that some voices appeared that exhorted against the rule of interest and its potential dangers. Scottish philosopher and historian Adam Ferguson quickly noticed negative effects of work and trade on an individual's personality and his social ties with others. "It is here, indeed, if ever, that man is sometimes found a detached and solitary being: he has found an object which sets him in competition with his fellow-creatures, and he deals with them as he does with his cattle and his soil, for the sake of the profits they bring. The mighty engine which we suppose to have formed society, only tends to set its members at variance, or to continue their intercourse after the bands of affection are broken."<sup>6</sup> French politician Antoine Barnave said: "The morals of a commercial nation are not completely those of merchants. The merchant is thrifty; general morals are prodigal. The merchant maintains his morals; public morals are dissolute."<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, it is by no means necessary that there is a harmony between private and public interests, as Tocqueville noted. Far from interests taming or restraining the passions of the masters; on the contrary, if citizens focus on the realisation of their private interests, power can be seized by an ingenious and ambitious man. "A nation that asks nothing of government but the

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 42.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 42.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 42.

maintenance of order is already a slave in the depths of its heart; it is a slave of its well-being, ready for the man who will put it in chains."<sup>8</sup> Political effects of economic development may be essentially ambiguous. If it is true that economy should be left to run free, then we do not have only a reason to limit imprudent acts of the master, but also to suppress the equal behaviour of the people, to limit political participation, anything that could be understood by an economist-king as a threat to the regular functioning of the "sensitive clock".

Now we can understand better why today's friendships are the way they are. Let me add as an intermezzo that today's democratic neoliberalism – the heir of modernism – has not only devalued friendship and reduced it to the level of instrumental operationalisation; the same has happened to the truth as a (scientific or philosophical) concept that is now used by corporate laboratories and university incubators merely as a means of achieving profit. We can say that the truth is dead, replaced by statistical probability that does not work. Art has had it even worse. Groys even says that it will be erased because society will not have any other criterion left but taste. In the future taste would be developed only on the basis of design and fashion (which determines whether I like an object or not; in turn, the artist himself becomes an object of agreeability for others), which will make art disappear as a specific space in which design, fashion, aesthetic judgements are related to eternal questions such as: what is subjectivity, what is a man, what is his destiny, what is the destiny of human relations, where are we coming from, where are we going.

This leads to the conclusion that it must be true what the most intelligent people said about our society a while ago: that it has no friendship, no truth, no happiness, no virtue, no freedom, no sexual and love relationships. But if there is nothing, what has been left for us – what should we live for, what should we hope for, dream about and yearn for? Indeed I miss the "disinterested" and solidarity-imbued times in which friendships between equals were a most everyday and inspiring phenomenon.

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<sup>8</sup> Tocqueville in Hirschman 2002, 122.



## CHAPTER 2: HAPPINESS

Happiness, too, is a word which is always on the tip of our tongues. But what is happiness – everybody wants it, everybody longs for it the same as for love – and why is it so hard to achieve? And is it true that happiness is real *only* when/if shared? I believe it is not; happiness is something we feel deep inside. I remember how I would often laugh and smile just like that, how I would enjoy playing with cats, dogs, children, go for walks and admire trees and butterflies, stare at the horizon where the sea meets the sky, go on trips to European cities, read books of all sorts – out of pure fondness for animals, children, sea, trees, butterflies, knowledge – and I still do it. Happiness resembles love: it need not only be shared, we can feel happiness, like love, within ourselves. It is a kind of basic orientation in life, a kind of trust. It is a kind of inner peace/reconciliation and satisfaction with life and everything that may come – even when/if something *hurts* us; for, after all, everything in this world passes and is passable because of time, which runs unavoidably and unstoppably.

This, of course, does not mean that one should not be in a bad mood, angry, sad or suffering from time to time. Does happiness go away when such feelings are expressed? No, these are actually situation-driven emotions that do not have a lot in common with the basic awareness that happiness is to do what you really like and see the meaning for ourselves and for others in this. Thus we may say that happiness is a feeling – a general optimistic outlook of life, a reconciliation with life and oneself, but can also be a feeling that refers to a particular event, person, animal, thought or anything else. Happiness can also be a virtue: that we do good. Besides, it is a feeling/joy that can be shared with other(s), a feeling of being connected with everything that is (around us) and being a part of this universe... of joy.

Happiness is, last but not least, the very awareness of being – of living and being liked by somebody just because we are (and because we are what we are), and being loved. I received a message a while ago: "Facebook reminds us of people who we do not meet so often, but who are special and dear in a certain way. In the holiday spirit of my imminent trip to the island of Hvar, I wish you lovely holidays wherever and with whoever you are." Sometimes it only takes a brief message like this to make us happy and confirm our general positive outlook. One of the basic sentiments/messages that we need in our life in order to be happy is sensing and knowing that we are actually noticed and loved, that we are not alone in this world – that we are truly loved in the sense that our existence is worthwhile and that we are beautiful and good personalities. Understanding what it means to be a good and beautiful personality and having the ability to



truly see others besides oneself, is the foundation of everything that is important in life. Without the effort to be beautiful, good, cheerful personalities, there is no family, no friendship, no partnership, no cooperation, no society; what is more, no civilisation. There is nothing at all. There is no human life as we know it. Are we aware that this happiness and joy and a smile as its most genuine and primary expression are actually the reflection of confirming the existence of another person? And that our smile is actually a smile about the fact that he or she exists, or even more, the reflection of the confirmation of the existence that he or she exists *at all*? Therefore there is no true life without a smile.

Happiness and joy originate from an entirely different level, from a different source than one may think, namely from the fact that we are capable of noticing the existence – our own as well as the existence of another creature or creatures, life in any of its forms – and that the existence of others that we notice or that we are capable of noticing is entrusted to us for care, that is *for care and not for abuse*. Thus happiness also lies in the fact that we are aware that something has been entrusted to us, that we are aware that we have been entrusted a *carefully, patiently, precisely made precious "treasure" – the other*, and that we can see the meaning and beauty in this fact. After all, *it is this awareness of the other that makes us smile at to him or her*, thus confirming *him or her* and (in a way) *presenting ourselves to him or her*.

Happiness also comes, therefore, in outdoing oneself by doing good, by bestowing a gift on others and opening the doors for them into feelings, emotions, experiences, thoughts they have not felt before, therefore into the beauty they have never seen, felt or thought about before. It is an exceptional happiness, namely, to be able to see a fellow man and give him what he desires and values himself. Aristotle said: "And in loving a friend men love what is *good for themselves*. Each, then, both loves what is *good for himself*, and makes an equal return in goodwill and in pleasantness". Happiness, therefore, also means the ability to see the other person and make him or her happy – to know how to restrain and open ourselves, how to be kind and affectionate instead of seeing only our interests and pleasures regardless of the consequences. In my opinion, making others happy and spreading happiness or joy is the *essential* present that we can give to ourselves and to other people. Those who can see others besides themselves are happy and cheerful because they are aware that they are something instead of nothing. The essential happiness can be summarised by the thought *One for all, all for one*, which does not encompass only people but also animals, plants, minerals, the whole planet as well as the cosmos and galaxies, if our "influence" can reach that far. Happiness never lies in hoarding things just for oneself. After all, nothing is ours and nothing has been truly created by us. We are only visitors, "passers-by", as my father would have it, so we should not leave devastation behind us after we

are gone, that is, after we die. Because this world is actually much more wonderful, more colourful and fragile than we are ready to notice; it has resulted from extraordinary efforts, deliberation, patience, sense and love.

Of course, happiness can be also experienced on a more basic human societal level, for example happiness means being free and benefiting from the basic human rights as well as education, health care, pension system, social bonuses, legal tools. Happiness lies in discovering new things, be it in the field of science, art, philosophy, partnership, politics etc. Freedom, of course, does not mean that we can carelessly do whatever we want. No, what freedom demands from us is the awareness that there are others living in this world, too, which means that freedom brings responsibility and self-restraint. Therefore happiness also means the knowledge of one's freedom to self-restraint.

An equally important aspect of happiness is that we can (be) play(ful) or see that life is sometimes a juggle or a merry-go-round *beyond our comprehension* and that we cannot control everything or think that everything in this life can be controlled.

Is happiness something that can be held or measured? Not exactly. Happiness is something that should be felt, kept in mind. It is the game, the happiness, the joy one gets from juggling or sitting on the merry-go-round called *Living your life together with others*.

But what happens to happiness, joy, smile, when people are worried and something bad happens to them, although they did not deserve it? This is when they become sad, bitter, and their lives do not feel funny or happy any more. How so? Can we still be happy when we lose the so-called edenic virginity and enter into deeper understandings of life, when we become familiar with suffering, pain and "evil"?

In my opinion, a great, beautiful and good person is the one who nevertheless does not lose what we can call a childlike good and loving heart, and does not forget to laugh because laughter is the most important especially in such moments. In the darkest moments, when we think everything is breaking down because we have unjustly lost a loved one or a long-term job, or because one of the dearest persons in this world has died, what we need is love, warmth, happiness and especially a smile; of course, crying, sadness, pain and concern are not absent either. But nevertheless – if *we are aware of the fact of a smile* stressed above, we are even more aware of its importance, for only then it *literally works wonders*. The power of smile can be seen in a metaphor of phoenix: a smile can gather and put together the scattered pieces from the ashes and assemble them. Smile, happiness, joy and love (re) establish, construct and maintain the immune system of our body, heart and soul. And whoever may say that a man should be less happy and laugh less because of hard things that happened in his life would sound unusual. Ancient Roman

philosopher Epicurus states exactly the same: to be happy despite hard things would be, according to him, in discord with the state of affairs. He thinks that only gods can be endlessly happy because they know of no concern, while people are constantly slightly concerned and thus unhappy. But we beg to differ, stating that it is precisely the human ability to preserve happiness, joy, smile and heartiness that testifies to one's particularity and extraordinary ability and love for life and all that surrounds him or her – the closest family members, relatives, friends, colleagues, neighbours, fellow citizens, fellow men.

Yes, life can be unfair at times. Sometimes we do our very best to do things right but fail anyway. Why? Unfortunately, people do not and cannot see the full picture of the situation in the world because we are, after all, only people and cannot see all possible solutions to our circumstances despite all knowledge and technology in our possession. How can we, therefore, find a solution and, even more importantly, why even try for anything, especially for joy, happiness, a smile, after we experienced suffering and (immeasurable) pain? This should not be misunderstood; it is entirely understandable that a certain period of grief and accusation is necessary. But as the closest ones witness a long-term suffering of somebody they love, they suffer along with him or her. This is exactly why I believe that it is important to try to be happy and cheerful for ourselves and for others who are still with us – to cheer about the fact that we and they are (still around), while being able to think with a particular joy and gratitude back to the times we spent with those who were with us for a while but either left by themselves or were forced to leave our life. I think, too, that people might have to learn to accept to a greater extent that everything, including us, is indeed more ephemeral and frail than it may seem. At moments like this it is certainly worth remembering that people who had to leave us unjustly (for example because of a tragic deadly accident and the like) would not want us to suffer so inhumanly because of them.

There is something else I have noticed. People are excessively burdened by the logic of revenge and retaliation; they reason along the lines of *You have to go through what I have been through*, thus actually perpetuating the suffering in this world. (What an irony this is – somebody suffers something and then makes others suffer because he has suffered, then the one who suffered because of the first passes his suffering on to the third person and makes him suffer because of him, and so on. At some point we must put a stop to this pattern; enough is enough, no more retaliation, this world should be ruled by the compassion towards all creatures!) Those who act by the logic that another person should go through suffering, too, because they have suffered themselves, do not see the person who suffers at a *given* moment. They see the other from the aspect of themselves and the experience they had to go through instead of momentarily putting

themselves aside at the time of great suffering of the other and offer the necessary support; this support is, I repeat, the feeling of love, warmth, acceptance and joy, as well as a smile. This is a very appropriate moment for the saying: "God give me strength to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference," instead of "What does not kill me makes me stronger," because the latter thought is too often turned into "What does not kill you, cripples you. Thus people forget all too often that everything they need to heal their wounds is already here and now: love, joy, warmth, the smile of those closest to them and to their fellow people, and of course, *respect* towards each individual. And maybe even god (or gods) is surprised by us and such a response!

But let us return to Epicurus. Why did Epicurus think that people cannot be "blissfully and innocently happy", such as gods, despite the worries and suffering they had to go through? As a polytheist, Epicurus believed in several gods, but he did not believe that gods are concerned about human living; therefore he did not believe that gods are benevolent and prudent, either. In order to understand Epicurus, we must first propose the reasons why gods should be benevolent towards people. According to this hypothesis, the following applies: although the world may seem infinitely complex, it is at the same time capable of satisfying everybody's needs. This means that this world offers people everything they need to survive and thrive. The air, for instance, is composed of the precisely right combination of elements that enable us to breathe, the temperature is exactly right for our bodies and we have, at least in principle, enough natural resources to produce clothes, build our homes and have enough to eat. If it is true that a supreme being created people on earth, it is reasonable to suppose that the same being created enough means for our survival. Besides natural resources and suitable ecological conditions, gods also bestowed reason on people. Reason enables a man to live in peace and harmony with others, as well as gives him an insight into how to be happy and how to live a good life. And if gods gifted us with reason in order to learn how to live a good life and be happy, they must be concerned about us and wish us all the best. Yes, indeed, they are concerned about our well-being. And if they are concerned about our well-being, they probably keep an eye on us to make sure we have everything we need to survive and thrive. Therefore it may be deduced that gods *are* benevolent.

But Epicurus rejected this position. For although he believed that the gods existed, he also believed that they showed no interest in human affairs because (1) gods are endlessly happy, (2) if gods troubled themselves about human happiness, this would make them concerned, (3) being concerned means being unhappy, but (4) gods cannot trouble themselves about human well-being because that would make it impossible for them to be endlessly happy. Therefore (5) gods are not benevolent and prudent. In other words, it is contrary to the wisdom of gods to trouble

themselves about human well-being because each creature concerned for another necessarily experiences anxiety, and being concerned at least sometimes also means being unhappy. Therefore it is not true that gods are endlessly happy and concerned, which in turn leads to the conclusion that gods are not benevolent and "prudent". Epicurus's argument is therefore successful insofar as it illuminates the contradictory nature of happiness and concern (trouble): an individual cannot be happy if he is concerned at the same time. But this does not necessarily mean that gods are not interested in our happiness; after all, where did Epicurus acquire his understanding of gods being endlessly and carelessly happy, where did he gather the knowledge about the "nature" of gods? Epicurus claims that each man somehow becomes familiar with the concept of gods and that the understanding of the existence of gods should not be taught as man simply understands this and recognises with the nature of gods through such understanding. In short, Epicurus implies that all worldly concerns make man unhappy rather than happy.

We could say that Pascal Bruckner in his work *Perpetual Euphoria* agrees with Epicurus when he states: "Regardless of the point of view taken, there is no happiness save in insouciance, unconsciousness, and innocence, in the rare moments stolen from uneasiness and alarm. We are happy only in spite: in spite of a friend who is suffering, of a war that is killing people, of a sick universe."<sup>9</sup> An interesting fact is that Christianity disqualified any form of happiness, too, stressing that we face sure death anyway, which means the emphasis on the fact that our very birth submerges us to the state of concern and numbness that we can be free of only in the death struggle. Life is a dream from which we must awaken, which will happen with death – a metaphor which originates from the ancient period is ubiquitous in Christian thought which shows death as the fatal end. In a way, we distinguish between three deaths: (a) physical perishing in the narrow sense of the word; (b) death already in one's lifetime for those who live in sin, i.e. without the contact with God, in the spiritual blackness (paintings in some Breton churches depict hell as a cold, icy space in which we are separated from others); and (c) death as liberation and transition for the just, namely as a transition to the place of joy, which cannot be achieved on earth by any means. To renounce the false charms of this world means to justly expect an immensely greater reward in heaven. Purgatory unveils a possibility to enjoy this world and to reach a reconciliation with it. In short, Christianity liberates us from our bodies but re-establishes it along with its rights by virtue of embodiment. It affirms human autonomy even as it subordinates it to divine transcendence; it demands the satisfaction of senses without idolizing

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<sup>9</sup> Pascal Bruckner, *Nenehna vzhičenost*: Pascal Bruckner, *Perpetual Euphoria: esej o prisilni sreči* (Ljubljana: On the Duty to be Happy (Princeton University Press, Študentska založba, 2004), 237.2010), 229.

them, without raising mundane things to the rank of absolutes, as stated by Bruckner in his book.<sup>10</sup>

Bruckner further elaborates that the contemporary concept of happiness and the commandment to be constantly happy originates from the Voltaire's famous line in the poem *Le Mondain* (1736): "Paradise on Earth is where I am." This statement, incredible and bold for its times, discredits the centuries of eremitism and asceticism. Thus the Enlightenment and the French revolution did not merely declare that original sin is erased; what is more, they went down in history as the heralds of happiness for all humankind. Happiness was no longer a metaphysical dream, an impossible hope; happiness turned into here and now, now or never. "For the most enthusiastic, Condorcet for instance, happiness is simply inevitable, it is inherent in the triumphal advance of the human mind and is both irreversible and infallible. It is impossible not to desire one's own happiness; it is a natural law of the human heart just like the laws of matter in the physical world; it is the moral counterpart of universal gravitation. /.../ 'To secure one's own happiness is a duty, at least indirectly; for discontent with one's condition, under a pressure of many anxieties and amidst unsatisfied wants, might easily become a great temptation to transgression of duty,' wrote Kant in his *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals*."<sup>11</sup> Ever since the time of Enlightenment, man relies solely on his powers in arranging his earthly life. A person who feels capable of overcoming misery and mastering his fate feels that he can reduce the disgust he feels towards himself. The world can be a fertile garden instead of a bare enclosure, pleasures are real and human experience is no longer merely pain. Most of all, one should reconcile with his own body: this is no longer a short-lived and disgusting envelope of the soul that cannot be trusted and from which one should be liberated. Our body is now our friend, our only vessel on earth, our most loyal friend for which it is appropriate to care for, nurture and treat in accordance with the rights of medicine and hygiene. It obviously opposes the times when religion commanded or at least recommended the suppression of the body and disdain towards it.

In short, we show our "beautiful humanity" exactly by possessing and being able to understand the deep importance of joy and happiness despite all trials we experience in this world. For only the feeling and emotion of happiness and only laughter will "cure" us of the unhappiness, trouble and pain of the hell we have been through (and which we hope not to ever experience again). And let us laugh also because we will all die some day (possibly soon) and it can happen even sooner that we will lose a loved one or ones. What defines us, according to

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 27–33. Ibid, 18-33.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 42.



Hume, is not our universality but our partiality (the combination of selfishness and compassion, joy and pain). Our mournful or joyful perception of the state of affairs is often influenced by a narrow, partial environment that influences us in the same way that we influence it. "Thus there is a happiness that is elicited by others but whose scope is limited to a few intimates and never radiates to the ends of the earth."<sup>12</sup>

Happiness is, as stated, the general optimistic outlook of life on the one hand, a silent reconciliation with all that is - that comes and goes -, but also fragile and (co)dependent on circumstances, events, people and the like on the other. What is more, Voltaire wrote already in the 18th century in *Candide* that man was born to live either in the convulsions of misery, or in the lethargy of boredom. This is more than typical of today when, despite all goods and novelties, boredom is one of the essential problems - there is nothing (or no novelty) that can keep people satisfied for more than a day or a few days at most. It seems that happiness for most people wanes or disperses after a while. "Emptiness supposedly comes about because everything that can flourish can also become empty. Bliss and emptiness are inseparable."<sup>13</sup>

But if we know of all these traps we can all the more invite others to rejoice over what we have. Sometimes we must lose it all to be able to appreciate what we have. Bruckner relates this by a telling story about John and Mary who spend ten years waiting for John's fate to happen and be fulfilled. "The years pass by, the man and woman grow old together, always on their guard. One day the "admirable friend" falls ill. Before she dies, she tells the man, 'You have nothing to wait for more. It has come.' /.../ The worst that can happen is to wait for the miraculous event in the hope that will someday redeem us *and fail to see that the miracle resides.*" Bruckner places the following words in John's mouth: "If he returned the love she gave him and finally experience the passion that would destroy him, he could experience the delight of life. But walled up in his obsession, he remained someone "to whom nothing will ever happen".<sup>14</sup>

Today, when more and more people are unhappy again and we witness so many different forms of suffering, suppression, exploitation, abuse, maladies and boredom at the same time, we must take a stand with regard to whether we want to be happy or not, and *sincerely ask ourselves what happiness actually means to us*. It may be true that "we will never stop oscillating between two fundamental attitudes: that of the prosecutor who condemns life because he evaluates it in comparison with a utopia or preconceived idea, and that of the defence lawyer who goes out to celebrate both its disappointments and its attractions, whether it wounds us cruelly or caresses us softly. And when the accuser exclaims, 'I've been cheated,' the defender replies: 'I've been

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 229.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 230.32 33

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 107.



satisfied'.<sup>15</sup> As said, we must decide ourselves and *build our happiness*. What I attempted in this essay was to provide my reasons for happiness.

But it is also true that we do not know everything that may await for us. After all, we do not know whether anything comes after death. Wieslaw Myśliwski says in *The Treatise on Shelling Beans*: "Why am I convinced that a dead man thinks? Because we do not know that he does not think. What do we know at all?"<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 148.

<sup>16</sup> Wieslaw Myśliwski, Traktat o luśčenju fižola, *Sodobnost*, 2010, no. 7–8, 887.