Disasters of Morality – Narcissus

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Morality is the disaster of the human being. It has been the disaster since man became conscious of himself or, as the Bible says, since Adam and Eve broke God’s will and tasted the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Adam and Eve posited the primordial problem of the whole mankind. Good and evil as a choice and responsibility are so up-to-date that they always seem to call for urgent solution. However this problem is so banal because it always steps on old-fashioned notions and traditions that it seems to always give up its own solution. Otherwise it needs a new interpretation and update of the traditions. The scenario “Adam and Eve” is the most fundamental scenario which depicts the initial choice as the starting point of man’s existence as a man as opposed to a mere animal. The reproaches of the religious people about this initial “sin” that the man must redeem sound so insincere and worn out, so unreasonable and even irritating that there can hardly be any serious approach to it. The arguments of the religions that the man lives in the condemnation of his original sin and is guilty by default can hardly be taken seriously at any time when posited by the hypocrisy of those who pretend to be able to redeem this guilt. And there have always been such hypocrisy which not only did not solve the problem of the opposition between good and evil but even deepened the drama. In fact, this drama is the core of human existence. The boring issue of deciding about what is good and what is evil gave birth to unrepeatable cases in the life of the mankind as it does it in the individual life as well. No tradition can ever adequately interpret morality as traditions always tend to solidify and morality is never solid though this is what it seems to be always striving for.

1 The story of Adam and Eve is a banal metaphor; however man can hardly express himself without metaphors – this is one of the ridicules of his being – to be imprisoned in one of his own inventions when he wants to express the whole of his being. The insufficiency of the expression, the ugly mismatching of the metaphor and being is a drama he is condemned ever to live because he wanted to know good and bad and divided his being into good and bad – into being and non-being.

2 In fact this is judged by the monotheistic religions which narrate the problem of good and bad as a problem of man and god – they posit the opposition between the two entities as an opposition between perfection and imperfection, sin and virtue, innocence and guilt.
Morality is the living humanity\(^3\) which marks the traces of its drama, of its memory; morality is the scars of human life and no pain can ever be explained while it hurts.

This is one of the big lies of religions – the consolation they promise, the healing of the pain of human existence – their narratives provide a solution of the problem of human morality and in fact, they provide a solution for the human existence - that is death. Solution of the problem of morality\(^4\) means killing the man. Also the redemption of the original sin and the achievement of the state of pure innocence and perfection, heavenly peace, can be interpreted as a reminiscence of this initial state of the man, as reminded so witty, so reasonably, ultimately so ostensibly by the “Holly” books\(^5\). The morality of the man is so treacherous, however so fundamental, that it is the favorite expression of him abused by…him himself. This abuse is possible only because of the plurality of humanity which treacherously convinces that there is also plurality of morality\(^6\). One person alone can not be immoral because one person alone has no one to abuse and to cheat\(^7\). This is in the fundamentals. Adam needed Eve in order to become a man and this is not a mere feminist statement as this is also (even more!) banal position and the arguments of the statement by themselves reject this possibility! Adam needed Eve to become a man (hu-man) because she was the other one whom he could refer to in his existence and become aware of as someone to cheat him\(^8\). Eve did not need Adam less to become a man (hu-man) as Adam was the other one to be cheated, the one whose existence divided the singularity of morality and, via the primordial

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\(^3\) With no attempt for excuse of this note, humanity is not simply the romantic notion of human virtues perpetuating themselves under the slogan of being “human” and the wording in general is not a mere reference to traditions; wording, however, worn out or fresh, is herein used with no concern about these circumstances, with no regret about repetition or mis-interpretation – wording is another disaster of the human existence – it is the sickness, the condemnation of man for his ambition to know. So, wording, with no excuse for itself, is used here to refer somehow to a primordial human disaster – that is morality.

\(^4\) Not even the problems of morality in plural but the problem in singular as at that stage of questioning the mere existence of morality, it is not yet plural and this is the most banal state of things ever.

\(^5\) Pardon, Books!

\(^6\) Even Adam needed someone else to cheat him to eat from the fruit and interestingly, he called Eve by name after she made him eat from the notorious tree, that is, after she cheated him, when he became conscious of himself and conscious of herself as well.

\(^7\) And even cheating oneself is impossible without someone else being aware and referred to as a mark of the treachery.

\(^8\) As a minimum.
choice they made, this morality already became dual\textsuperscript{9}. Of course, they were duly punished for this sin, as the religions helpfully remind and edify.

The abuse of the other is therefore a direct result of the primordial constitution of the other – at the very first step of human existence one needs the other in order to be oneself. This simple interrelation is the fundamental problem of morality interpreted in hundreds of ways throughout the history of mankind and is the key interrogation of man to himself. This interrogation has caused more disasters than any other as it challenges man in the most delicate point of one’s existence – one’s fallibility and eventually, cheat-ability. The other side of this hot, prickly problem is one’s responsibility, which can cause even more disasters as it is the most powerful connection of the man to the other but it is also the specious expression of the misery of human solitude. And, indeed, man used responsibility in the most virtuous way he could and the effects of this use and, eventually, abuse, engendered the most dramatic experience of mankind, which, if not redirecting the main road of morality\textsuperscript{10}, drew many roads aside of it, which, in fact, is the sense and contents of the plurality of morality and man’s “interesting life”.

The abuse of the other is the primary version of the responsibility to the other. Even on the animalistic level, the destruction of the other is a kind of responsibility – it is the way one responds to the other, and destruction is the outcome of one’s ability to respond, of one’s response-ability towards the other. The key point in the conception of responsibility is the contents of the response and the constitution of the ability for it.

The state of Narcissus is a pathological state of inverted responsibility as Narcissus merely reflected himself onto the surface of the water he gazed and he could not actually respond to the other, not because he did not have the ability for that but because…the Other one was missing. The Other one, in Narcissus case, was Narcissus himself and this invalidated the ability, his solitude dis-abled his response. Narcissus’ case is an impasse of responsibility – it is not even abuse as a vulgar, barbaric, animalistic expression of responsibility to the Other one; it is a deviation from the Other, it is a way back to oneself - a point in which morality is simply irrelevant. Narcissus is

\textsuperscript{9} Duality automatically posits plurality though the way to it could be interpreted in lengths.

\textsuperscript{10} Which somehow boringly remains the same two-way road.
condemned to be immoral not because he does good or bad but because he can not do either good or bad – he has no one to do it to, no one to respond and no one even to abuse or destroy. Narcissus is perhaps one of the most dramatic characters of morality as mode of human being as he is a perversion of it. Narcissus’ love to himself is not the human love which dives into the Other one, which discovers the other in the surprise of the Other one’s existence. Narcissus (re-)discovers himself in his reflection and enjoys himself as a flat image of himself – the only way he can enjoy himself. This is the most crucial, the most dramatic and fundamental point of the Narcissus’ scenario – the flatness of his reflection, which is also the flatness of his love and ultimately, his existence. This existence, as human existence, is in impasse as it is condemned to remain flat as it lacks the option to respond. The ability to respond remains on a rudimentary level as there is no need for it, there is no urge to enable it and therefore the response remains dis-abled and Narcissus – inhuman form of being. Whereas, for example, the tragedy of Sisyphus is in the preservation of a sense which he is conscious of but which he is condemned to continuously restore as it ruins, Narcissus tragedy is in the unawareness of the sense which, once aware of, would firmly establish as it is the sense of one’s existence in its primordial, unrejectable and undeniable validity – this is the sense of the response as the most natural ability of the man.

The state of Narcissus is the state of inverted response-ability which remains self-contained and constitutes a solitary man of no world.

The tragedy of this responsibility is most monstrous when it wants to proliferate misunderstanding oneself as a real, externalized responsibility. Narcissus, who wants to be responsible in real, is a disastrous Narcissus - he suffers the disaster and the others he engenders also suffer the disaster of his inverted responsibility. It is dramatically enough that a Narcissus, who has no “Other” to respond and thus is not a real human, is able to constitute “Others” as mere existences out of his own existence. And Narcissus often does that and if he fails to overcome his impasse, the disaster is then a disaster of the Others engendered by him. The mechanisms which enable this scenario are the same.

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11 The Myth of Sisyphus.
12 And not even perverted as per-verted would mean that it is still external to itself; whereas being in-verted, responsibility remains capsulated – it is an embryo never to be born.
created by the human morality in its various interpretations in the contexts of traditions. But whereas these mechanisms are intended for human morality, the effects of their implementation in Narcissus’ terms are in-human and thus immoral. The context of whatever tradition can never be the universal context of interpretation of morality\textsuperscript{13}. And when Narcissus meets the Others engendered by him himself, he can not recognize them, he can not respond to them as he is still on the mode of his reflection onto himself and the option to respond is disabled. The Others are beyond a wall which he can not trespass, which he can not transcend. The self-containment of Narcissus is his rejection of the Others’ existence. The drama, however, is no longer only with Narcissus fate. When Narcissus himself is constituted as the “Other”, the primordial “Other” with whom the world starts to exist, the drama is already with the one, whom Narcissus engendered and whose “Other” he refused to be\textsuperscript{14}. What happens to this newly engendered "Other" with no “Other” to respond? Does he become another Narcissus because his ability to respond remains rudimental as the case was before? How the new “Other” can become conscious of himself as someone different than a mere Narcissus if the only face he could see is his mere, flat reflection on the impenetrable face of Narcissus who engendered him?! The problem already calls for interpretation. And it does need an interpretation because the abstract state of disabled option to response of Narcissus can no longer sustain its validity, which is in fact a pseudo-validity as it is based on an unnatural state, inhuman state and ultimately - immoral state. So the abstract Narcissus, the isolated, alienated – artificial! – Narcissus is challenged to overcome his solitude, his alienation, his flat reflection via his own existence or

\textsuperscript{13} This is a statement. It can always, in all traditions and times be said that human life for example is a never fading value and no interpretation can change it. However, human life by its virtue, can be interpreted as good or bad, that is, in moral terms, in different contexts and justified as such. So, universal interpretation of morality is not possible, despite of Kant’s convincing arguments about the fundamentals of morality that is rationality. Morality, enclosed in the rationality, could probably be based and universalized via rationality itself, but when released from rationality, trespassing the borders with the irrational human being, no single interpretation can be the base of morality and preserve the human existence in its \textit{ad hoc} and \textit{hic et nunc} state, that is, in the instantaneity of the choice.

\textsuperscript{14} Perhaps any reference to particular cases and examples would dismiss the metaphysical pattern of the discussion; yet the constitution of motherhood for example is probably the most dramatic expression of this pathology of Narcissus to be responsible without being able to respond. Was the problem not so monstrous, the fable of the frog and the horse whose shoeing it wanted to imitate would be a joyful variation of this narrative of Narcissus’ disaster; however the multiplications that it produces make the problem much more serious – so serious that the whole mankind can suffer it (and often it does).
via interpretation in another existence. That is to be appealed by the “Other” as the only one to respond.

The success to respond to the “Other” however lays in the positing of the Other one as an external entity, surprising entity and ultimately, as an anticipation of the primordial state, as an abusing entity and a destructing entity. The Other one must be constituted first in his negative, destructive existence. This is related to a fear, a primordial fear of losing oneself into the other – Narcissus who is safely sheltered into his own reflection where there is no other but him, can hardly risk one’s “flawless” though boring existence (though pseudo-, inhuman and immoral existence) for the sake of the troublesome, dangerous, yet infinite meeting of the Other into the world. Another point is that the world itself can be constituted and has a meaning only in this meeting with the Other which calls for the response to the “Other”.

However, to risk one’s uneventful existence, Narcissus needs a strong impetus, which, interpreted in narcistic terms, is to break the reflection, to break the mirror of Narcissus so as to dis-able his option for reflection and face him towards the misery of his empty existence, where, being deprived of his own reflection, there is nothing more to be seen and met. This equals death. And only death in this sense can bring forward the alternative of it, which is life – life, possible only through the Other as the only alternative of I.

Narcissus’ mirror is Narcissus’ Inquisitor. The limits of the reflection are the limits of existence. The trespassing of the limits of reflection is trespassing of one’s existence – in Narcissus terms, this is not trespassing into an authentic world of real existence but is a world of multiplied I, of imaginative Others which are mere I’s. The results of the attempts to respond to I as to Other, is the horrific agony of Narcissus trespassing his own reflection – and his own reflection, just like an Inquisitor, brings about his own punishment. The violation of one’s own limits of the world is the sin which calls for punishment. The narrower the limits, the easier the violation. The uncl earer the I, the more monstrous the reflection. The mirror is outside Narcissus and bears the influence of the environment (of independent, unrelated, irrelevant Others).

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15 With no direct references or implications, Hegel’s concept of the negating activity towards the other has some relevance to the constitution of the Other in this context.
16 Levinas’ term, see “Totality and Infinity”.
Whereas Narcissus, in one’s denial of this environment (of the Others) can never adequately respond to the changes of it, but can merely suffer the disaster of it. His imagination is his limits, is his Inquisitor. Reality (which is outside, which is dangerous, abusing, destructive!) is freedom, it is merciful. Narcissus, however, needs his death in order to be able to live free. This death is not the one-off act of ceasing one’s existence. It is the ultimate surrender of oneself as solitary being and a world constituted as a mere reflection of oneself. This death is the fatal damage of the mirror which can no longer reflect Narcissus being, which is simply a closing of Narcissus vicious projection into a non-existing world. The ability to respond is always there, in Narcissus, as a primary, unalienable ability of the man to exist in a world. This is due to the primary act of Adam and Eve, who first constituted themselves as Responsible Others to each-Other, in a choice, in a questioning, in a primary discourse.

Once man has convicted his primary sin, he is condemned to live it with all its requisites, as the “Holly” books demand. Among these requisites of particular meaning is the responsibility as the precondition for the sin. Was there not an ability to respond, there would not be a sin and eventually, a response.

Narcissus fate is an open wound in the flesh of responsibility as a content of morality. There are numerous figures in the history of mankind representing the dramas, even tragedies of morality to establish its interpretations and constitute itself anew in new contexts of unique human horizons.

Sisyphus’s fate to redeem a sense he abused is not any easier even to conceive of than to accept and much less to overcome. Sisyphus is another disaster of morality which is a mockery over the self-constitution of him as a master of existence\(^17\).

Out of mythology\(^18\) into reality, Nietzsche’s super-man whom he proclaimed as a substitute of God, whom he proclaimed dead, was the paroxysm of his disastrous existence which ended in 11 years of dementia\(^19\). Nevertheless,

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\(^{17}\) He tried to cheat life and death by human tricks and was punished for that by eternal endeavoring to fulfill a primordial, finite, human sense.

\(^{18}\) Which, as a mockery over the disdain towards metaphors, is the most expressive source of moral disasters, i.e. explicated in metaphors.

\(^{19}\) The contrast between the length of his life and the years of complete absence of it IN it is comparable only to the contrast between the furious moral revolution he headed aspiring “beyond good and evil” and the immense oppression which reality rendered him. His Zarathustra is a symbol of the paroxysm
Nietzsche interpreted morality in a way which enabled the constitution of the new epoch of irrationalities and a type of plurality which no longer cared for the “Other” above, but needed to respond to the “Other” next-door.

The “Other” next-door is now the other one in the discourse, the one who challenges and the interrogation between I and the Other is an actualization of the ability to respond as well. The way and extent it is done is a subject of a different discussion.

The interpretation of morality is always challenging and therefore morality itself is always a challenging mode of human existence. What makes things even harder is that the challenge is not continuously the same and predictable; morality lays on the dynamic of the human unpredictable nature and the responsibility to the other as a permanent condition.

The concurrent narratives of morality can not depict the present sense of it as this sense becomes visible and depictable as it rests in the past. There, in the past, this sense can be interpreted via the living morality of the present as an up-to-date consciousness of one's existence between good and evil; from there, in the past, the sense can respond to the interrogation of it now. Crimes are judged a posteriori and not a priori or concurrently.

The virtue of human existence can not be achieved via direct moralizing of the human. As a natural aptitude, the opposition would inevitably lead to the negative value of it. For that reason too, the moralizing effect comes from the disasters of morality.

The fate of Narcissus, his impasse and perspectives are a disaster of morality in terms of responsibility understood as a pure ability to respond before it can even become a ground for morality - responsibility which crucially presupposes and premises any morality.

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20 Of course, for many God is still the “Other” whom they respond (or at least they posit him as such), but he is rather the I they respond to as he himself does not challenge the I and thus he does not manifest himself as an “Other”. The respond to God as to “I” reminds to the Narcissus scenario with the blindness of the responsibility, which, therefore is a pseudo-responsibility.

21 And who has not lost his ability to abuse as well!
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