

Literatúra

NOVOSÁD, F. (2014): *Čo? Ako? Prečo? Sociálna teória v otázkach a odpovediach*. Bratislava: Hronka.

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LADISLAV KOVÁČ:

Closing Human Evolution: Life in the Ultimate Age

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“No shepherd, and one herd! Everyone wants the same; everyone is the same; whoever feels different goes willingly into the madhouse.“

Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

The most recent *tour de force* of the preeminent Slovak scientist, a leading figure in cognitive biology, and public intellectual Ladislav Kováč, *Closing Human Evolution: Life in an Ultimate Age*, makes both a rewarding and thought-provoking read, not merely for those well versed in evolutionary biology, cognitive science or Prigoginean thermodynamics. Drawing from science scholarship and ramifying into so called cultural sciences, the text engages with such luminaries of the Western intellectual firmament as (the order is purely alphabetical) Richard Dawkins, Eric R. Kandel, Ray Kurzweil, Konrad Lorenz, James Lovelock, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Bertrand Russell, to name just a few.

Commendably escaping the notorious passion for chasing “causeless causes,” Kováč adroitly recounts the great evolutionary narrative of life on Earth – from cell to civilization – as positively a success story of our unique and puzzling species. “The “ultimate age” of the book’s title, however, seems rather to connote “the terminal” than “the apex” or “the twilight” than “consummation.” Kováč’s tightly argued inquiry foregrounds the crucial role of cognition as an active process of an evolutionary subject at all levels. Still, while awed by the selection wisdom of the bio-chemical evolution and the survival advantages conferred on humanity by the initial phase of its social-cultural stage, Kováč makes no bones about the fact that the ensuing stretch of the evolutionary road, wedded with

unstoppable “artifaction” may well prove to be a blind alley leading to a blissful Inferno. Making this unsettling point, Kováč qua natural scientist shows no qualms to cede a good portion of “scientific” austerity and here and there let philosophy speak with a view to exploiting its axiological and ethical potential. While peering into the black box of the brain, the author makes a case for the preeminence of his bio-cognitive pet, the cerebral cortex – the most recent evolutionary addition to the human anatomy. This convoluted blanket of ten billion neurons is the biological substrate of human “mind” and involves with human unique mental prowess – consciousness – to “escape from the geographical and chronological prison” (Russell 1995, 165) of the here and now and to construct imaginary worlds that are not there as well as read other minds. Science itself, to borrow from the Slovak social philosopher František Novosád, is a cogent example of such symbolic world-building and the power of abstraction: science “speaks of a reality identifiable nowhere else but within the realm of disciplined imagination” and “what much it does speak of reality happens to be only in a slight measure the praxis that is immediately accessible to us” (Novosád 2014, 103. Translation is mine). The neocortex’s place of pride in the human evolution is then fully justified, the author holds, as it is the site responsible, among other uniquely human traits, for the gift of language, self-consciousness and the self – “a center around which societies, technologies, art, and literature arise” and come into full bloom (Kováč 2015, 59).

Yet, philosophy is being implicitly invoked in his text for at least one more good reason, notably, to do its bit and find its niche within domains of human endeavor beyond the confines of its own discourse. Faulting “cultural sciences” for clinging to allegedly antiquated conceptions unable to accommodate the vertiginous changes wrought to human condition by the dehumanizing externalities of the avalanche of technique, Kováč reminds of another intellectual use that contemporary philosophy ought to have. At this hour of the Anthropocene, the author issues a warning, one cannot afford to entertain the belief in the “Logos” or basic rationality of the (increasingly virtual) world, hence philosophy ought to “inculcate the realization of the fallibility and of the uncertainty of many things” (Russell 1995, 167).

On the face of this, the author may be viewed as showing considerable affinity to the “French Heidegger” Alain Badiou whose nothing but trail-blazing analyses also display a good deal of cross-disciplinary syncretism, including hefty doses of mathematics and set theory. Badiou’s “contemporary thinking philosophy” relevant to our current Civilization Singularity (*impasse*), proceeds from the assumption of philosophy’s adequate “conditioning” (a philosophical operation that names and thinks truth procedures outside the realm of philosophy proper). Now the timeless relevance and immediate “utility” of a philosophy are contingent on its switching over between current truth procedures elsewhere and philosophy’s own conceptual concerns such as, for instance, truth or the subject.

In pursuit of thusly grasped “compossible” (co-operative and co-extant) various discourses (in Kováč’s case, those of philosophy and science), one inevitably ends up producing a stylistically “mongrel” opus, and Kováč’s essay is one of those: clearly a synthetic genre still frowned upon within Academia as impure. In this light, the composition

chosen by Kováč for his book and some of the stylistic tropes employed in the explication of its – at times arcane – notions merit a mention.

Not unlike many a “prophetic” book, Kováč’s minor volume is designed to broadcast a kind of liminal situation (human ascending evolution has deteriorated into “paravolution” of degeneration caused by excessive artifaction) and to signal an immanent radical rupture with the past evolutionary stages. The author decides to have the apocalyptic contents of his uncompromising scientific findings encased in the reassuring familiarity of a Trinitarian structure. The book is thus made up of three thematically autonomous (musical) “movements”, prefaced by a prelude and concluded by a finale. Each of the parts is assigned a distinct task to perform. An excursion to history offered in the *Prelude* ushers in the pivotal metaphor of the text – that of the “*Music for the Royal Fireworks*” (really commissioned to Georg F. Händel and actually performed to celebrate the end of the War of Austrian Succession). So then, by way of consolation, before breaking the news of the imminent end of humanity in the scientific argument to come, Kováč the humanist extends his invitation to “join in vibrant and brilliant exuberance of human feats that illuminate the twilight,” and contribute to the dazzling “fireworks” (Kováč, *Prelude*).

Now the ensuing *First Movement. Life as a Cosmic Imperative* makes recourse to lucid expository prose of scientific discourse. In this conceptual part, the tantalizing enigmas of entropy, subjectibility and ontotelic systems are, among so many others, addressed. A touch of drama that precedes the impending existential disaster of the extinction of the human species is added by slipping in Richard Feynman’s metaphorical idea of a ratchet – a wheel with asymmetrically skewed teeth that is designed only to spin in one direction, preventing thus a regress. Should be no problem were it not for the fact that since the advent of cultural (man-induced) evolution the wretched thing has been turning ever faster with no chance to turn it back. In tandem with the techno-scientific evolution, uncontrollable cultural cornucopia will be churning out ever more numerous and complex artifacts, including artificial intelligence which one day might not choose to obey... For visualization, a sketch of the wheel is attached (Kováč 2015, 26) – its primordial mechanical primitiveness in an abysmal contrast to the collapse of the human project – viewed by the author, fully deservedly, as the one of a matchless grandeur.

This laudatory claim is enthusiastically endorsed in the *Second Movement. Evolutionary Uniqueness of Humans*, where the joyous allegro of the triumphant biological and initial cultural evolution is trumpeted via the parataxis of “humanizing” attributes subtitles: a transcending dung-beetle, animal *artifaciens*, animal *symbolicum*, and hypersocial animal. The crescendo of emotional revolution, what with the Darwinian utility having been displaced by a hedonic one, gives way to the chilling premonitions of the upcoming digress. For good measure, a mercilessly laconic scientific inference stops all “music”: “... culture is not arbitrary: its edifice can only be erected on the firm foundations laid down by biology” (Kováč, 79).

As one reads through the *Third Movement: The Ultimate Optimism: Finitics*, there is little room left for genuine good cheer, irrespective of the claim to a modicum thereof in the heading. Against this rather inconsolable background, *Finale* that closes the “music

piece” brims with “the wisdom of human temporariness” and evocates pristine and bracing mountainous air extolled by Nietzsche’s Zarathustra. Kováč chooses to grace the end of his evolutionary account by a fine piece of Czeslav Miłosz’s poetry that celebrates the delights of unmediated Being, complete with “the blue sea and sales.” The deliberate “medley” of at first sight incongruous discourses serves the author good in his endeavor to reset the “re-evaluation of all values” in the times of soaring levels of artificially reinforced pleasure, tapping thus the dormant resources of inner creative “chaos” in humanity. Herein, Zarathustra might be recalled as addressing a crowd at the marketplace: “I tell you: one must still have chaos in oneself to give birth to a dancing star” (Nietzsche 2007, First part, 5).

It is allegedly good manners to squeeze a droplet of reasonable optimism out of any mess imaginable. But Kováč’s scientific essay leaves one under no illusion that, qua species, in a mess we are, paragon or no paragon of Creation. In this context, Novosád’s philosophical perspective of current human condition, though appreciative of the advantages of technological progress, reveals telling parallels with Kováč’s as he refers to the “escalation of possibilities for irrational drives taking sway” as they are wont to in breakthrough stages of human affairs when there is no way to identify the progenitors or culprits of the raging chaos of interregnūm, when everything gets out of hand, when “everybody just complies ..., when cause is indiscernible from effect, intended action from unintended one or random improvisations from well-weighed decisions” (Novosád 2014, 219). Still, both the philosopher and the scientist invoked herein maintain that the overflowing energies and compelling tensions of such breakthrough periods are auspicious for the ripping “fireworks” in philosophy, science, and art – as “the social energy sublimes into the realms of symbolic systems.” These are times “when the awareness of unsustainability of the status quo and of inevitability of radical reforms in the way of life gets the upper hand” (Novosád 2014, 225).

Back to black: after travelling such a triumphant, if arduous, evolutionary journey and currently well on the way to metamorphosing into Nietzsche’s proverbial “last man”, the human of today, forgetful of the pride in being a Subject, debases herself to the state of an self-indulgent “individual animal” content with the status quo in as much as the latter secures the steady run of her hedonistic treadmill. Even the anxiety of the finitude of death, of which humans alone are fully conscious, pales against the prospect envisaged by the author – and Nietzsche’s Zarathustra: “Behold! I show you *the last man*. What is love? What is creation? What is longing? What is a star? – asks the last man and he blinks... The earth has become small, and on it hops the last man who makes everything small (Nietzsche 2007, 5). Though firmly imbedded in scientific rigor, Kováč makes the reader set her sights on the stars, on creativity contributory to the “fireworks” of the ultimate evolutionary level. This, however, needs overcoming the impasse of the civilization excesses and becoming an “over-man.” This is exactly where a niche for philosophy is being carved: “A novel role of humanists – scientists turned intellectuals – is to analyze the consequences of the astounding dynamics and, by attaching values to the accumulated pieces of knowledge, make the ultimate stage sublime and passable.”

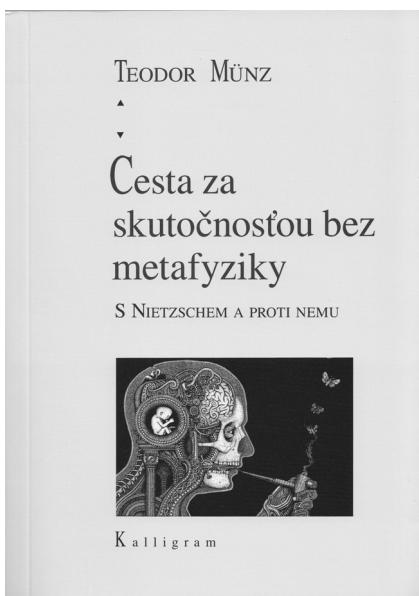
An astute scientist and subtle storyteller, Kováč has penned a book which though peppered with a number of biologically substantiated compliments to our species' evolutionary achievements, his inquiry is in a great measure a list of disquieting home truths. But then again, with Badiou, "a truth is always that which makes a hole in a knowledge" (Badiou 2007, Meditation 31).

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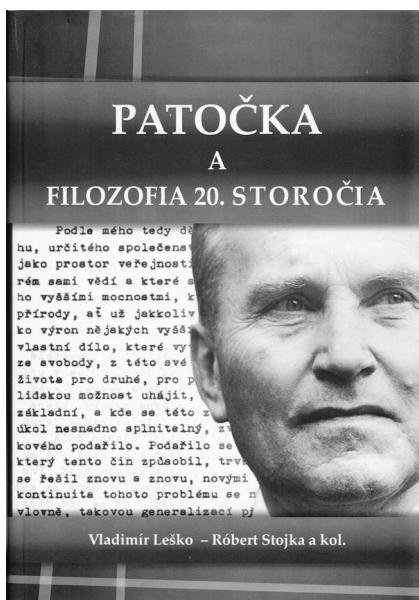
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Teodor Münz: *Cesta za skutočnosťou bez metafyziky. S Nietzschem a proti nemu.* Bratislava: Kalligram 2015, 161 s.

Autor sa zaoberá témom, ktorá už nie je vo filozofii prvoradou záležitosťou: pokúša sa dokázať predovšetkým poznateľnosť vonkajšej, tzv. nezávislej skutočnosti. Jeho hlavným argumentom je biologický fakt, ktorý navrhuje reflektovať z filozofického hľadiska, pričom kladie otázky: Ak vonkajšiu skutočnosť, prírodu aspoň sprostredkovane nepoznávame, na základe čoho teda žijeme? Ako je možné, že sme tu už milióny rokov, vedecky i technicky sa vyvíjame a ovládame prírodu čoraz lepšie? Autor si za svojho oponenta zvolil Friedricha Nietzscheho, ktorý možnosť poznávania nezávislej skutočnosti neuznával a noetiku ako teóriu poznania zrušil. Celou knihou čitateľa sprevádzajú argumenty a protiargumenty, čím sa mnohostranná problematika udržujú stále v popredí a ukazuje sa jej dôležitosť. Ako je to však v poznaní, a najmä vo filozofii bežné, autor dospevia k záveru, že ani v prípade tohto starého problému definitívne riešenie nájsť nemožno.



Vladimír Leško – Róbert Stojka a kol.: *Patočka a filozofia 20. storočia.* Košice: Vydavateľstvo UPJŠ 2015, 698 s.

Kolektívna monografia *Patočka a filozofia 20. storočia* je zavŕšením bádateľského záujmu Katedry filozofie a dejín filozofie v spolupráci s viacerými slovenskými historikmi filozofie (J. Sivák, E. Lalfková), ako aj so zahraničnými špecialistami na teoretické dedičstvo najväčšieho českého filozofa 20. storočia. Z českej strany sú to M. Sobotka, I. Blecha, J. Zouhar, V. Schifferová a J. Frei. Z polských historikov filozofie prispeli svojimi štúdiami do monografie Cz. Glombík a D. Beben. Nemeckých a rakúskych historikov filozofie reprezentujú H. Blaschek Hahn a L. Hagedorn. Práca sa člení do piatich základných častí. V prvej sa skúma Patočkov vzťah k nemeckej filozofii s dôrazom na Husserlov a Heideggerov filozofický vplyv. V druhej časti je predmetom skúmania Patočkova recepcia francúzskej filozofie. Tretia časť kolektívnej monografie je venovaná Patočkovmu miestu v českej a slovenskej filozofii 20. storočia. Vzťah Patočku k polskej filozofii je analyzovaný v štvrtej časti. Záverečná piata časť obsahuje skúmanie niektorých aktuálnych problémov filozofie 20. storočia v Patockej tvorbe – otázky slobody, existencie a filozofie výchovy či 20. storočia ako storočia vojen.