
HUMAN AFFAIRS

Published by

Historical Institute
Institute of Oriental and African Studies
Department of Social and Biological Communication
Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava

SAP – Slovak Academic Press, Ltd.
Bratislava, Slovakia

ARTICLES

MAN IN-BETWEEN ANXIETY AND HOPE

MARIÁN PALENCÁR

Department of Philosophical Sciences, Faculty of Humanities, University of M. Bel,
Tajovského 40, 974 01 Banská Bystrica, Slovakia

The author contemplates the need of hope in human life with respect to its temporal character. After differentiation between fear and anxiety, hope is characterized as a feeling connected with an expectation of the desired future.

Hope - as a basic existential parameter of the human being - binds with any partiality.

This paper develops the motives of existentialist philosophy and the impulses of the theology of hope.

Undoubtedly we live in an exceptional era. We have been witnessing radical transformation of our society for the past five years. The break-down of the order of our lives was two-fold (political and national) and we are struggling to establish a new one. It is a historical process but, at the same time, and probably just for that reason, both controversial and painful. The enthusiasm of the majority faded away, disappointment and apathy expanded. A. Michnik named such a situation in Poland as "a crisis of hope". Uncertainty becomes an unpleasant accompanying feature of the often uncontrollable "double somersault". People feel jeopardized by the decline in the standard of living, unemployment, crime and disorder, intolerance, etc. However, the primary concern is the uncertain future and loss of life perspectives. We live in the period of fear, apprehension and anxiety (this statement has also been supported empirically [1]).

Anxiety and fear are phenomena that are significant not only for current life in our country or in other post- communist countries, i.e. where social cataclysms occur. Medical epidemiological studies show that about one third of the population of Western civilization suffers from a more severe anxiety [2]. What do these phenomena mean - whether as epiphenomena of industrial society or as phenomena typical of our society? What are the sources of so much anxiety and what is the role of hope in this connection?

At least from the time of Kierkegaard, differentiation has been made between fear as an apprehension of something clearly identified, a known threat (usually associated with the present object) and anxiety as an apprehension of something uncertain, unknown and impending (see e.g. [3]). I'm scared my child will hurt itself

with a knife but it is rather anxiety about its future fate - what (ills) the child will have to face in future life. Fear is also a feeling dominated by apprehension about partial danger (the child cuts itself and it hurts), anxiety or rather the apprehension of potential total threat (tragic death of the child will or it will destroy itself morally). There are many connections between the two (e.g. of the kind existing between hurting itself with a knife and the tragic death). The concept of anxiety is, however, primarily reserved for situations where a human can lose himself or herself as a whole - when his or her physical life is in danger but also when he or she is for e.g. ashamed, feels cursed, etc. Already Hegel has shown this ([4], 159-161).

Fear is unambiguously a self-preserving deliberate emotion, leading humans either towards avoiding explicitly empirically defined danger, or mobilizing their strengths to master or remove it. This is why we will not use any sharp object at all or we will learn to use it with skill. However, how can we avoid the unknown (i.e. the "object" of anxiety) and/or master it?

Human life is in principle of passing character [5], [6]. Time enters constitutively the ontological structure of human beings with three dimensions. Humans exist in the possibility of transcendence of what is here and now directed towards the past (memory) and primarily towards the future (expectation) reciprocally influencing the living of the presence. Within this temporal character, it is the fundamental openness to the future that is the determining factor. Anxiety is a feeling of unjustified apprehension implying the opening up of humans who are aware of their end and limitations with respect to the future (and through it with respect to "possible" being) which indicates that this being is completely undetermined, empty, it is nothing. An anxious person is frightened but does not know the object which he or she is afraid of. Kierkegaard speaks therefore about the "experience of nothing", and about relation to nothing ([7], 227), while Heidegger says that "shows nothing" and goes on, saying that for humans "Dasein" ("being here") means to keep in fallenness into that nothingness" ([8], 96, 97). Anxiety is thus something more than just a random emotion. It is a constant, basic "tuning in" of a human being, it is of an existential character. If existence is a constant desire for unifying the temporal with the eternal ([9], 233, 234, etc.), then anxiety is a necessary prerequisite and manifestation. It cannot be removed from life. Through it anxiety and human freedom is declared as the core of existence and as the undetermined "possibility of possibilities" ([7], 226). Each such examination by nothing through freedom and anxiety is of ambivalent character. The unknown is alluring, enticing but at the same time it is repulsive and threatening. It attracts and evokes our curiosity since it promises to uncover possibilities not yet realized, and also the possibility of our self-confirmation and self-realization. This is the only way towards experiencing the new - meeting it e.g. in creation. However, among these possibilities there can at the same time be, and finally there also will be, undesirable ones, threatening (especially physical death) human beings. Adequately to an uncertain character of

nothingness, the existential anxiety for humans is both an enticing challenge to participate in a dialogue with something outside him or her and also painful doubt and warning whether he or she will stand as being in this dialogue and will not be destroyed physically, spiritually, and morally (see e.g. [10], 95).

The functioning and adaptiveness of existential anxiety as a necessary sign of free human life is manifested by the orientation of humans towards the search for hidden danger and making it concrete. Anxiety is transformed to fears, these becoming countable through inclusion into a sort of order - humans will avoid their empirical sources or will gradually master them. Its role in the life of the individual and humankind is thus that of dynamizing, since it motivates humans to produce various forms of self-security, i.e. reduction of the unknown (chaos and nothingness) to the order. The open and well developing society is hardly imaginable without anxiety.

The rationalization of anxiety mentioned, presumes "courage to be" [10] - direct contact with nothingness being expected. Not everybody is able to take on the burden of responsibility for one's freedom. Anxiety then becomes pathological - see [11], [15], [10], followed by an "escape from freedom", as E. Fromm said - escape from that "fallenness into nothingness" as a whole and thus also from its second constructive pole. Openness is cancelled, closeness occurs with all consequences.

Maybe this is just the background of current neuroses, a way "how to avoid nothingness by avoiding being" [10]. Many other phenomena of social pathology probably hides an unsound attitude to anxiety (aggressiveness as a source of certain types of crime, drug-use, suicides, etc.). A special way of "escape from freedom" is the inclination to ideology, totalitarianism, often associated with nationalism in its extreme form. Don't we often meet its renaissance in all post-communist countries where masses are left to the tender mercy of freedom looking for "quick and cheap" identification - with the leader, idea, etc.? The mentioned psychosocial pathologization of anxiety is due to the typical causes of the era of industrialism, and also the conditions of former socialist societies add some specific features. The spirit of nothingness and chaos is more evident than in other situations, when we experience a harsh historical break, where the destruction of previous securities takes place, and the old order does not exist any more and the new one has not yet been installed. At the same time we experience a "shock of freedom" as if we have come out of the cage, where the conditions of high safety and the non-existence of accountability for decision-making existed, and now are responsible for. Not being trained in freedom, we are driven to low tolerance of anxiety. Also this is the reason for nostalgia for things of the past.

Existential anxiety is not identical with freedom. It is an indispensable insufficient condition. Its ambivalence indicates but does not breed a positive dimension of our openness to the future. Freedom would not be complete without hope as its second component; it would turn against itself.

At first glance, the word "hope" may seem to be intimately known and its meaning generally understandable. Living everyday life, we all know or rather sense what is going on and that it is something important for the life of humans. Deeper insight shows that this primary intuitive awareness comprises of ambivalence, particularly in relation to the content and assessment of an assignment being fulfilled by hope in the life of humans. Analogously, experience of generations crystallized in folk wisdom (proverbs) considers it as something positive, stating that "humans hope till death", "hope dies last" or there is a challenge for humans "do not lose hope, when wrong is done to you"; on the other hand, it is something negative when warning: Hope will lead to the top and then shove down", "hope - a great liar" or "after the hope people pass away". It is probably not the ambivalence shown that was the cause of resignation to the issue of hope, prevailing in institutionalized activities (science, philosophy, education, etc.) of our society in the last decades. Ideologically motivated silence on hope was reflected in the absence of corresponding terms, concepts, entries in encyclopaedias and dictionaries, conceptual equipment in psychological and pedagogical disciplines and philosophical forms of human self-awareness. A sort of exception was religious and theological literature (of course not many and not easily available), where the hope was traditionally regarded within the context of faith and love as one of the divine (supernatural) virtues. This also gave rise to false impressions that this theme had just sacral but not profane dimensions. Among philosophers and psychologists it was substituted insufficiently (being itself ruled out) by a related issue of the sense of life. It was not until after November 1989 that the political and ideological relaxation created suitable conditions for the conceptualization of life through the prism of hope. At the same time, the requirements of the processes mentioned above for this conceptualization are more and more pressing than before. For several reasons it is topical to overcome ideological isolationism and critically follow the stream of analyses springing somewhere in Jewish-Christian spiritual tradition philosophically revived in this century by G. Marcel [12]. In the fifties it was the atheistic Marxist E. Bloch who sensed the need of re-thematization of this issue and inspired thus even the whole movement of the so-called theology of hope. It is probably not by accident that its creator J. Moltmann assumes that after the medieval theology of love, and Luther's theology of belief, it is time to build the theology of hope which could bridge the gap between secular and sacral hopes [13], [14].

The first approximation of hope can be understood as an emotion connected with the expectation of a desired future (of some good). We concentrate thus on hope as on the status of a subject - we say "I hope" in contrast to the second chief meaning of the same word which means an object (person, thing) of whom we are expecting something - we also say "you are my hope". Setting goals, planning, and the expectation that the goals will be achieved are connected with the first understanding. It is just this ability that is considered to be a sign of the individual's vitality and a measure of his or her "psychological age". Old age emerges where hu-

mans do not make any plans for the future any more and do not expect anything new in life. If a person loses all hopes, he or she becomes psychologically dead before his or her physical death. Hopelessness appears in these cases as grief and depression - the main factors of suicidal actions. Self-projection and self-transcendence of humans to the future thus appears to be a prerequisite of human life - its meaningfulness and quality.

If we have already said that hope is primarily an emotion associated with the expectation of the future desired, it should be added that expectation is not mere passiveness but it is usually connected with patient struggles mobilizing humans in the direction of this future. This is chiefly valid for the so-called right hope. H. Plugge ([15], 238 n.) differentiates between the so-called everyday hopes related to particular objects (objectives) and the right hope which is without any ties to anything particular, but to being as a whole. Such hope may be regarded as the basic parameter of the human being. We cannot say that "we have this hope" but we can say, together with G. Marcel that "we are the hope" ([12], 87). (This is the place to mention the analogous differentiation between fear and anxiety.) Taking risk and disappointment are inseparable parts of everyday hopes, followed by hopelessness, depression, despair. This is just why hope can be called the "great liar" in folk tradition. And it is probably also one of its biblical denotations as "foolishness" or as "madness of the reason" in the ancient Greek myth of Pandora's box. Therefore if we want to avoid the loss of hope and to maintain psychical balance, the best thing is not to have any hope, as the Stoics say. "Nobody should expect too much from the future" since it is not within our power ([16], 228). And to live just in hope implies not to know the real life - just the one, for whom "the presence is nothing...depends on the future" ([16], 229). This criticism is, however, directed against any positive conception of hope but also against anxiety, since it rejects ontology which is expected by them. The uncertainty of the time and events may be the underlying and the only phenomenal moment of being. According to the classical Greek approach this argument would, however, mean "contradictio in adjecto" - being is always present and certain as well as knowledge bound to it. For similar reasons these "affections of the soul" as "not good" and codifying uncertainty were also strictly rejected by B. Spinoza ([17], 308 etc.) Camus' "absurd man" [18], i.e. a human for whom there is no tomorrow and does not hope, is a reaction to a human in hope, who is, according to Camus, weak to resist absurdity relying on help to come from the outside. If suicide is a mistake with respect to absurdity, then humans with hope do not create any alternative to suicide since in their case it is a "philosophical suicide" - they give up themselves. But is it really so?

The right hope is not, similarly to anxiety, bound to any particular object but to being as a whole. In contrast to anxiety this being is not put forward as nothing and emptiness but as fullness - although non-concrete, yet trustworthy. If anxiety is a challenge to start a dialogue since it senses something outside us, but simultaneously also a hesitation halfway because of the apprehension of destruction by the

other, then the hope is a transcendence to the other, something, we open ourselves to on the basis of trust. Of course, not only to the other, we are opening ourselves to - it is not "mere reliance on its good". By opening themselves, humans also express trust in themselves showing that he or she is capable of growth to such an extent and that meeting the other will not decompose him or her but it will help his or her self-renewal through such a meeting. He or she does not withdraw from him or herself since his or her "self" is not determined for ever but assumes its completion through communication with the other (man, world, God). Paradoxically enough G. Marcel said that nothing can happen to me with hope [12]. Camus' truth stands and falls with the idea of an *a priori* ready and an isolated individual. But is not our underlying position in the world limited by other coordinates? I think of the resignation of a woman expecting a baby with two synonyms, and in the Slovak language it is symbolic in this sense: she is "in hope" or "samodruhá" - pregnant in the sense of "being both self and other". Does not this refer to its participation in something more sovereign than she would be, in her isolation, she herself as well as this co-production? And this should probably be a sense of any hope (including sacral) - overcoming of partiality and the expression of belonging to the whole of being through transcendence.

RERERENCES

- [1] *Majú občania SR pocit istoty do budúcnosti? Prieskum SŠÚ - VVM*. In: *Národná obroda*, IV, No. 76, 1. IV. 1993.
- [2] WEISMANN, M.M.: *The Epidemiology of Anxiety Disorders*. In: TUMA, A.H., MASER, J.B.: *Anxiety and the Anxiety Disorders*. Ed. Hillsdale, N.J., Lawrence, Erlbaum 1985.
- [3] DRVOTA, S.: *Úzkost a strach*. Praha, Avicenum 1971.
- [4] HEGEL, G.W.F.: *Fenomenologie ducha*. Praha, Academia 1960.
- [5] AUGUSTINUS, A.: *Vyznání*. Praha, Kalich 1976.
- [6] HEIDEGGER, M.: *Výbor z díla Sein und Zeit*. In: *Antologie existencialismu*. Praha, VŠP 1967.
- [7] KIERKEGAARD, S.: *Pojęcie strachu*. In: TOEPLITZ, K.: *Kierkegaard*. Warszawa, Wiedza Powszechna 1980.
- [8] HEIDEGGER, M.: *Co je metafyzika?* In: *Prostor*, III, No. 12, 1990.
- [9] KIERKEGAARD, S.: *Krytyka Heglizmu*. In: TOEPLITZ, K.: *Ibid.*
- [10] TILICH, P.: *O existenciální úzkosti a odvaze k životu*. In: *Prostor*, V, No. 17, 1991.
- [11] BOUTONIER, J.: *Contribution à la psychologie et à la métaphysique de l'angoisse*. Paris, Presse Universitaires de France 1945.
- [12] MARCEL, G.: *K filosofii naděje*. Praha, Vyšehrad 1971.
- [13] BLAIN, L.: *Dwie filozofie skoncentrowane na zagadnieniu nadziei: G. Marcel i E. Bloch*. In: *Concilium*, 6-10, 1970.
- [14] Ks. RUSECKI, M.: *Teologia nadziei według Jürgena Moltmanna*. In: *Nadzieja w postawie ludzkiej*. Lublin, Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL 1992.
- [15] PLUGGE, H.: *O naději*. In: *Bolest a naděje*. Praha, Vyšehrad 1992.
- [16] SENECA: *Další listy Luciliovi*. Praha, Svoboda 1984.
- [17] SPINOZA, B.: *Etika*. Praha, Svoboda 1977.
- [18] CAMUS, A.: *Mýtus o Sisyfovi. Pád. Caligula*. Bratislava, Slovenský spisovateľ 1993.