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THE INNER CONFLICT OF MODERNITY, THE MODERATENESS OF CONFUCIANISM AND CRITICAL THEORY[1]

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Abstract: This paper deals with Care of the Self under globalization. The first part refers to Johann P. Arnason's interpretation of Jan Patočka's work on super-civilization and shows the contradictions facing people in the Modern Era. It suggests that the concept of moderateness is an adequate point of departure for handling the various contradictions of the current epoch. The second part looks at selected aspects of Confucian philosophy in which moderateness, that is, the permanent search for a "middle position" is an integral part of that philosophical tradition. The critical actualisation of Confucianism as proposed for instance by Heiner Roetz is seen as an appropriate way of developing the dialogical characteristics of Confucian philosophy. In the last part it is stressed that critical theory is of relevance when identifying various forms of suffering and because of its ability to understand and critically evaluate diverse cultural and social contexts.

Key words: care of the self; contradiction; moderateness; reasonableness; Confucianism; critical theory.

Introduction

There are a variety of theoretical approaches that yield different interpretations of the many phenomena related to globalization. This does not mean, however, that the philosophers and scholars currently working on such issues will necessarily end up with mutually incompatible results. The main reason for adopting critical theory as an appropriate theoretical framework for theorizing globalization is that historical experience confirms the view that solutions to social problems are rarely solved through prescriptions derived from reflecting upon ideal circumstances; instead they are the result of having learnt from catastrophes (Habermas, 2001, pp. 38-58) such as past problems, disasters, unfortunate developments, crises, and so forth. The role of critical social theory, which takes this historical experience as its point of departure—as emphasized for instance by Marek Hrubec, is to help find a solution by critiquing undesirable developments and by articulating the

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historical struggle for recognition, as this might help avoid problematic future scenarios insofar as is possible (Hrubec, 2010, pp. 87-88).

In fact, there are various interpretations of critical theory[2] which do not undermine the one presented above, but emphasize other aspects or perspectives.[3] For my present purposes Axel Honneth's reconstruction of the legacy of Critical Theory, interpreted as the search for "pathologies of reason", is of particular importance (Honneth, 2009). According to Honneth, a defining feature of Critical Theory is its commitment to a Hegelian conception of collective self-actualization secured through mutual participation in rationally structured practices and institutions, whose value may, if necessary, be defended and preserved against individual interests. The emancipatory character of cooperative practices, in turn, is not to be understood as resulting from shared affective bonds or feelings of affiliation or approval, but from occupying a shared rational perspective, that is, a non-coerced agreement on the social preconditions of human self-actualization. Therein lies what Honneth refers to as the ethical perfectionist core of Critical Theory, which distinguishes it from both liberalism and communitarianism (Honneth, 2009, pp. 27-28). From this perspective, obstacles to collective self-realization can be correspondingly characterized in terms of 'social pathologies' or 'pathologies of reason'.

As an attempt to connect my own research[4] and my work on critical theory as part of a research project on *Care of the self: Ancient problematizations of life and contemporary thought*[5], this paper relates to Vladislav Suvák's analysis of 'Socratic therapy' as care of the self and for others. According to Suvák, the goal of Socratic upbringing and education is to give direction to one's life and make it good and beautiful. *Phronesis* or 'practical wisdom' is key to achieving 'excellence'[6]. He reconstructs Antisthenes' understanding of *phronesis* in order to emphasize the difference between Antisthenes and Plato. Antisthenes associates practical wisdom with endurance, self-control, and asceticism because they will lead to 'excellent' decisions. According to Antisthenes—following Socrates—we can only differentiate between what is and what is not beneficial to our life using 'practical wisdom'. The therapeutic task of this 'practical wisdom' is to eliminate delusions and false assumptions about the meaning of a 'good life'—by caring for the self, which means

[2] Although the term "critical theory" can be used to refer either to aesthetic theories that deal specifically with literature or the theory of society, I do not think it necessary to distinguish specifically between them when considering care of the self. Hence, while I am strongly indebted to the work of some important figures in the second and third generations of the Frankfurt School of Critical (Social) Theory (e.g. Jürgen Habermas, Johann P. Arnason, Axel Honneth and Hans-Herbert Kögler), their work does not place as much emphasis upon aesthetics as the first generation theorists. Here I am operating from a broader understanding of critical theory, one that embraces both dimensions.

[3] For instance, Christopher F. Zurn provides the following summary on the definition: "critical social theory is interdisciplinary social theory with an emancipatory intent: it aims to describe and explain current social reality, with particular attention to the actual conflicts and aspirations of contemporary social actors aiming at human emancipation in such a way that theory can help to both morally evaluate contemporary conflicts and contribute to progressive social change Zurn (2015, p. 5).

[4] This article should be understood as unveiling my new research project.

[5] The project is being implemented at the Institute of Philosophy, University of Prešov, http://ff.unipo.sk/sos/en/

[6] This is Suvák's preferred translation of the Greek word *arete*, more commonly translated as 'virtue.'

working unceasingly on oneself—with the help of Socrates, or a philosopher-teacher (Suvák, 2016, pp. 56-57[7]).

A constitutive part of 'practical wisdom' is to properly understand rationality, in this case reasonableness (or *rozumnosť* in Slovak—Suvák's preferred translation of *phronesis*). The goals of this paper are to identify the key 'excellence' or 'virtue' of reasonable thinking and behaviour under globalization—or to obtain a *moderate* understanding of rationality—and to outline possible ways of cultivating it.

In this context, I consider whether initiating a transcultural dialogue with Confucian philosophy is an appropriate way of adequately responding to some of the deficits in Ancient Greek conceptions of the care of the self. This will also enable us to draw attention to a philosophical theme that is profoundly developed in the Chinese philosophical tradition, and thereby help overcome the Eurocentric bias that persists in most philosophy departments in Western countries.

Need for moderateness

I begin with a description of a painting[8] that featured in the *Care of the Self in the Global Era* workshop.[9] It portrayed the two halves of a human being barely capable of caring for herself. It represented a female figure experiencing mental difficulties by showing one half of her as transparent and clear, while the other was cloudy and indistinct. The aim was to illustrate her inner "world" and its many desires, dreams, memories, unfulfilled life-plans, and so forth. Some of Gustav Klimt's motifs were used to portray a serious theme: a human being struggling to cope with her social role and position in her community, which is associated with specific "recognition patterns", that is, the norms, duties, obligations, and expectations of society within a particular culture. They pressurize or even coerce her into neglecting or abandoning her own authentic and autonomous expression and instrumentalizing her behaviour towards conformism and opportunism.

On the left of the painting (as you look at it) there is a realistic image of the person. This portrays a woman shackled by social conventions who has been married for many years. She has conformed so strictly to her social roles (daughter, wife, mother, employee, etc.) that she has lost herself. The "shackles" are symbolically illustrated by many burdensome chains. They prevent her from escaping her position or even from "com[ing] up to gasp for air" (George Orwell). The chains are depicted by thin lines, as on their own they seem to be manageable. However, the sheer number, different kinds, and combinations of them render this impossible. The woman's face is an "ailing" white—as if bloodless, without a pulse, and therefore lacking vitality.

The connection between the two halves of the painting is represented by the woman's eyes, which close just as she looks downwards to return to "her world", the world of her youth (and dreams) which is full of motion, colours, possibilities, and desires. This world—

[7] I am referring here to the Slovak version of Vladislav Suvák's article. The English version is forthcoming. Cf. Suvák (2017).

[8] The painting is by my wife, Júlia Dunajová.

[9] The workshop took place at the University of Prešov on June 26-27, 2017.

her inner world—is full of walks through flowering meadows, fragrances, natural sensuality, and uncertainty. However, since her youth was a long time ago, the memories are misty, unclear, and intangible. Moreover, her real world is also penetrating into her inner world. It

is highlighted in grey or dark green, softened, but still there; the two overlap and produce an intrusive reflection of the dominant blackness which characterizes her real life.

This situation is irresolvable. What remains is a contradiction: a contradiction that is typically experienced by a modern person, still bound or at least connected to the concrete "social reality" she originates from, and which determines who she is as well as the frameworks in which she can actualize herself. But there is a modern promise of unrestrained freedom, of fulfilling the desire to realize one's life with no limitations, obstacles, and responsibilities (social, etc.), and that offers the possibility of escaping a social task. However, this vision is pressed up against certain boundaries. Not just from the perspective of society or a particular community, but in terms of her own realization that expectations such as having a family, a child, a successful career, or a dignified life, prevent us from experiencing life's fluidity, uncertainty, and lack of plans, irresponsibility, and so on. There is, therefore, an insurmountable contradiction between the two paths and in the decision about which to choose. The many phenomena connected to the impacts of globalization have rendered this situation even more complicated.[10] Moreover, there is still a danger that the uncertainty presented by "many paths" will destroy our ability to make good decisions. It is here that "recognition patterns" acquire a positive role, since they provide a source of guidance on life. The seemingly banal and traditional conclusion that we should find a reasonable middle way—between the two extremes of absolute individualization[11] and uncertainty or rigid conventionality and the devastating consequences—seems to point to successful care for the self in the modern era being the solution. However, this conclusion requires a new vocabulary in which the term *moderateness* plays a key role in regard to the demands of rationality. Hence, it is worth turning to the notion of moderateness mentioned in the introduction which is an important part of 'practical wisdom'.

My attention was drawn to the concept of moderateness when reading Johann P. Arnason's commentary on Jan Patočka. Johann P. Arnason—in his magnum opus *Civilizations in Dispute: Historical Questions and Theoretical Tradition* (2003)—rediscovers one of Patočka's almost forgotten essays from the 1950s titled, 'Super-civilization[12] and its inner conflict' (Patočka, 1996). In it, Patočka deals with Toynbee's *Study of History*, and according to Arnason, it is remarkably topical despite being a peripheral and virtually unknown text (Arnason, 2003, p. 132) since it reveals the various metamorphoses of radicalism in the modern age (Arnason, 2010, pp. 43-49).

There is not the space here to touch upon all aspects of Patočka's multifaceted essay. Nevertheless, we shall look at some of its key ideas, following Arnason's more detailed interpretation, which attracted wide attention especially in Czechia.[13] According to Arnason, Patočka's originality consists in his having been the first to see modernity as a civilizational paradox, that modernity is both more than and less than traditional civilization. This means that modern civilization, characterized as "a rational super-civilization", wants, on the one hand, to make the "exodus from civilization" that it is no longer "a civilization among

[10] See for instance (Bauman, 2007).
[11] Regarding the paradox of individualization see Honneth (2004).
[12] In Patočka's vocabulary, the term 'supercivilization' means modernity.
[13] Cf. for instance Arnason, Benyovszky, and Skovajsa (2010) and Homolka (2016).

others", that is, one that transcends the particularism of older civilizations by rationalizing all areas of social life (Arnason, 2003, p. 135). Therefore, the most explicit definition of super-civilizational radicalism emphasizes the radical attempt and aspiration to make rationality the key to answering every question in life. On the other hand, while super-civilization attempts to offer the same world-constitutive capacity as older civilizations—through the rational exercise and organization of power—it is ultimately incapable of doing so. According to Patočka, a *moderate* super-civilization is capable of successfully coping with this paradox by relinquishing claims of absolute superiority to and autonomy from previous civilizations and acknowledging its partial dependence upon them. In other words, such moderation consists in relativizing the domain of validity/authority in reason in order to make room for other sources of meaning, which is tantamount to accepting that the hybrid character of modern civilization relies upon both modern and pre-modern elements:

> Those who accept the finite and incomplete character of every rationalizing move are by the same token amenable to compromises or dialogues with premodern traditions, and capable of efforts to maintain or reconstruct these surviving sources of meaning. […] A civilization unrivalled on its own ground thus acknowledges a residual but persistent dependence on the legacies of less powerful predecessors. Patočka uses the term 'moderate super-civilization' to describe a culture where this attitude prevails (Arnason, 2003, p. 135).

However, for Patočka there exists a radical variant of super-civilization which strives to overcome the paradox of super-civilization—the inability to provide the aforementioned world-constitutive capacity and, therefore, give an ultimate answer to the question of the meaning of life—by means of a total rational restructuring of social life. In other words, super-civilization simply replaces traditional religion with the modern secular cult of reason; absolute authority in all spheres of life is thus transferred from a supernatural deity to human reason. Such a move, however, in no way overcomes the dogmatic self-enclosed character of older civilizations, but merely reproduces it in a different form (Patočka, 1996, p. 255). The result is ultimately self-defeating in that super-civilization is unable to fulfil its aim of distinguishing itself as superior to all pervious civilizations, but merely reinforces its status as one among others, as Arnason rightly notes:

> For Patočka, however, the problematic of radical rationalism is obviously best exemplified by the theory and practice of Communism.[14] Here the paradox of an unconditionally self-affirming and for that very reason unintentionally self-limiting super-civilization becomes fully visible: the doctrine that claims to represent a complete scientific world-view develops into a secular religion which resembles the belief systems of traditional civilizations in its dogmatic

[14] According to Arnason, "Communism does indeed belong to the history of super-civilizational radicalism and, Patočka's whole concept doubtlessly originated primarily as an attempt to understand and classify communist phenomena; nevertheless, a radical super-civilization is not just identical to communism, and it does not follow from Patočka's argument that communism necessarily represents its definitive or last possible form. Rather, at the beginning of the 21st century, the hypothesis was posited that an ideological amalgam of market fundamentalism (combining many resources which need not belong solely to the category of radicalism per se) was established as a new form of super-civilizational radicalism. It is a continuation – albeit in a very selective way – of the heritage of classical utilitarianism [Orig. in Czech, translation – Ľ.D.]" (Arnason, 2010, p. 44).

> closure and resistance to questioning. Its role in the accumulation of power thus follows the same pattern and suffers from the same limitations as the earlier forms of charismatic mobilization. The very attempt to complete modernity's triumph over all other civilizations (and over civilizational difference as such) results in a particularistic regression which brings super-civilization closer to the condition of one civilization among others (Arnason, 2003, pp. 135-136).

I claim that such a narrow understanding of rationality not only destroys the ability of agents to adequately care for themselves, but may have also dangerous consequences for society—which was already clear to Patočka.

In order to explain Patočka's idea of moderateness it is worth turning to Milan Kundera's most philosophical novel[15], *Immortality* (1992), particularly the third part titled, 'To be absolutely modern' (Kundera, 1992, pp. 155-159). In it Kundera describes the dangers of a narrow understanding of "what it means to be modern". This reductive view of modernity tends to be mere "fashion" or "mode", and therefore, since *"phronesis"* (reasonableness) remains underdeveloped, it is impossible to adequately care for the self.

In the aforementioned chapter, Kundera describes two people—Jaromil and Paul—living in different times and places but connected by their passionate conviction that 'it is necessary to be absolutely modern'. We can better understand what Patočka had in mind by linking part of the Marxist movement with radical rationalization, and in this context it is worth quoting the parts which describe the radicalism of Jaromil and Paul.

The radicalization of Jaromil in Prague:

> We are in Prague, the year is 1948, and eighteen-year-old Jaromil is madly in love with modern poetry, with Breton, Eluard, Desnos, Nezval, and following their example becomes a votary of Rimbaud's dictum from *A Season in Hell*: 'It is necessary to be absolutely modern.' However, what turned out to be absolutely modern in the Prague of 1948 was the socialist revolution, which promptly and brutally rejected the modern art Jaromil loved madly. And then my hero, along with some of his friends (just as madly in love with modern art) sarcastically renounced everything he loved (truly loved, with all his heart), because he did not wish to betray the great commandment 'to be absolutely modern'. His renunciation was full of the rage and passion of a virginal youth who longs to break into adulthood through some brutal act. Seeing him stubbornly renouncing everything dearest to him, everything he had lived for and would have loved to go on living for, seeing him renouncing Cubism and Surrealism, Picasso and Dali, Breton and Rimbaud, renouncing them in the name of Lenin and the Red Army (who at that moment formed the pinnacle of any imaginable modernity), his friends were dismayed; at first they felt amazement, then revulsion and finally something close to horror. The sight of his virginal youth ready to adapt to whatever proclaimed itself as modern, and to adapt not through cowardice (for the sake of personal gain or career), but courageously, as one painfully sacrificing what he loved, yes this sight revealed a horror (a portent of the horror to come, the horror of persecution and imprisonment). It is possible that some of those watching him at the time thought to themselves: 'Jaromil is the ally of his gravediggers' (Kundera, 1992, pp. 155-156).

[15] Cf. Ricard (2004).

Similarly, Paul's first radicalization in Paris:

> Paul knew as well as Jaromil that modernity is different tomorrow from what it is today and that for the sake of the *eternal imperative* of modernity one has to be ready to betray its *changeable content*, to betray Rimbaud's verse for the sake of his credo. In 1968, using terminology still more radical than that used by Jaromil in 1948 in Prague, Paris students rejected the world as it is, the world of superficiality, comfort, business, advertising, stupid mass culture drumming its melodramas into people's heads, the world of conventions, the world of Fathers. During that period Paul spent several nights on the barricades and spoke with the same decisive voice as had Jaromil twenty years earlier; he refused to be swayed by anything, and supported by the strong arm of the student revolt he strode out of his father's world so that at the age of thirty or thirty-five he would at last become an adult (Kundera, 1992, p. 156).

Paul's second radicalization involved abandoning the rational analysis of reality and turning towards "fashion":

> What does it mean to be absolutely modern when a person is no longer young and his daughter is quite different from the way he used to be in his youth? Paul easily found an answer: to be absolutely modern means in such a case to identify absolutely with one's daughter.
> […] …he [Paul – Ľ.D.] had doted on his daughter more and more in recent years, and whenever he was puzzled about something he sought her opinion. At first he did so for educational reasons, to make her think about important matters, but soon the roles imperceptibly reversed themselves: he no longer resembled a teacher stimulating a shy pupil with his questions, but an uncertain man com to consul a clairvoyant.
> We do not demand of a clairvoyant that she be wise (Paul did not have an exaggerated estimation of his daughter's talent or education), but that she be linked by invisible connections with some reservoir of wisdom existing outside her. When he heard Brigitte [his daughter – Ľ.D.] expound her views, he did not ascribe them to her personal originality but to the great collective wisdom of youth that spoke through her mouth, and he therefore accepted them with ever greater confidence (Kundera, 1992, pp. 158-159).

Kundera's conclusion—"to be absolutely modern means to be the ally of one's gravediggers"—indicates that someone who wants to be absolutely modern—as variously understood by the term—will ultimately destroy him/herself. Hence, it can be understood as the inability to care for the self. Here too, for instance, the moderate dealing with the opinions of Paul's daughter, that not being a rigid, conventional father, but being able to distance himself from her opinions, may be an appropriate mode of care of the self.

The third quotation, that is Paul's second radicalization, aims—although a much more precise analysis is required—to explain the somnolence of and tendency towards decadence which Patočka thinks *moderantism* and thus also the classical (laissez-faire) liberal democracies are susceptible to (Patočka, 1996, p. 264).[16] He thinks the moderate paradigm had its own inherent dangers of regression: the particularist short-circuiting of tradition and modernity, and self-misunderstandings coming from within the most established

[16] This perspective actually brings Jan Patočka close to the first generation of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, although he himself did not discuss the issue of consumerism to the same degree for instance.

and seemingly least contaminated currents of modern thought: positivism and liberalism (Arnason, 2003, p. 136). Nevertheless, Patočka believes moderate super-civilization can "survive" by developing certain competencies (Homolka, 2016, pp. 205-207). However, he did not provide an adequate account of how they might be developed. Consequently, in what follows, I will provide a preliminary outline of the way in which Confucianism and critical theory can be combined so as to develop just such an account of moderateness.

The relevance of Confucianism to the 'Care of the Self discussion' and moderateness

To begin with, it is worth stressing that we should refer to the plural 'Confucianisms' rather than the singular 'Confucianism'. The Confucian tradition stretches back more than two thousand years and contains many ideas, interpretations, and so on, which may still be inspirational and useful in contemporary philosophy. This tradition now seems to be a well-established philosophical movement, although it is still ignored by most European philosophers. Nevertheless, there are many reasons why philosophers from the West should take an interest in Confucian philosophy.[17] I will explore Stephen C. Angle's accounts of 'Sagehood' and 'Progressive Confucianism', since these are relevant to the topic of the workshop on *Care of the Self in the Global Era*.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to consider the promising potential that lies in comparing Angle's perspective and Vladislav Suvák's emphasis on Antisthenes's rather than Plato's special mode of care for the self. I am not able to say much more here about Angle's interpretation of the Confucian "Care of the self", since in this paper my aim is only to look at the moderateness of Confucianism. Nevertheless, it is worth quoting a passage from Angle's book *Sagehood: The Contemporary Significance of Neo-Confucian Philosophy* (2009):

> Ideas of sagehood in Greece are often bound up with a conception of divinity, which is a realm of perfection separate from humanity. Only gods are truly wise, though humans can and should aspire after wisdom (*sophia*); those who do so are lovers of *sophia,* or "philosophers." Since these individuals love and aspire to something that is fundamentally different from our limited human knowledge, though, Greek theorists generally recognize that its pursuit requires a rupture with everyday life. They argue that people should seek to shape their lives by spiritual exercise that bring divine wisdom tantalizingly closer. For many thinkers, the best human life (i.e., the life of happiness or "*eudaimonia*") is the life of contemplation ("*theoria*"). The upshot of all this is that even though the use of "spiritual exercise" to shape one in pursuit of perfection resonates strongly with Neo-Confucian ideas, the impossibility of actually living a human life as a *sophos* ["sage" – Ľ.D.] has important consequences. The Neo-Confucian pursuit of sagehood does not involve the same kind of rupture with everyday life; indeed, one of the most telling Neo-Confucian critiques of their Buddhist rivals was precisely that the latter did call for a rupture with everyday life (p. 22).

Moreover, in the following passage the concept of "phronesis" relates to the discussion on Angle's emphasis of the unsatisfying elements of the Greek solutions:

[17] Some of these reasons are mentioned in Dunaj (2016, pp. 135-136).

> When we bring the ideal of *phronimos* ["sage", "moral sage", "gentleman" – Ł.D.] into the picture, things get even more interesting. The *phronimos* is the practically wise person (i.e., the person with "*phronesis*") who excels not so much in contemplation as in practical activity ("*praxis*"). Most of Aristotle's famous treatise on ethics, the *Nichomachean Ethics*, is devoted to the virtues and practical wisdom of the *phronimos*, and it seems to detail a life of happiness that, in its well-rounded sociality, contrast with the life in contemplation, which is self-contained and has only minimal reliance on external goods. When one leading interpreter[18] of Aristotle describes the *phronimos* as a "gentleman, it is tempting to think that whereas in the Confucian context, I have argued that *junzi* ["gentleman" – Ł.D.] and sage are fundamentally continuous with one another, in the Greek context we are offered two distinct ideals: the practical, human-centered life of the *phronimos* or gentleman, and the contemplative, divine-oriented life of the philosopher, striving to become a *sophos* ["sage"]. Some scholars do indeed read Aristotle this way, but most look for a way to reconcile the two visions of ideal life, typically by maintaining that contemplations is, in one way or another, the perfection of a practical life. Given how ultimately imperfect human attempts at contemplation must be–and how removed from the normal concerns of human life–these solutions strike me as technically clever but unsatisfying" (Angle, 2009, pp. 22-23).

In his other book, *Contemporary Confucian Political Philosophy* (Angle, 2012), Angle defends Mou Zongsan, a Chinese New Confucian Philosopher, against critics who claim that Confucianism is not merely a profession, but a "way of life" in which Confucian practices relate to improving oneself and one's world. Although Angle is sympathetic to this idea—referring also for instance to Wang Yangming's[19] (1472-1529) statement: 'true knowledge and action are unified'—he emphasizes that knowing how to practice Confucianism today may be not as easy as it once was (Angle, 2012, p. 8). Moreover, he claims that critical modern innovations like broad political participation, the rule of law, and the active rooting out of social oppression, are actually better for those wishing to be good Confucians (Angle, 2012, p. 9). In this context, Heiner Roetz's interpretation of Confucianism and the role of moderateness within it, is of particular importance for my project because he is strongly committed to both Confucianism and Critical theory (Heubel, 2009, pp. 44-45). By proposing a 'modern or left-wing Confucianism,' Heiner Roetz emphasizes the dialectical relationship between self-regard (individual autonomy) and community:

> Confucians live in two worlds: the world of particular ethical duties with their detailed ritual prescriptions [...] and the world of the moral interest of the whole, which transcends the first world, relativizing, yet not negating it. This dialectic of Confucianism, on which its development potential otherwise depends, has all too often been overlooked because of its prima facie conventional appearance" [Orig. in German, translation – Ł.D.] (Roetz, 2006, p. 22).

The logical consequences of the awareness of this dialectic is *moderateness*.

In his reconstruction of *Confucian Ethics of the Axial Age* (Roetz, 1992), especially

[18] Angle refers to Amélie Oksenberg Rorty's 'The Place of Contemplation in Aristotle's Nichomachean Ethics' (1980).

[19] A Chinese Neo-Confucian philosopher, official, educationist, calligraphist and general during the Ming dynasty.

in the chapter on 'The Background of the Emergence of Chinese Moral Philosophy: The Dissolution of Conventional Morality in the Mirror of the *Lunyu*'[20], Roetz emphasizes that the dialectic of Confucianism is the answer to the dissolution of conventional morality in the Chinese 'Axial Age'. Indeed, according to Roetz, Confucianism succeeded where other ancient Chinese philosophical schools such as Daoism, Legalism, or Mohism failed because they resisted or were unable to reconcile their normative concepts with the prevailing ethos and common sense of Chinese society (Roetz, 1992, p. 71).

Roetz suggests that Hegel's critique of Kant and the distinction between *ethics* [*Sittlichkeit*] and *morality* [*Moralität*] is appropriate for assessing the core character of Confucian philosophy because it strives for, as did Hegel, a synthesis of ethics [*Sittlichkeit*] and morality. In particular, Confucianism tries to (re)consolidate the fragile ethos [*Sittlichkeit*] of the Chinese Axial Age through a process in which the individual reflectively internalizes morality. However, the two pillars of ethics [*Ethik*] are in permanent conflict. The key theme in *Lunyu* (*Analects of Confucius*) is how to deal with that conflict. However, Roetz considers Confucius' answers to be pedagogical recommendations rather than a systematically construed philosophical theory (Roetz, 1992, p. 74). His aim is to stimulate self-reflection in students so that they may arrive at their own conclusions. At this point, we again find ourselves at the common perspective with Suvák's interpretation mentioned in the introduction of this text: Suvák also stresses Socrates' role, which was to act as a teacher in developing the concept of "*phronesis*". While a deeper discussion is necessary but beyond the scope of this paper, I will conclude here by pointing out perhaps the most problematic part of Heiner Roetz's interpretation of Confucianism. According to Roetz,

> Confucianism, provided it frees itself from its widespread traditionalistic self-misunderstanding, can even contribute to safeguarding the unitary (rather than multiple) 'project of modernity' as the normative, not merely technical and economic, project which it was in its early conceptualizations (Roetz, 2008, p. 376).

There is a potential danger here, however—as I tried to show in the first part—if one's understanding of modernity is too narrow. The project of obtaining a sufficient understanding of modernity and of rational principles in general presupposes a dialogical interaction between "(Western) modernity" and various "civilizations" in order to achieve the *moderate* super-civilisation Jan Patočka had in mind. To be part of a culture, built for instance on Confucian roots, means upholding different ideas in many different concrete social and individual circumstances.[21] As a result, there has to be an openness to various forms of a "well-ordered society", because we saw that certain kinds of liberal democracy and values can be inappropriately radical. For instance, as the ideology of globalization, the neoliberal understanding of the economy lays ideological claim to being *the* rational way of organizing the global economy. With regard to the perspective of an individual agents, we may point to radically categorical acceptance and absolutization of certain "recognition patterns" which resulted from Western modernity. If the hermeneutical and dialogical

[20] *The Analects* – the key book of Confucianism.

[21] Cf. for instance such perspectives as: Bell (2015); Qing (2013), Heubel (2016),

aspects of practical wisdom (*phronesis*), ways of achieving "excellences" or "virtues" (*arete*), are absent, conflicts and contradictions can arise which prevent adequate care of the self and care of the common (polis, city, etc.). Nevertheless, my conclusion amounts to a pernicious relativism, since I hold that it is possible for an agent to both emancipate herself from various forms of particularism and conventionalism without any 'rupture,' (Angle's quotation) that is, without necessarily losing contact with her own culture/civilization altogether. Critical theory, despite its variety of forms and the necessity of its "global learning", may thus be helpful in developing such "practical wisdom".

The relevance of critical theory to 'Care of the Self in the Global Era'

Since there is still a danger of conservativism in any attempt at "being moderate" and thereby supporting "ideological recognition",[22] one important role of critical social theory is to search for various forms of suffering today. A quick glance at contemporary Western societies makes us realize that the existing situation requires considerable critique. With regards to the state of societies in highly developed capitalist countries, we can agree, with Axel Honneth and other social scientists,[23] that there is the

> trend toward growing impoverishment of large parts of the population; the emergence of a new 'underclass' lacking access to economic as well as sociocultural resources and the steady increase of the wealth of a small minority (Fraser & Honneth, 2004, p. 112).

Honneth discusses the scandalous manifestations of an almost totally unrestrained capitalism today (Fraser & Honneth, 2004, p. 112). In addition, he does not restrict his critique to problems and sufferings in the public sphere that have already been articulated, but draws attention to the everyday misery still to be found beyond the perspective of the political public sphere (Fraser & Honneth, 2004, p. 118)—by referring to Pierre Bourdieu's *The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society* (Bourdieu et al., 2000).[24]

It is also important to point out that in recent decades other forms of social suffering have spread, which in some sense have no predecessor in the history of capitalist societies. They are less easy to empirically observe since they relate to mental disorder(s), such as the rapid growth in depression (Honneth, 2004, p. 475). As Honneth emphasized in his *Organized*

[22] See for instance Zurn (pp. 96-98).

[23] Compare other critical analyses of current capitalism, for instance (Piketty, 2014; Robinson, 2004; Streeck, 2014. Sklair, 2001; Harris, 2016).

[24] Honneth broadly sketches out the characteristics of these phenomena of social deprivation: "they include the consequences of the 'feminization' of poverty, which primarily affects single mothers with limited job qualifications; long-term unemployment, which goes along with social isolation and private disorganization; the depressing experience of the rapid disqualification of job skills that had enjoyed high esteem at the start of a career and now have been made useless by accelerated technological development; the immiseration of the rural economy, where, despite deprivation and back-breaking work, yields on small farms never seem to be sufficient; and finally, the everyday privations of large families, where low pay renders even the efforts of both parents insufficient to support the children (Fraser & Honneth, 2004, pp. 118-119)."

Self-Realization: Paradoxes of Individualization (Honneth, 2004) in reference to Alain Ehrenberg's "The Fatigue of being oneself - Depression and Society" (1998):

> Ehrenberg arrived at the conclusion, after having sorted through the clinical evidence, that we are currently faced with a rapid rise in the frequency of depression; not merely a growing number of therapeutic findings but also the unprecedented sales of pharmaceutical anti-depressants show that, to a horrifying degree, full-blown depression is displacing the symptoms of neurosis. As a key to explain how this kind of illness has become a mass phenomenon Ehrenberg makes use of the idea that individuals have as it were been psychically overburdened by the diffuse but widespread demand that they must be themselves; the permanent compulsion to draw the material for an authentic self-realization from their own inner lives requires of individuals an ongoing form of introspection which must sooner or later leave them feeling empty; and the point at which inner experience no longer marks out the path for one's own life, even given a strong resolution that it do so, signals in Ehrenberg's view the moment when a depression begins (Honneth, 2004, p. 475).

As such, we are confronted with various problems in Western societies located at the social and individual level which cannot be attributed to a single cause. Nevertheless, the restructuring of manufacturing and services in the 1980s can be identified as a cause of many of the current negative social phenomena.

In the same book, Honneth points out that what happened during this period has been described by economists as the phase of eliminating Fordist production methods, and this led to job candidates, no longer being referred to as dependant employees, but as "creative businessmen themselves". Honneth highlights the fact that corporations, which are not controlled by politics, operating at an international level, constantly seek new ways of signing contracts, which leads to the reoccurrence of the same forms of unprotected contractual work, part time jobs and work from home which existed at the beginning of capitalist industrialisation. The increasing flexibility of the labour market and the society-wide adaptation to market principles, poorly justified by references to the new individualism, mean that "social issues" are becoming a challenge once again, despite being considered part of the already-vanquished heritage of the 19th century by the second half of the 20th century (Honneth, 2004, pp. 473, 475).

Honneth calls into question critical social theory's traditional fixation on the concepts of 'antagonism' or 'crises' and focuses rather on the concept of 'paradox' (Honneth, 2002; Honneth & Sutterlüty, 2011). The paradoxes of current capitalism are such that it seems that normative progress in one area of society simultaneously involves regression in others, with more freedom in one being accompanied by restrictions in another. Consequently, we cannot meaningfully speak of a linear progression towards a better or worse state of affairs (Honneth, 2007, p. 9).[25] This, in turn, makes it difficult for individuals to be able to care for themselves.

Another aspect of the difficulties related to the care of the self is the necessity for dialogue among members of different cultures that is a consequence of the unprecedented increase in intercultural encounters in the era of globalization. This is a result of the

[25] I refer to the Czech translation of Honneth (2002).

economic growth of the non-western world, particularly of China, and other rapidly growing countries like Brazil, Russia, India, and South Africa (the so-called BRICS countries). Other countries like Japan, Mexico, Venezuela, Turkey, Iran, Vietnam, Saudi Arabia and Nigeria are already regional powers with further ambitions to enhance their geopolitical power. Many of them oscillate on the 'border' with the West, some wanting to fully integrate with the West, and some rejecting integration altogether. For the purposes of this paper, however, what is important is that these countries seek greater recognition—not only in world economics or politics, but also in the sciences and humanities, and of course philosophy. Moreover, as a consequence of globalisation, large numbers of people do not live in their country of origin, or that of their parents. If discussing the preconditions of a good, fulfilling/successful life[26] (*ein gelingendes Leben*) is an important component of critical social theory (Honneth, 2009, p. 22) then an adequate form of intercultural communication has to be developed. Logically then, proposing universal and all-encompassing solutions seems to be a moderate point of departure.

Although a large number of philosophers see limited prospects for western world-views to be fully implemented into non-western countries—John Rawls and his *The Law of Peoples* (Rawls, 1999) is just one example—and for global problems to be solved from a Western standpoint alone, the perspectives of non-western countries (especially China) have nevertheless remained largely unaccounted for. While I take critical social theory to be a viable approach for inquiring into social reality, it must nevertheless undergo what might be called a 'global learning process' in order to become fully adequate. If the representatives of the West (political, cultural, philosophical, etc.) want to become trustworthy partners for non-western cultures in promoting such a dialogue, they must overcome their ethnocentric perspective to grapple effectively with injustices in an increasingly globalized world.[27] However, this does not only mean speaking out about "decolonizing" (A. Allen) or "global justice" (R. Forst), for instance, but also engaging with the important works of non-western philosophical traditions—past and present—so as to be ready for such an intercultural dialogue.

In this context, it is worth introducing the views of three theorists that are methodologically important for my purposes, in that they possess the potential for opening up critical social theory to global learning, namely those of Axel Honneth, Hans-Herbet Kögler, and Johann P. Arnason.

Axel Honneth's *theory of recognition* plays a crucial role in this, particularly his thesis that

> an attempt to renew the comprehensive claims of Critical Theory under present conditions does better to orient itself by the categorical frameworks of a sufficiently differentiated theory of recognition, since this establishes a link between the social causes of widespread feelings of

[26] In order to gain a deeper understanding of the second and third parts of this article, see Dunaj (2016, pp. 140-142).

[27] With regard to the issue of ethnocentrism and fundamentalism cf. for instance Dudinská (2013; Dudinský & Dudinská, 2014).

injustice and the normative objectives of emancipatory movements (Fraser & Honneth, 2004, p. 113).[28]

Honneth's aim is to produce a quasi-transcendental justification of a critique of the structure of civil society through moral-psychological considerations. He assumes that all forms of social integration depend on certain forms of mutual recognition, which connect injustices to feelings of misrecognition which can be understood as impulses for social change. Social suffering and discontent, therefore, possess a *normative* core:

> It is a matter of the disappointment or violation of normative expectations of society considered justified by those concerned. Thus, such feelings of discontent and suffering, insofar as they are designated as "social," coincide with the experience that society is doing something unjust, something unjustifiable (Fraser & Honneth, 2004, p. 129).

Honneth argues that

> the conceptual framework of recognition is of central importance today not because it expresses the objectives of a new type of social movement [as proposed by Charles Taylor for instance – Ľ.D.], but because it has proven to be the appropriate tool for categorically unlocking social experiences of injustice as a whole (Fraser & Honneth, 2004, p.133).

Therefore, as he states in his magnum opus *Freedom's Right*:

> The motor and the medium of the historical process of realizing institutionalized principles of freedom is not the law, at least not in the first instance, but social struggles over the appropriate understanding of these principles and the resulting changes of behaviour. Therefore, the fact that contemporary theories of justice are guided almost exclusively by legal paradigm is a theoretical folly. We must instead take account of sociology and historiography, as these disciplines are inherently more sensitive to changes in everyday moral behaviour (Honneth, 2014, p. 329).

According to Hans-Herbert Kögler, a proponent of *critical hermeneutics*, critical theory and cultural studies are interested in culture as a medium in which power and subjectivity meet. They are not interested in analysing forms of culture for their own sake, but rather are motivated by the goal of promoting critical reflexivity and political change. Thus, key questions for both paradigms are how social practices of power affect the self-understanding of the subject on the one hand, and how subjects can influence and alter various cultural and social practices, on the other. According to Kögler, the problem of the cultural creation of the self through power thus constitutes the basic problematic of both paradigms, and is reflected in the questions: in what way is power 'embedded' in the inner life of subjects? How can we explain the fact that individuals accept and even identify with living conditions which are detrimental to their flourishing? And finally, how should we understand a subject's resistance to power if we want to claim that power has a fundamental influence on the

[28] In order to highlight certain overlaps between Honneth's theory and Patočka's idea of the moderate super-civilization, it is worth mentioning Patočka's emphasis on its two key values: the value of scientific truth and the value of people's freedom, i.e. the recognition of man by man as equal (Patočka, 1996, p. 260).

creation of a subject's self-understanding, but that it does not lead to a self-defeating form of social reductionism (Kögler, 2006, p. 56)?

If we accept the central premises of the theory of recognition presented above, we also have to accept the premise that (different) institutionalised forms of mutual recognition exist in all societies. However, there are not only significant differences (cultural, social, economical, etc.) between societies, but also many similarities (because of the dynamics of global interactions), and we should not lose sight of these. Thus, if the representatives of the West are to enter into a constructive dialogue with the members of these civilisations, they must not only become acquainted with the "driving forces" for social change within these societies, but also with their predominant world-views, the way these societies are integrated and organised, their most important historical narratives, and so on. Most importantly, they have to learn from the predominant forms of recognitional patterns of these societies.

Hans-Herbert Kögler stresses that if we take *social situatedness* as our point of departure, we must keep in mind that all values and norms are articulated and expressed through specific languages and traditions, established and embedded in a concrete cultural context with its own conventions, practices, and institutions, which are saturated and distorted by social relations of power and by structures of social control (Kögler, 2005, p. 309). Kögler concludes from this that a new field of inquiry for critical theory must be started before the task of identifying and determining proper values and norms can begin, and before the presuppositions of such a dialogue can be analysed within societies (p. 317).

Thus, in the context of globalization, any attempt to formulate a *minimal universalism*—concerning environmental challenges, for instance—requires knowledge of the values and norms (as well as the social and economic background) of the cultures and societies which could serve as potential candidates for universal application, that is, that could possess cross-cultural validity. Moreover, an analysis of the dominant cultural forms cannot be based just on the study of history, but must also avail itself of current empirical research, which can not only indicate the kinds of values and norms currently effective within societies, but also those which remain relatively constant or continuous with the past. To achieve this aim we thus require a *civilizational analysis* which would enable us to ascertain which are the most important forms of recognition operational in societies.

Johann P. Arnason is an important proponent of civilizational analysis who emphasizes the importance of theoretical and historical approaches to the comparative study of civilizations:

> The term "civilizational analysis", used by Said Amir Arjomand and Edward Tiryakian in a highly influential edited collection of papers, is designed to stress the combination of theoretical and historical approaches to the comparative study of civilizations. More specifically, the focus is on the constitutive patterns and long-term dynamics of civilizations – understood as macro-cultural, macro-social and macro-historical units – as well as on the question of their more or less active involvement in modern transformations (Arnason, 2007, p. 2).

According to Arnason, *civilizational analysis* does not try to subsume all levels of socio-historical reality under civilizational categories, but attempts to properly thematise important phenomena which have previously been neglected by the humanities. Such a task involves

linking ontological or cosmological visions (interpretive frameworks) to the main arenas of social life, that is, the institutionalised forms of social action and interaction. The two key components linking the socio-historical sphere (interpretive frameworks and institutionalised forms of social action) are related primarily to the power structures in which specific cultural orientations are reflected (Arnason, 2009, pp. 9-10).[29] While this civilizational dimension is by and large implicit or latent within society, it is nevertheless an important determinant of social life that must be taken into consideration.

So, to sum up, critical theory in the way I propose it may help an agent care for the self by (a) identifying various forms of sufferings, that is, her own suffering, (b) understanding the dominant recognition and civilizational patterns and (c) developing her critical reflexivity to emancipate herself from inappropriate recognition patterns in various cultural contexts.

Conclusion

This paper argued that a moderate attitude is the most appropriate point of departure for a fulfilling care of the self in the global era—a time of unprecedented growth in diverse forms of global interactions and impacts—economic, cultural, political, ecological, and so on. In many contexts, an extreme attitude to various "questions of life"— linked to a radical understanding of modern principles, especially of the rationalization of all areas of social life—may undermine the ability of an agent to adequately care for the self. Without a dialogical stance on traditions, contexts, historical preconditions and situation, cultural differences and so forth, adequate care of the self in our global era may become impossible. Nevertheless, I am aware that not every society is conducive to developing the kind of moderateness I have in mind. The discussion about legal, economic, cultural, moral, and other preconditions of such a society is, however, a matter for another study.

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[29] Here Arnason is following on from the work of S. N. Eisenstadt: *Comparative Civilizations and Multiple Modernities* (2003, p. 34).

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