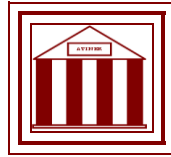# Athens Institute for Education and Research
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The Transformation of the Ancient Worldview in the Consciousness of a Medieval Man

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Abstract

The history of the development of the human mind is presented as an ascent through society from the lowest to the highest stage, as the process that has a successive connection.

Thus, ancient Christianity has become the heritage of medieval West. The process of social evolution with all its ups and downs creates a versatile tradition that makes up a successive connection between the new and old society.

Indeed, everything on the historical arena is interconnected, and the general evolution of the culture and society brings not only a new stage in history but also defines the changes between the old and the new ideas considering one or another is needs that are relevant in the course of time.

In research work the main line of analysis is the transformation of two worlds – Ancient world and Medieval world and the consciousness of men in that period.

Keywords: Worldview, universals of culture, Ancient world, medieval spirituality, personality, non-classical type of philosophy.

Introduction

Complex and sometimes conflicting processes taking place in the world, today more than ever require an understanding of the fundamental factors of our own existence. To deal with it efficiently, we need an integrated study of the human problem that will embrace both special studies and philosophical synthesis of results achieved in various sciences. This context makes it obvious that among the central topics in contemporary philosophy there should be the problem of consciousness, worldpictures and inner world.

In this paper, we will consider the problem of inner transformation of worldpictures in human consciousness at the turn of two epochs – Antiquity and the Middle Ages. This topic is actively discussed in contemporary philosophical and cultural studies, but scholars have proposed quite different principles of how to see the nature of these epochs and the interactions between them. In our own research, we base mainly on the writings of Étienne Gilson, Jacques Le Goff, Nikolai Berdyaev, Aaron Gurevich, Aleksei Losev, Svetlana Neretina, Vyacheslav Stepin, Pavel Florensky and other philosophers who greatly influenced the study of the ancient and medieval life, as well as the appearance of non-classical philosophical approaches.

Making no claim to analyze all transformations in every aspect, we focus on the key one for our inquiry. We consider as the basis for all these transformations a new understanding of man and human action, which was caused by great transformational processes and worldpictures shifts.

As Gerald Holton states, opinions and actions of individuals to some degree are guided by a strong, map-like assemblage of an individual's underlying beliefs of "how the world as a whole operates" (Holton 1992, p. 111). Among these underlying assumptions that substantially shape our mind map there are such fundamental categories of a worldview as the "world" and "man". These rather abstract categories become concrete through the system of categorial meanings of other cultural universals, expressing attitude of an individual to nature, society, to other people and themselves. All these worldview categories always have a sociocultural dimension and largely determine the nature of life activity and the picture of this world. If at early stages that picture was of an anthropomorphic, mythological character (Early Antiquity), with the emergence of philosophy the worldview got more theoretical in character. Here, philosophy as a theoretical core of worldview not only organizes the world images that are represented by meanings of cultural categories, but also invents again and again fresh nonstandard representations which go beyond these images.

In the context of worldpicture images, Vyacheslav Stepin, a Russian scholar, regards as foundations of science certain worldview and philosophical guidelines and does it from a rationalistic stance. He argues that rational understanding enables the equality for all basic values and the openness of different cultural worlds for dialogue (Stepin 2003, s.198-200). Indeed, such type of rationality makes possible entirely new prospects for dialogue of

cultures and new values and worldview orientations which we will discuss in this paper.

It primarily concerns the historical destinies of worldpicture and the process of their shift – as it is widely assumed there is always some continuity between old and new conceptions of reality. Any major changes in human life imply modifications of culture. From the outside, a culture seems a complex mixture of interacting pieces of knowledge, regulations, norms, patterns of actions, ideas, problems, beliefs, generalized world views, etc. In a complex kaleidoscope of cultural phenomena from each historical period one can reveal their foundations, kind of underlying social activity programs, which permeate all other elements of culture and organize them into a coherent system. Foundations of culture determine the type of society at every historical stage. They form the worldview of a historical period. These bases act as a very generalized system of worldview assumptions that shape an integral image of the human world. If so, the question arises about the structure of these conceptions, the ways of their being, the forms in which they are implemented. Such forms are constituted by categories of culture which are worldview universals that systemize and accumulate human experience (Stepin 1999). All these features are fused into a single unit in the human consciousness of any epoch, since consciousness in its real existence is not something abstract. It includes both social and individual mind, in every epoch having a specific historical content.

It is from this standpoint we think efficient to identify a specific categorial order of consciousness that exists in every type of culture. Such order embraces absolute and relative elements. The absolute expresses underlying invariants of human existence, its attributes. The relative, historically mutable, expresses specific cultural traits of a certain historical type of society, its inherent forms and ways of communication and human activities, its ways of storage and transmission of social experience; a set of values adopted in this society.

An individual shaped by a certain culture most often takes for granted the meanings of its worldview universals. These meanings act as guidelines for our actions and are not usually realized as deep grounds for our perception and understanding of the world. Types of perception and understanding being peculiar to a particular society are largely dependent on different content of categories, underlying the culture.

According to V. Stepin, universals of culture simultaneously perform three interrelated functions. First, they provide a kind of structuring and sorting of diverse, historically changeable social experiences (Stepin 1999). Through this, the experience is transmitted from one generation to another. Secondly, cultural universals, their meanings determine the categorial system of consciousness in every particular historical period. Lastly, the interrelation of universals forms the worldview of this or that period. This is a picture expressing generalized images of the world. It introduces a certain set of values adopted in this type of culture and that is why it determines both the comprehension and emotional perception of the world. Within all these functions, the meanings of cultural universals need to be assimilated by individuals, to become the inner basis of

their personal understanding of the world and their actions. However, people introduce their personal meaning into cultural universals depending on their life experience. As a result, the worldpicture gets an individual shape and acts then as an individual worldview.

To change and evolve, the fundamental meanings of cultural universals and the worldview itself require individual variations of attitudes. However, they are not enough to automatically change the categorial model of the human world lying at the foundation of a culture. Any critical, opposition ideas are able to become the centers of remelting of the old guidelines for the most people only at certain stages of social development.

Such shift of fundamental meanings of cultural universals and of a type of culture is always connected with crucial points of human history. It always means the transformation of a human world image and of value orientations.

The Comparison of the Antique and Medieval Worldpictures

In this study, we will focus on the shift of the historical horizon at the turn of Antiquity and the Middle Ages. This shift is connected with Christianity the rise of which was accompanied by a profound spiritual crisis, a transition to a new line of human history.

There are crisis periods when a former historically established fixed "categorial model of the world" ceases to provide the translation of new experience, the clutch and interaction of activities needed by society. In such epochs, the traditional meanings of cultural universals lose the function of worldview guidelines for mass consciousness. In Late Antiquity, as Alexei Losev puts it, an individual is far from "the olden quiet and noble … self-contemplation" and "sees his or her insignificance" (Losev 1989, s. 99). And the society starts an intensive search for life meanings and values to find orientation, to recover the lost "connection of times", to recreate the integrity of their life experience. They need new worldview guidelines and – most importantly – a new system of values.

The polis culture of Antiquity gave two great inventions to humanity which are democracy and theoretical science and philosophy. These inventions became important preconditions for the future, fundamentally new type of civilization in the regulation of social relations and in the process of understanding the world (Kulikova 2009, s. 195). According to A. Losev, the ancient thinker sees the endless movement of the Cosmos as a kind of eternal recurrence, a movement within certain limits where the harmony of the whole is constantly reproduced. The changeable Cosmos is also considered a sculptural whole, where the parts complementing each other create a complete harmony (Losev 1977, s. 14-18).

In their general picture of the world, the Greeks see the world as a theater stage. People are actors who appear on this stage, play their roles and leave. They come from the sky being the emanation of the cosmos, the cosmic ether to which they would return. According to the aesthetics of Antiquity, the

Cosmos is the best, most perfect work of art. But what is human art? Just a poor imitation of cosmological art. The culture of Antiquity is based on impersonal cosmologism (Kessidi 1972, s. 18-20).

In that worldpicture the individual was not considered valuable because people did not have a formed feeling of personality. At the same time Antiquity was the first to take an initial step in that way – it separated man from universal substance. Man is understood here not as dissolving in the mysterious and unfathomable Cosmos, but as its especial, distinguished part acting as the measure of all things (Stepin 1999). Ancient philosophers regard the inner world of man as his or her ability to realize themselves as part of the large Cosmos and to act according to the knowledge about this world.

Among the fundamental categories of Antiquity the prime is 'Logos' which means "a word", "a thought" but never and nowhere "a person". It would mean "a person" only in Christianity. Or rather, the internal man would be opened only in the Middle Ages, when an inner spiritual work began, when man stood up in the center of the Christian faith and worldview. The attitude to man in the Middle Ages totally differs from that of Renaissance and especially of Antiquity (Berdyaev 1990).

We do not claim to understand the reasons for why the ancient worldview was dismantled and Christianity won an intellectual victory. We will try to at least identify the peculiarities of the philosophical environment that nurtured those reasons.

The way of transformation of the ancient worldview was considered in the Middle Ages as search for the paths to salvation (Gilson 2010, s. 54). Christianity based on revelation and monotheism would be strange to the ancient religious and mythological worldview where nature was considered perfectly organized, the absolute for itself (Losev 1989, s. 155-157; 159-162). Starting from the limited human conditional, Christianity entered the spiritual life of the ancient society as the path to individual salvation, as the state of absolute person that is above the world, ahead of the Cosmos and all flesh. That position was later advocated in the Middle Ages as well. At that point of history, Christianity declared a fight against the natural human, the low elements for the sake of man's redemption. The medieval Christian religion chained the natural human, alienated man from Nature in both the inner and outer world (Neretina 2011).

Thus, we believe that medieval times inherited and developed a kind of philosophical problem from Antiquity. The pagan culture did not reach up the doctrine of absolute person, but the medieval worldpicture was not able to do without it. The Middle Ages inherited, mirrored and transformed the spirit of Antiquity.

It was Cicero in late Antiquity who regarded the concept of humanity (humanitas) as the most important result of culture that lead primarily to a type of human renaissance. A. Losev saw there a struggle of two worldviews, one related to the thing, the body, the nature and the other related to the person, the society and the concept of the ideal world. He saw "a mutual permeation of spirit and body, an absolute balance between the spiritual and corporeal"

(Stepin 1999). Indeed, such stance ran through all areas of medieval culture – everyday mundane thinking, artistic perception of the world, religious, theological and philosophical conceptions, medieval physics and cosmology, etc. It was a natural expression of the social relations system in that period, their mode of life (Stepin 1999). In science, for example, it found itself in qualitative distinction between terrestrial and celestial space. In the meanings of medieval culture, the celestial was always identified with "spiritual" and "holy", while the terrestrial with "corporeal" and "sinful". The movements of celestial and terrestrial bodies were considered essentially different, since those bodies were attributed to fundamentally different spatial areas (Stepin 1999).

The European medieval times became an important mark in the categorial system of cultural meanings. They had their own view of man as created in the image of God. They had the cult of Man-God and the cult of love to Man-God, to Christ; the cult of the human mind, able to understand and grasp the mystery of the divine creation, to decipher those letters that God placed in the world when he created it. This knowledge was aimed at deciphering the Providence, the plan of divine creation implemented in the world. Noteworthy that Renaissance restored the natural human, as it did for many other achievements of Antiquity. At the same time it radically transformed them, assimilated into the medieval idea of the Godlike human mind. It accordingly transformed the worldview of people.

The Non-Classical Approach to the Medieval Culture

In the context of the aforesaid, how can we explain why the Middle Ages are yet considered "dark"? Not only do some historians think so and frighten us with witch trials at the end of that period, or the Inquisition. Philosophers do it as well, despite the fact that they should be interested only in the truth. We would say many philosophers are accustomed to think from the traditional, accepted or established at the moment. From the fixed concepts according to which something has been attributed to the obscure and dark (Neretina 2011, s. 6). For example, since the Early modern period we have been accustomed to believe that philosophy is thinking in concepts, and that are represented by authors. The Middle Ages were oriented to authority and did not have authors in the current sense of the term. God was seen as the true author of both the world and word, and the Church Fathers were the only existing authority.

The traditional practice has always proceeded from a sharp opposition of Middle Ages and Renaissance-Antiquity that is somewhat a one-sided view. This stance has its grounds but let us consider the other aspects as well and thus come to the main issues of our reasoning.

All the medieval culture could be thought as a grandiose painful effort to embrace and express this tragic religious problem of redemption. From here comes the medieval asceticism scary with its inhumanity, its inclination to everything speaking substantively of decay, decomposition. On the other side,

from here comes the medieval art, perfectly formal but somewhat not affecting our soul, abstractive, expressly symbolic (Bitsilli 1996, s. 177).

In fact, the medieval individual is highly controversial. On the one hand, the categories of the medieval worldpicture seem to always bring the researcher to the core of what was man in the Middle Ages. These categories include space-time, celestial and terrestrial, life and death, image of the other world, freedom and limited human conditional, rights as one of the basis of being, oral and written culture, etc. On the other hand, even if researchers manage to grasp certain features of the worldview, they find them mostly as indications of the collective consciousness. Only very seldom we are able to reach an individual personality whose consciousness contains all these categories and many others (Gurevich 2009, s. 12-13).

Medieval culture was shaped primarily through the synthesis of the antique legacy, including both Greco-Roman pagan teachings and Christianity, with the barbaric heritage. It is hardly possible to adequately understand the mental attitudes and behavior patterns of medieval people (Gurevich 2009, s. 50).

Pavel Florensky, a Russian religious philosopher of the "Silver Age", who was at the origins of non-classical philosophy, also criticized the one-sided attitude to the Middle Ages. He believed that it was a formal approach to generate "wild" evaluation of medieval period where, in fact, there flowed its own "meaningful river of genuine culture". The medieval art does not fit in the "scheme of the Euclidean and Kantian space, which in painting reduces to the linear perspective and proportionality". But to regard the medieval art as a decline, ignorance, savagery, only because if this, means to distort reality, to impose your own point of view (Florensky 1990, s. 57). An approach similar to Florensky we can see in the profound studies on medieval culture by Mikhail Bakhtin, Dmitry Likhachev, Arseniy Gulyga.

Perhaps we could describe the Middle Ages not as lacking the bright minds, but as having spiritual awareness of human insignificance and inscrutability of the Creator before Whom all knowledge seems poor. As Petrus Comestor said, He seems darkness just like the bright sun that will darken if you stare at it. In comparison to Divine Intelligence who created the world, nature is regarded artificial. As for human activity, it is interpreted as a kind of small-scale semblance of the divine creation acts; and man is seen as spiritual in his or her inner world. Such view penetrated into all areas of the medieval picture (Stepin 1999).

In the context of evolution of philosophical views on personality space, we would say that Renaissance philosophers were the first to make from that space the object of philosophical speculation. It was thought as the space of personal fulfillment filled with spiritual meanings that expressed individual capacities and elevated feelings of creative personality. And it was in medieval times when the principle of man's personality and spirituality got the interpretation within the concept of Man.

We would not deny that medieval consciousness included some drawbacks and imperfections which revealed in the late Middle Ages and early modern period. However, what was the defectiveness of that medieval idea of the

kingdom of God – the defectiveness that contributed to the inner fracture and collapse of the theocratic culture of the Middle Ages, to the end of medieval history and emergence of new man struggling with the medieval spirit? As we see it, the insufficiency of the medieval mind lies primarily in the fact that free, creative human power was not truly opened up, and medieval man was not released to create and build a culture in a free, unfettered way. It is true that medieval Christianity contributed greatly in producing the real spiritual forces of man, but, actually, those forces were not tested in freedom.

Medieval asceticism reinforced human strength but did not set it free for experience in free creative consciousness. It became clear that a forcible implementation of the kingdom of God was impossible – impossible without consent, without freewill participation of independent human forces. The religious culture in the world would require a difficult period for man to voluntarily go through a tragic testing of his or her powers and to reach finally the higher levels of religious consciousness. There, man would be able to independently build a theonomical culture and use his or her powers to create the kingdom of God.

The experience of the modern history became the experience of free unfolding of human forces. New European man was inevitable as a phenomenon in the humanity history, needed for a real test of human creative freedom. The Middle Ages gave a focus and discipline to man's spirituality but at the same time they limited it. Only at the dawn of modern times man's forces were decentralized and set free and it became possible on the basis of the human spirituality nurtured by medieval culture.

It was Christianity which from its emergence, in a long and difficult way discovered the inner person, the new Adam, a personality in people themselves. We would like to emphasize that particular period when the medieval culture transformed the antique legacy (no one would deny the fact that the Middle Ages accepted ancient writings) and assimilated it with its own deep dive into spirituality and human personality created by God. Perhaps, it is the very time interval where we could identify the Middle Ages not as "a dark night", but rather "an interval before the sunrise of Renaissance". That sunrise filled the natural ancient element of man with a spiritual meaning. And the person became free having an inner world and subjectivity within which he or she moved and evolved being aware of his or her both spiritual and corporeal nature.

Later humanism experienced different stages. The closer to the sources of Christianity and Antiquity, the greater the human art is. The farther away from medieval Christianity, the weaker the human forces and beauty of human spirit become. This is one of the most apparent and yet paradoxical observation which is better seen within the non-classical approach to the worldpictures of Antiquity, Medieval times and Renaissance.

This observation can contribute to the explanation of why the beginning and end of Renaissance are so different and somewhat mismatching. The beginning produced the heyday of Renaissance; we could still feel here that medieval Christian personality and the link to Antiquity. At the end of the

Renaissance we can see a growing gap with both medieval and antique foundations.

Conclusion

Thus, the farther away from the Middle Ages the individuals in their history and consciousness, the farther they are from Antiquity and – from the original motives of Renaissance. The new spirit of the modern period guided man toward the ways totally different from both the medieval and antique directions. We think that this observation proves an assumption saying that man had only two spiritual foundations – antique and medieval which mirrored, complemented and transformed each other. Here, Antiquity means Nature and Medieval times mean Person [Neretina 2011, s.12-13].

We believe that all the aforesaid is enough to see how ramified the discussion of our topic can be. At this, we have tried to outline the major points toward the non-classical study of the historical epochs under consideration, as well as the formation of man. Within the contemporary post-non-classical science, we think it necessary to substantially change our previous cognition norms, which somehow prevent from a deeper, more adequate investigation into centuries and worldviews distant in time. To our mind, it could help us discover new paradigms of human existence and new worldpictures.

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