

## “Anus Mundi”

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*What a monster is man? What a celebrity, what a beast, what a chaos, what a confluence of oppositions, what an amazing thing! A judge of everything – a mindless earthly worm; a guardian of the truth – a sewer of uncertainty and mistakes; glory and disgrace of the universe.*

Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*

Heinz Thilo, a physician in the Auschwitz SS unit, in conversation with Kremer, described the camp as “*anus mundi*”. Weighty description, as one can assume was an expression of repulsion and horror the camp aroused in every observer, and at the same time legitimated its existence with necessity to purify the world. Problem of purification – *catharsis*, important in everyone’s life, is also meaningful for the life of societies.

In the concept of Nazi extermination camps, besides immediate political and economical tasks, which were the most effective and cheapest annihilation of the enemy, they had also a deeper sense. That was the purification of the German race from that all, which was incongruent with the ideals of German *Übermensch*. A distant goal, was a vision of the world of beautiful, strong, healthy people, a world with no place for the ill, disabled, mentally abnormal, infected with Jewish or Gipsy blood.

This “beautiful” world could be reached via the distasteful horror of the concentration camps. So it is not surprising that a service in concentration camp was treated as front service, even if SS-men preferred to be heroes in concentration camps then in a battlefield. The life preservation

law is usually stronger than ideology; it helps when ideology can be used as an excuse for one’s cowardice. However there were few that could not stand the camp service and had chosen the front or suicide. Majority were sedating themselves with alcohol and a feeling of well-performed duty for the goodness of motherland and grand idea.

The ability to transform the surrounding world, one can regard as a specifically human feature, one that contains the largest span of human nature contradictions. This ability gives birth to heroism, dedication, arts, science, but also cruelty, abuse and killing. To change the shape of the world, wars have been carried, people have been victimized in camps and prisons. What does not fit to the structure to be enforced, becomes strange and hostile, and as such, has to be destroyed.

A mechanism of implantation of a foreign structure is known in biology. A virus can attack a bacterium. Virus genetic material – its DNA reaches the bacterium interior, subdues its biochemical “apparatus” in such a way that in a minute the bacterium starts to produce millions of new viruses identical with the invader. The bacterium continues to live, but its structure has been changed: instead of its specific DNA, its biochemical processes are run by viral DNA. Seemingly the same, in reality it loses its specific structure, loses then its identity.

A similar process, but on an incomparably higher level, may be encountered in human life; when a person is dominated by an idea, strange at the beginning, but with time one's own. One does not see anything besides, is ready to sacrifice the life – one's own and other person's lives (usually other's is easier to sacrifice). As a bacterium mentioned above, a person loses his/her identity; his/her thoughts, emotions and doings are no longer an expression of his/her personality, but become a reflection of the structure accepted from the outside. People possessed by the same idea become identical as twins; social differentiation diminishes, but effectiveness (understood as aiming the same tasks, postponing everything else) increases. A human being who has not a stigma of the same idea, in consequence, becomes an obstruction in its realisation, an enemy, an obstacle, and has to be eliminated. Grandiosity of an idea, importance of its goals – assessed subjectively by those overwhelmed – justifies the rule: the goal is more important than the measures. One who sacrificed everything to the idea is deeply convinced that everything around has to be sacrificed too.

“Chaos”, “confluence of oppositions”, “mindless earthly worm”, “sink for uncertainty and mistake”, allowing an idea to possess him or her, and in consequence losing itself, gains an order, congruence, clarity and confidence. The bigger the inner disorganization, feeling of being weak, unsure and fearful, the stronger is the longing for something integrating again, something that will bring self-confidence (as a matter of fact not self-confidence, but confidence in the idea which replaces the self). Self-repulsion is being compensated by self-image as a hero – follower of the idea. Group belonging and feeling of group bonds and enhances the attractive powers of such a false model. A person is confronted with an alternative: to be as the others or not to be. Not fitting to the ideology standards – means to put oneself in a position of the enemy of the idea, hence to be exterminated. Among the followers of the idea, there develops a specific rivalry: not to be worse than the others. To be worse, means to be excluded from the group. Depending of ideology characteristics – merits or crimes can be a field of rivalry.

It is not my goal to analyse Nazi ideology, its shallowness, naivety and arrogance are evident.

That it was accepted by the German community can be explained only if one takes into account a specific atmosphere of the time between the two World Wars. Its characteristic was an exaggerated and kindled feeling of the national grief. Breakdown of ideological structures, feeling of dullness, lack of sense, economical depression, war traumas, etc., all created a good soil for every ideology, providing it would offer the perspective for a better future.

Ideology is dangerous, separately from its inner contents, as a structure enforced from outside; it blocks the developmental process. Tensions between opposing structures – of which ones are being born, the other die; new things appear and the human being develops – become replaced by the alien structure subduing everything. The human being does not grow; she/he changes into a blind tool in the service of an idea; blind – as she/he is capable to see only the tasks; above all is unable to see the other human beings, seeing instead comrades of common confession or an obstacle in goal achievement, a subject which must be eliminated, destroyed.

Claude Eatherly, Air Force Major performed a flight checking weather conditions and air defence measures over Hiroshima, on the morning August 6<sup>th</sup>, 1945. Then he gave a signal for atomic attack: go ahead. Recognising that the explosion burnt 200 000 people he developed growing moral conflict between a glory of hero, which surrounded him, and sense of participation in a crime with the need for expiation. “The complex of guilt” led him even to episodes of severe depression with anxiety, hallucinations and suicidal attempt. Eatherly volunteered to hard physical work and supported Hiroshima victims financially. His letter exchange with the eminent philosopher and active pacifist Günther Anders, persecuted by Nazis during the war, can be found in the book *No more Hiroshima*.

Among Germans, especially those who were active in the great industry of extermination, there is no Major Eatherly. Those few, who were put under judiciary procedures, usually had no feelings of guilt, but rather a strong grief of being punished for their blind obedience. For fulfilling their duties. Liberation from the guilty feelings, which is often much harder than any punishment a society can execute, they owe to ideology. They were not guilty, it was an alien struc-

ture, enforced, blinding them, replacing feeling, thinking and pushing to activity. Without ideology they are "serene people" again, coming to money in an honest way, and maybe secretly recollecting the great days of "heroic" past.

Those who were the impediments, the material which was decided to be exterminated, to prevent infection of the new world; they were meeting their fate in differentiated ways. Some had no time to get out of shock resulting from being thrown suddenly into the hell of a camp. Their life end was coming soon. The others were meeting their death with fatalistic conviction of irreversible fate. Yet others wanted to survive at every cost. As in the extermination camps convenient life was reserved for those only who were killing others, those who were lords – so some tried to follow their example. There were also those who in spite of hunger, thirst, cold, pain and humiliation were able to distance themselves from their suffering and avoid thinking only about finding something to eat, to stop the cold or heat, to stop pains in the body. The biological imperative is powerful and an enormous power of will is needed to stop thinking about bread, being hungry, about water, being thirsty, or about a sore place in pain. This effort, however, was necessary for preserving inner freedom – free space for free thinking, dreaming, deciding and to free oneself from a nightmare of the present time. If in camp life itself, in this *anus mundi*, there was so much sacrifice, courage, love towards other people, the phenomena which were – one could suppose – in such conditions almost impossible, that was just due to this inner freedom.

For those who survived, concentration camp memories from that time are not only the nightmares; they are also the proof, that in the most terrifying conditions they were capable to preserve their humanity. That they had stood the true question: "what am I like, truly". And often they feel the best among those who were there with them; they knew what their former co-prisoners are like truly.

One could suppose that in conditions of maximal slavery, humiliation and persecutions of other human beings heroism is not possible. To get heroism out of oneself, the minimal free space and strength is necessary. But, even in such conditions heroism was possible. In the hell of the

concentration camp, the greatness of man appeared.

Nazis did not achieve their goal. In spite of millions of victims they failed to clean the world of that, which did not fit to their *Herrenvolk* ideal. They showed instead, to the whole world, where delirious, unreasonable ideology could lead to. The Auschwitz smokes, let us hope, for a long time still, will be a warning of sightlessness, hatred and disregard towards the other. Ready forms of thinking and acting, blind following of commands can be dangerous in effects. That is why it is necessary to carry the burden of responsibility for one's thoughts, feelings and doings. Claude Eatherley expressed this in his letter to Günther Anders:

"There were periods in the past allowing a man to live his life through without engaging his conscience in problems of thought habits and norms of acting. Our times, obviously, do not belong to those epochs. Contrary, I believe, we are approaching rapidly the situation forcing us to think again whether we are ready to give away responsibility for our thoughts and doings to social organisations such as political parties, trade unions, the Church or the state. None of these organisations is capable to give us infallible moral indications and that is why we should object their pretence for giving us such indications."

"*Anus mundi*" showed the world the human being in all his nature diapason: besides terrible bestiality – heroism, sacrifice and love. Seeing this, one can say, following Pascal: "Be humble weak mind; be silent stupid nature; know that man limitlessly overgrows a man".

## REFERENCES

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