ON THE GENEALOGY OF MORALITY.
THE BIRTH OF PESSIMISM IN ZAPFFE’S ON THE TRAGIC

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Abstract
This article examines the genealogy of morality, as represented by the Norwegian philosopher and writer Peter Wessel Zapffe, as well as the way it affected the justification of his pessimism, which made him one of the most influential existentialists of the 20th century. Analyzing the complex relationships between so-called biological, social and (autotelic) metaphysical morality, which are explored against the background of four interest fronts (biological, social, autotelic and metaphysical fronts), I will clarify why Zapffe’s pessimism is irreducible to the one displayed by Schopenhauer since Zapffe provides a critical reception of Schopenhauer’s theory of tragic.

Key words: Peter Wessel Zapffe, morality, existentialism, pessimism, On the Tragic

Regardless of the fact that the conceptions of the Norwegian mountaineer, lawyer, writer and philosopher Peter Wessel Zapffe are not as well-known as the theories of Arne Naess, they had a significant influence on the development of Norwegian existentialism. In this context, we should specify why one should talk about Zapffe’s pessimism rather than Zapffe’s nihilism regardless of Nietzsche’s influence on his views of cultural degrowth, as well as of the possibility to draw some parallels with Nietzsche’s ‘melancholic metaphysics’ [1], as Haave suggests (Haave, 1999, pp. 236-237). Zapffe himself describes Nietzsche’s theory of tragic arguing that his “aesthetic-tragic desire” (“aestetisk-tragiske lyst’) is imprecisely interpreted (Zapffe, 1941, p. 554).

According to Zapffe, pessimism takes place as an element of Nietzsche’s works, namely, as a “Dionysian comprehension” (“dionysisk erkjendelse”) (Ibid): thus the general law of cruelty, suffering and total destruction looks deep-rooted (Ibid). In turn, this understanding leads to Buddhism, to repulsion of acting and life (Ibid, pp. 554-555). However, Zapffe emphasizes that here comes the difference with Schopenhauer: “Nietzsche wants to go back to
life: he wants salvation from Buddhism and finds this salvation in the tragedy, as it was in Greece and as it was for us” (Ibid, p. 555).

Furthermore, investigating Zapffe’s reception of Schopenhauer’s ideas as displayed in Zapffe’s fundamental work On the Tragic (Om det tragiske) (1941) contributes to revealing how his unique biosophy [2] (an existential philosophy adopting the methods of applied biology) affected the complex understanding of morality.

In this context, I will analyze the genealogy of the different types of morality introduced by Zapffe. For this purpose, I will explore why so-called biological morality is a problematic issue clarifying the genealogy of some ambiguous concepts such as the ones of biological value and biological responsibility [3]. Another main objective is to outline why Zapffe’s attempt at justifying different types of morality while solving existential problems is one of the strongest arguments against defining Zapffe as a nihilist.

Special attention will be paid to the main concerns about how to interpret Zapffe’s idea of world’s responsibility, taking into account that the metaphysical strive for meaningfulness faces the constraints of the autotelic mode of thinking.

Against the background of the aforementioned investigations, I will outline whether we can unquestionably accept Zapffe’s distinction between so-called deficient and surplus pessimism, as well as how this distinction affects the existential potential of man compared to other species.


Examining the implications of Zapffe’s theory, Kvaløy specifies that according to Zapffe, man is recognized as an aware (as full of understanding) living being (erkjennelsesmessig), as well as that his conception of morality can be defined as “over-equipped” in respect with the environment it has to function in (Kvaløy, 1992, p. 255).

In turn, the connection between metaphysical interest front and morality in Zapffe’s sense [5] is a complex one since morality requires metaphysical behavior to be differently formulated when we discuss so-called morality of world order (“verdensordenens” moralitet), autotelic-morality etc. (Zapffe, 1941, p. 66). According to Zapffe, the question of life meaning presumes metaphysical need of a heterotelic meaning of life to be clarified unless this question is posed as one about life “as it is”, i.e. as asking about life “for the sake of life itself” (Ibid). On the other hand, the aforementioned morality of world order requires the metaphysical need
to be defined, as Zapfè suggests (Ibid, pp. 66-67). Due to this order, everything has a plan and meaning: if it is necessary, suffering is caused by following an economic principle according to which everything goes fairly well due to the evaluation of every single man, or due to an evaluation regarding the fact that all can “raise themselves up” (“haeve sig op til”) with their own help (Ibid, p. 67). In this context, Zapfè makes the important comment that if justice cannot make the necessary, love does the rest and thus the metaphysical environment should be strengthened by a sympathetic disposition (Ibid).

Analyzing that example, we should specify the role of morality of world order [6] as based on metaphysical behavior that has both autotelic and heterotelic aspects (needs). From the perspective of the world as such, it should be defined as a certain type of autotelic-metaphysical morality, which is grounded in achieving fairness per se by reducing the role of morality to the one of world’s justice. However, from the perspective of man’s needs, it can be described as a metaphysical need having a heterotelic aspect: otherwise, the role of love would have been neglected. Zapfè himself is aware of this problem saying that if we talk about one who has a “need of a moral world order” (Ibid), we should make the following specification.

The need of finding life’s meaning is not identical with the ones of loving God or believing in life after death [7] (Ibid). It has much to do with the fact that humans are bearers of interests. At some point, they may show solidarity with other people and even with all living beings because “we assert the principle that all interest bearers have a claim on destiny that is relevant to the interest” (Ibid).

1.1. Why Do Not We Call Zapfè a Nihilist? On the Genealogy of Zapfè’s Morality

Zapfè’s theory of solving the existential problems by introducing noncontradictory morality, which to be closely tied with the practical experience is among the strongest arguments against defining him as a nihilist. However, maybe one of the most contradicting issues is what Zapfè calls biological morality. Within the framework of the latter, he introduces a set of problematic concepts such as biological value and biological responsibility that become a methodological obstacle even for his own analysis while he aims at justifying the need of showing love and compassion with other living beings. On a practical level, so-called by Zapfè biological justice [8] (Ibid, p. 33) turns out to be something more than a projection of a biological veto (Ibid), albeit, as Zapfè relevantly claims, the question of biological hubris is not limited to the one of safety [9].
Some implicit arguments that support the establishment of a certain kind of experiential morality can be found in Zapffe interpretation of Johannes Müller’s conception [10] of ‘Erfüllung’ (‘fulfillment’). According to Zapffe, the one who looks for a confirmation of the way of perfection “can say to oneself in one’s own heart: ‘This landscape, this man talks to something in me, which answers. I will allow this thing in me to answer and to be one whole with my answer. I have an experiential readiness (oplevelsesberedskap): it is as rare as the inalienable opportunity to fulfill it, to give a meaning to that side of my life’ (Ibid, p. 103). This definition corresponds to a certain extent to what I call experiential morality [11] in so far as it is based on the normative validity of the dialogue due to which the response is considered as a responsibility to learn both to hear and to be heard. Through the process of communication, the meaningfulness is determined as embodied in different meanings that expand the idea of experiencing and experientiality as such. It is a given type of responsiveness irreducible to the response itself, albeit it has the latter as its necessary condition since experientiality explains what it means to think globally (stort)’ [12] (Ibid, p. 104), as Zapffe suggests, in non-quantitative terms.

In this context, some parallels can be drawn between Zapffe’s theory of empathy and Schopenhauer’s conception of compassion who argues that just person and good person can be distinguished due to the compassion they show [13]. According to Schopenhauer, the good person aims at alleviating the suffering of the others, which may culminate in the willingness to sacrifice his/her own well-being for the sake of the others (Schopenhauer, 2007, §67). In turn, this ethical conduct corresponds to the embodiment of sacrifice in the conduct of heroism, as displayed by Zapffe (Zapffe, 1941, pp. 403-404).

The understanding of man’s meaning of life posed as a question about his/her destiny has much to do with the one of the normative validity of his/her situatedness into the world, where being is not a goal in itself because it is not equivalent to the mode of becoming. That is why we may claim that what Zapffe calls historical responsibility (Ibid, p. 111) is a heterotelic responsibility [14], while world’s responsibility [15] is an autotelic-metaphysical one due to which the metaphysical meaning of life concerns life’s plan as such.

It is not by chance that world’s responsibility, defined as both “response for and response to the world itself”, is described by Zapffe as the optimal expression of awareness of deeds (Ibid, pp. 111-112, Note 19). This expression has an “encompassing and thrilling validity” (Ibid). It is encompassing because it determines the role of the derived norms in all
four intersecting interest fronts. Zapffé also argues that the “developing” personhood first inflicts “pressure of responsibility”, and then “increasing metaphysical perplexity” (Ibid, p. 112). His analysis explains why the metaphysical restlessness is irreducible to the biological dissatisfaction, which, on a macro methodological level, shows why the aforementioned awareness does not lead to imposing certain moral absolutism regardless of its autotelic projections.

The moral choice is driven by a high-value norm [16], while competing with some impulses of more luring norms, which are less “full of value” by nature (Ibid, p. 30). Such an analysis brings us back to the issue whether we can correctly interpret the distinction between ‘more’ and ‘less’ valuable by avoiding moral objectivism, which is grounded in a certain kind of naturalism. Remaining on the level of applied biology, it would mean to equate values with facts, or even worse, to argue that values are ‘natural’ facts if we assume that they are valuable by nature. One of the main methodological disadvantages of adopting such an interpretation is that we should accept by default that the more developed (in a biological sense) forms have a higher moral potential [17].

Regarding the biological perspective, another problem derives from evaluating the metaphysical moral need as a “prolongation, as an interpellation of the development from unconscious reflex to responsible choices of action made on a broad basis” (Ibid, p. 121). Zapffé himself is aware of the difficulties regarding such a “biologized” (“biologistisk”) interpretation arguing that it is in tune with the one concerning distress reactions (reactions-nød) [18] (Ibid), which arise from man’s knowledge of death – “the last and the bitterest fruit of knowledge” (Ibid). Extrapolating Zapffé’s analysis, I reach the conclusion that the aforementioned biologization of morality can lead to reducing it to a certain form of moral behaviorism due to which moral responsibility to be examined from the perspective of stimulus-reaction. Not less problematic is another statement made by Zapffé, namely, that we should keep in mind that moral guilt can take place in biological, as well as in social, autotelic and metaphysical fields of interests (Ibid, p. 308). On the other hand, if we agree with him that in an ethical trial, we do not have to measure the “technical correctness” (den tekniske rigtighet) with the factual result, but with one’s good will, which is described as one’s subjective understanding of the deeds (Ibid, p. 309), it would mean to favor both the instrumentalization of morality and a certain type of ungrounded moral relativism.
1.1.1. The Role of Social Morality

Another questionable issue is how to interpret Zapffe’s definition of social morality [19]. Undoubtedly, so-called social environment, which does not overlap with social behavior, is based on understanding the interests of the others rather than on merely being focused on one’s self-understanding. However, referring to such an approach still does not contribute to clarifying how to determine the origin and the function of the values as having unquestionable ethical validity. Zapffe discusses the role of social or ‘absolute’ values adopted by so-called moral geniuses, and possibly by religious and technological geniuses (Ibid, p. 230), without explicitly revealing what the moral aspects of these values are.

Related contradictions arise from Zapffe’s definition of duty, which is examined by the idealists not only from the perspective of the presumed superiority of moral idea, but also, to a bigger extent, from the one of ‘feeling of duty’ (ut fra en følelse av “pligt”) (Ibid). Judging by the latter definition, I argue that examining the heterotelic aspect of duty means to explore it against the background of cosequentialist rather than deontological ethics since it is determined as a strive for avoiding unpleasant consequences (Ibid). On the other hand, this interpretation is justified by Zapffe by referring to arguments of the field of ethical gradualism as well as by elaborating a precise definition of autotelic validity of the duty itself (Ibid). On a macro methodological level, it leads to reviving the role of duty by combining definitions, which characterize some contradicting ethical paradigms.

On the other hand, investigating Zapffe’s theory of so-called social morality raises the problem that we should either wrongly postulate the existence of a certain asocial morality (if the social morality is only one among many different types of morality, as he suggests), or if we accept it, we should ambiguously interpret (Ibid, p. 53, Note 1) juridical and ethical categories as ontologically interchangeable ones. I emphasize, however, that we have more arguments in favor of immoral society rather than in favor of asocial morality, which would put in question the normative validity of morality as such since it presumes counting the interpersonal relationships as a necessary condition for discussing morality in general.

If we recognize a given type of consequentialist morality in Zapffe’s sense, it would lead to misleadingly equating social and moral motivation, as well as neglecting the premises and the impact of the egoistic and altruistic demands [20]. Referring to Zapffe’s definition of demand (Ibid, p. 52, Note 1), I argue that it is discussable whether we can determine the satisfaction of the egoistic need as a direct process (in so far as their object is the self
himself/herself) in contrast to the altruistic ones, as Zapfè suggests. Furthermore, from the fact that altruism is directed to the others, it does not follow that it has a secondary normative validity. Otherwise, the indifference would have had a higher value in itself.

On a macro methodological level, it would mean to deny the role of autotelic-metaphysical morality in Zapfè’s sense by simplifying its role to the absolutization of the survival instinct. The other alternative is to investigate the genealogy of the norms and their practical application as determined within the framework of utilitarian ethics, which support the questionable justification of what Zapfè calls biological morality. Thus egoism and altruism would have been quantitatively defined depending on whether they affect one or many individuals, while the qualitative aspects of the definition would have been employed, as Zapfè points out, in respect with the level of interference between so-called desire for happiness and desire for association with others in society (Ibid, p. 242). In this context, it is important to emphasize that merely in a sympathetic environment in Zapfè’s sense, the other can be described as a bearer of similar or different interests.

Defining social morality in contrast to juridical ethics, Zapfè assumes that discussing social morality is not necessarily relying on different arguments (Ibid, p. 53, Note 1). Examining his theory, I argue that moral rules can be adopted while formulating juridical judgments, but from that, however, it does not follow that these rules can replace the judgments in question. Furthermore, from the fact that both moral and juridical rules benefit formulating social sanctions and social veto in Zapfè’s sense, it does not follow that they are affecting the rehabilitation of the complex polifrontal interactions. Last but not least, outlining the claim that the concept of morality has nothing to do with the interest fronts contradicts Zapfè’s own clarifications of placing a certain type of morality into the autotelic-metaphysical field.

Zapfè outlines that the metaphysical environment should be determined as strengthened by a sympathetic disposition [21] (Ibid, p. 67), and as such, it should affect the humankind alone because the objective is no longer to get the gist of the world and life themselves, but the objective concerning man’s presence into the world. Regarding man’s search for existential meaning, one should stress the idea of searching in order to compare and contrast its embodiments in the different fronts. Concerning morality, Zapfè defines this behavior as “valuable” (vuderingsmaessig) (Ibid, p. 69). The fight for finding a real metaphysical solution takes into account that the differences stem from the metaphysical
morality, which depends on the way one should serve one’s metaphysical interests (Ibid, p. 197).

2. The Genealogy of Existential Pessimism

2.1. The Experience of Pain and the Birth of Pessimism

Zapffe’s understanding of the internalization of pain [22] is regarded as based on the biological predispositions of the individual (Ibid, p. 89). Similarly, analyzing the principle of pleasure is done from the perspective of ‘stimulus-reaction’, i.e. from the one of ‘natural’ causality, which is defined as presumably overlapping with the logical causality. One of the main methodological concerns about this interpretation, however, derives from the simplification of the normative validity of experience. If we accept such an interpretation as a noncontradictory one, it would mean that tragic in Zapffe’s sense would be explored as driven by physical pain alone, which contradicts his own theory, namely, it would mean so-called surplus pessimism to be reduced to what he calls deficient pessimism. While it was mainly the character, which was examined in respect with the essence of man’s culture of fixations regarding some biological and cultural norms, the word personality was directed against the quantitative conditions, against the capacity as such (Ibid, p. 107).

In turn, the growing capacity of the individual affects the strive for developing more complex nets of fixations and surrogate objects due to the arising need of overcoming substantial deficiencies; a stage of development that makes pain and suffering irreducible to each other. As Zapffe outlines, suffering “widens” personality regardless of expansion’s usefulness (tjenlighet) (Ibid, p. 109).

A similar point is made by Schopenhauer who argues that the essence of existence is suffering, which is most apparent in the life of human beings due to their intellectual capacities (Schopenhauer, 2004, pp. 1-10). However, the latter are not a tool for relieving the suffering, but they rather make it more visible in human lives since human beings cannot overcome the suffering in question. This understanding of the initial deficiency of humankind is comparable with Zapffe’s ontological groundings of cosmic feeling of panic as well as with his analysis of the impotence of elaborating mechanisms of fixation. While Zapffe discerns between fate and destiny, Schopenhauer finds the reason of the ineradicable suffering in the blind will, which characterizes the deficiency of existence as a result of the impossibility of will’s fulfillment (Schopenhauer, 2007).
According to Zapffe, (emotional) depression and (intellectual) pessimism brought by humankind’s historical misery lose nevertheless their ground when evil reasons are defeated and disenchanted as a deficiency phenomenon or a wrong fixation (Zapffe, 1941, p. 157). Zapffe argues that there is no principal obstacle to disregard Schopenhauer’s, Hartmann’s and Leopardi’s theories [23] of evil, as well as the remaining influence (de gjenvaerendes indvirkning) on the common well-being to be reduced to a minimum, albeit the practical difficulties look considerably bigger (Ibid). In turn, the metaphysical value pessimism, which deprives its bearer of all gifts of consolation, provides a maximum of experiential pressure and moral sensitivity at once (Ibid). In this context, Zapffe describes so-called human qualities (one expression, which is defined in a vague way) as mainly referring to the autotelic-metaphysical surplus of consciousness (det autotelisk-metafysiske bevissthetsoverskudd) (Ibid), which is characterized with a powerful requirement for confirmation urged to expanding and an interest contact, meaning and connection (Ibid). It represents the will to shape not only a house and a landscape, but the whole universe after human ideals, to radiate eternity and endlessness by love and spirit (Ibid).

Judging by the aforementioned investigations, I draw the conclusion that such an analysis stems from Zapffe’s attempt to clarify the origin of the axiological conflicts embodied in the complex nature of pessimism. However, it does not mean that Schopenhauer’s pessimism can be explored as deprived of normative validity, taking into account that Schopenhauer himself looks for finding normatively valid means for living with pessimism by cultivating sensitivity towards otherness.

On the other hand, as Zapffe points out, the axiological implications of pessimism do not exclude the role of so-called new, social orientations, as well as the one of “technological triumphs” (Ibid). Otherwise, it would have meant to underrate one of Zapffe’s main principles, namely, the mutual ontological dependence of the different interest fronts. In this context, I conclude that we cannot talk about casually simplified pessimism [24], and then, about metaphysical one, since it would lead to recognizing the latter as a connotation without denotation, namely, to justify metaphysical pessimism as independent of its factual premises, determined as a form of ‘unreal’ pessimism satisfying autotelic needs in Zapffe’s sense.

He argues that the clearer the interest is formulated, the better (more precisely) the environment is described (Ibid, p. 220). That is why what we can call a ‘higher’ type of pessimism’ [25] is defined by Zapffe as a value pessimism, which is not based on the prevailing

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role of evil, but rather on the idea that good cannot be extended (Ibid, p. 411). For one to be a bearer of suffering of the highest order (lidelsesbaerer av høieste orden), his/her heart should be full not only of hunger and frost, having holes in the tissue, but also of divine desperation, of choice’s difficulty; thus one “gets” the issue, which he/she calls free will (Ibid, p. 239). Zapffe emphasizes that this is the only one door, which life allowed to stay open behind its prisoner in order he/she to keep the hope and inspiration regarding the thought of liberation alive (Ibid). The only one thing, which life has given, as one feels it now, is will (being confident that life drive is tied) (Ibid).

Regardless of the contradictions deriving from his definition of biological value, Zapffe’s methodological contribution concerns the reconsideration of the universal pessimistic point of view as intrinsically connected with already examined idea of the morality of world order. The latter embodies the principle that all the destinies of the interest bearers should have a meaning “both in the big and small things” (Ibid, p. 411). It presumes that we have already set up the demand for the moral world order (characterized by Zapffe as a matter of metaphysical justice). It is defined as a dispensable sign of what the culturally relevant view regarding whole-man (hel-menneske) is, as interpreted from a humanist perspective (Ibid).

There is a particular opinion that it is the metaphysical interest dominating the metaphysical front that makes the pessimistic views of life take place under the supposed cosmic conditions (Ibid: 220). On a micro methodological level, pessimism is characterized by Zapffe as provoked by the lacking belief in the opportunity of interest realization (Ibid, p. 410).

On a macro methodological level, the nature of Zapffe’s surplus pessimism can be revealed by exploring it as intrinsically connected to the one of metaphysical morality [26] in so far as they both have their origin in the autotelic-metaphysical front. The autotelic component of pessimism derives from one’s conviction, which has a high positive value because, according to Zapffe, it justifies his/her higher intellectual honesty (wholeness) [27]. The concrete representations of the autotelic-metaphysical engagement can be seen in the internalized tension (due to the functioning of consciousness as a self-consciousness) between real and desired in Zapffe’s sense, which in turn is strengthened by the distinction between desirably real and necessarily fictive (det ønskelig-reale og det nødvendig-fiktive) (Ibid, p. 163) [28]. Such a complex understanding of the ontological tension is another proof in favor of the thesis that not only objective tragic, but also suffering as such are irreducible to the biologically verifiable pain, albeit the latter might be their necessary condition.
2.1.1. The Role of Surplus and Deficient Pessimism

Adopting the distinction between factual and principal has some other implications such as defining objective and subjective tragic in Zapffe’s sense. According to him, the objective tragic is the one that can easily be determined as a destruction of the principal possibility for fight (Ibid, p. 336). It more apparently illustrates how autotelic and metaphysic interests are interconnected. Thus the impossibility of realizing the autotelic mode of life’s power and complexity, when the subject faces its embodied representations, is considered as an objective one in so far as it affects the understanding of the life mode as presumably non-achievable by the developing existential mode of the subject [29]. In turn, the autotelic deficiency regarding the process of self-realization provokes metaphysical insecurity, which is not a form of pure subjectivism. That is why man’s veto breaking his/her trust in life down comes not from the subject, but from life itself displaying the impossibility the latter to be dialectically examined as a possibility for itself.

On a meta-methodological level, it is the issue of normative validity that can make us understand Zapffe’s explanation of so-called tragic destiny of tree [30], which misses both the opportunity to choose and the strive for perfection (fuldkommenhetslaengsel) (Ibid, p. 337). The projections of tragic’s normative validity affect the opportunity to recognize and question the impossibility of realization not as a fact, but rather as a mode that in turn includes not only the awareness of unrealizable, but also the one of inaccomplishability of the possible fixations and surrogates.

In this context, Zapffe’s distinction between ‘deficient’ and ‘surplus’ pessimism (en underskuddets og en overskuddets pessimisme) has to be clarified (Ibid, p. 221). The tension arises from the comparison of the normative validity of the ‘fulfillability’ of the tasks with the one of the impossibility because both of them are driven by autotelic needs of specifying what fulfillment is, whose confrontation is grounded in the differences regarding the ontological premises [31]. According to Zapffe, due to deficient pessimism, the bearer has lost hope and belief because he/she is not adequate (ikke straekker til): the task is clear enough, as well as its solution brings salvation, but he/she is unable to perform it (Ibid). In turn, due to surplus pessimism, the lack of confidence is a result of the understanding that none of the tasks one can engage with could give what one innermost strives for and cannot give up, albeit the tasks were solved to perfection (Ibid). It takes place against the background of the misunderstood
distinction between objectively and normatively valid whose most puzzling aspect derives from the presumption that ontological validity is a necessary and sufficient condition for defining the normative one. It leads to evaluating Zapffe’s pessimism on the principle A or not-A, where A is the category of hope [32].

Regarding surplus pessimism, the explicitly stated lack of both ontological and normative validity of the possibility (i.e. of the possibility in itself) does not stem from the sum of the different kinds of impossibility (such as the ones concerning the means). Furthermore, it is the understanding of the experiential inability for itself that has a positively defined normative validity, albeit it is practically unrealizable as fulfilling given experience by adopting the corresponding means.

Going back to Zapffe’s definition that deficiency pessimism takes place when the person has lost his/her hope and belief because he/she cannot extend them (Ibid), I argue that the ontological lack is considered as reducing the impossibility to a physical lack of possibilities rather than to a possibility for itself. It is the impossibility understood as a lack of potential on side of man who cannot reach the goal by adopting the means he/she has.

According to Zapffe, the ‘more real’ pessimism (“Den “mere egte” pessimisme”) should be considered as a function of animals’ pure biological pessimism [33], when the conditions and chances are sufficiently plain (Ibid, p. 220). Zapffe refers to Schopenhauer’s theory finding a proof of it in Kowalewski’s monograph Studies in Psychology of Pessimism [34] by arguing that Kowalewski “confirms” Schopenhauer’s conception (Ibid, Note 1). However, another crucial issue arises again from Zapffe’s simplification of the aims of Schopenhauer’s pessimism reducing the latter to some basic biological representations, without taking into account some of Schopenhauer’s works [35], which examine the interpersonal relationships. Otherwise, it would mean to talk about a specific type of pessimism, which can be compared with Zapffe’s theory of deficient pessimism, but does not characterize Schopenhauer’s one at all.

In turn, ‘unreal’ pessimism (“Uegte pessimism”) (Ibid) is defined as pessimism, which is a matter of building a desire picture, i.e. a result of world’s underestimation, which has a ‘neurotic’ origin (Ibid). According to Zapffe, the pessimist “takes revenge on life” (Ibid) because something has gone wrong with him/her in one or another partial front (Ibid).

However, it is problematic to claim that the desire picture in Zapffe’s sense is based on underestimating the world rather than on the lack of providing a relevant evaluation due to the inability of approaching the world in its transperspectivity. Furthermore, the underestimation is
a projection of neuroticism, but it does not concern the gist of the unreal pessimism as such. Otherwise, pessimism would have been just another name of neuroticism.

On the other hand, the important role of all values, which are not understood as strictly ethical ones is determined by Zapffe in a contradictory way. One of the first concerns arises from confronting the affirmation of life achieved in contrast to its partial embodiments. Value of life becomes understandable as situated within the metaphysical front, which does not exclude biological, social, autotelic interests and their interaction due to the fact that the metaphysical front may entail not only autotelic, but also different types of heterotelic needs.

3. Conclusion

Zapffe introduces so-called biological morality in respect with foreseeing the consequences of the moral actions and their normative validity. In this context, I reach the conclusion that Zapffe underrates the fact that what he calls a transition from fixed to unfixed forms presumes cultivating responsibility in the fields of so-called by him social and metaphysical morality while in the one of biological morality, it should be examined as a matter of evolutionary development of the instincts of survival due to the changes posed by the environment.

If we accept Zapffe’s conception of biological morality, as well as what he defines as a value-biological paradox (Ibid, p. 244), it would mean that all living beings are ‘naturally’ moral, which in turn would question the role of morality and the one of ethical gradualism in particular.

On the other hand, investigating Zapffe’s theory of so-called social morality raises the problem that we should either wrongly postulate a certain paradoxal asocial morality (if the one of social nature is only one among many other types of morality, as he suggests), or if we accept it, it would lead to the ambiguous interpretation of juridical and ethical as ontologically interchangeable concepts. Judging by these investigations, I draw the conclusion that we have more arguments in favor of immoral society rather than of asocial morality, which questions again, albeit in a different manner compared to biological morality, the normative validity of social morality.

The problem how to discern biological morality from the social one in Zapffe’s sense is an important issue because it can contribute to rethinking how it is possible to minimize pain and suffering not only for the human species. Analyzing the implications of Zapffe’s theory, I
conclude that one of the main methodological concerns about the examination of suffering and pleasure, as displayed by Zapffe, derives from the simplification of the normative validity of experience if it is reduced to a set of biological functions. Otherwise, it would mean that tragic in Zapffe’s sense should have been examined as driven by the physical pain alone.

Furthermore, tragic, as defined by Zapffe, would have been simplified to the physical end of being and thus it should have been noncontradictory extrapolated to all living beings on Earth, which is against his conception. On a macro methodological level, it would have meant to sublate the distinction between what he calls deficient and surplus pessimism.

In turn, within the framework of metaphysical front, suffering covers the whole spectrum of existential restlessness, fear, emptiness, meaninglessness. The latter is one of the most illuminative reasons why man’s existential mode should be defined as having a high normative validity.

Regarding the methodological benefits of Zapffe’s theory, I also point out the fact that he implicitly rehabilitates the role of biological gradualism by rethinking the one of biological front as such while building a complex metaphysical theory of humankind’s existential alienation. Extrapolating the aforementioned investigations, I conclude that Zapffe’s surplus pessimism does not have to be negatively examined as a form of nihilism, but rather as a form of constructive criticism of the arising faith in technocratic invasion and interpersonal alienation, which can be minimized by cultivating empathy and love.

In this context, I draw the conclusion that regardless of the methodological similarities between Schopenhauer’s and Zapffe’s theories of pessimism, we should also pay attention to the way Zapffe criticizes Schopenhauer’s pessimism and his theory of tragic in particular. The practical implications of this issue can be outlined if we examine what Zapffe calls value pessimism.

Extrapolating Zapffe’s conception, I argue that cosmic feeling of panic determines man’s experiential gestalt to be considered as what I called moral experiential gestalt: a gestalt that contributes the process of self-realization to be guaranteed by showing respect and solidarity with all living beings. The reasons for justifying this gestalt as a moral experiential gestalt can be also outlined by comparing it with the reasons regarding the role of compassion, as represented in the writings of Schopenhauer. On a macro methodological level, I suggest that one of the crossing points can be found in their interpretation of empathy and compassion as one of the few ways of living with the fundamental feeling of alienation and cosmic panic.
Thus one can learn how to put oneself in someone else’s shoes in order to find life’s meaning against the background of the fundamental meaningless, which is recognized as a surplus of meaning and being.

Another problem arises if we justify a certain type of consequentialist morality in Zapffe’s sense, which would lead to ambiguously equating social and moral motivation, as well as to neglecting the premises and the impact of egoistic and altruistic demands. Furthermore, adopting the principles of consequentialist morality would mean to simplify the role of autotelic need in the metaphysical front. The other alternative is to investigate the genealogy of the norms and their practical application as determined again from a utilitarian perspective, which concerns the quantitative minimization of suffering that derives from the unquestionable presupposition of biological morality. Thus egoism and altruism would be problematically described as depending on whether they affect one or many individuals, while the qualitative aspects of the definition itself would be provoked by so-called desire for happiness determined in naturalist terms. In this context, it is important to emphasize that merely in a sympathetic environment, the other is justified as a bearer of similar or different interests in Zapffe’s sense, which is another proof in favor of the thesis that the problem of biological morality and utilitarian ethics requires further elaboration.

On a macro methodological level, I argue that it is the issue of normative validity that can make us anticipate Zapffe’s explanation of tree’s tragic destiny, which misses both the opportunity to choose and the strive for accomplishment. That is why the projections of the normative validity concern the possibility to recognize and question the impossibility of realization not as a fact, but as a mode. In turn, the latter presumes not only awareness of what unrealizable is, but also the double-bindness of the multiple mechanisms of fixations and surrogates illustrating why metaphysical interests are dominating.

I also conclude that the intrinsic connection between Zapffe’s value pessimism and autotelic-metaphysical morality can be outlined if we examine how they both have their origin in the complex relationships between the autotelic and metaphysical fronts. The autotelic aspect of pessimism derives from human conviction, which has a high positive value because it justifies one’s higher intellectual honesty, as Zappfe argues. This honesty provides the accomplishment of man’s self-realization to be understood as accomplishing the process of existential wholeness.
NOTES

[1] Naess defines Zapffe’s ideas as “disturbing, humorous, and thorough” (Reed and Rothenberg, 1993, p.104) outlining his attempts at exploiting the vulnerability of human being.

[2] According to Zapffe, people interpret tragic as a part of the struggle for existence looking for adapting it to a big ‘biosophical’ (biologic) unity. Biosophy means a philosophy, one theoretical view on the existence, which is oriented towards biology (Zapffe, 1992, pp. 141-142); this vision is focused on prolonging experience, which for biosophy is only a matter of curiosity (Ibid, p. 143). Furthermore, he points out that biosophy is a way of thinking, which is built on biology in a manner acknowledged by life. People can think about the first coming biosophical conclusion from the position of observation and introspection, without being accused of employing “free and irresponsible fantasy” (Zapffe, 1992a, p. 269).

[3] Zapffe points out that the arising lack of fixation could mean a higher biological feeling of responsibility (høiere biologisk ansvarsfølelse) and a growing need of a fixation help in the form of moral norms (Ibid, p. 48). It also signifies that it is an opportunity for increased life strength through experiencing, as well as for rescuing by making changes in the environment where the fixation form is doomed to take place (Ibid). Due to the changes in the surrounding world, the whole life’s front can be displaced (Ibid). In this context, Zapffe argues that the difference between biological and over-biological equipments (biologisk og overbiologisk utrustning) partly corresponds to the one between fixed and unfixed use of organs (Ibid). By surplus one means a quantitative measurement of capacity as well as a lack of fixation understood in a qualitative trial (Ibid).

[4] Zapffe argues that morality has a meaning only in respect with a norm, which should (bør) be fulfilled (Ibid, p. 30). It is important to make a distinction between desire (lyst) and value (vaerdi), which was later deepened because not every single choice has a moral value: only the one, which ‘serves’ as a ‘top norm’ (high value norm) (‘høiværdig’ norm) in the competition with some impulses that are more attractive but less valuable in nature (Ibid).

[5] According to Zapffe, there are four interest fronts, namely, biological, social, autotelic and metaphysical ones (Ibid, pp. 50-77).

[6] Zapffe outlines that this is the “need of perfectibility as a way to confirmation of life”, which is blocked due to the tragic constellations in respect with the course of the real solutions, as well as by being referred to false solutions or destruction (Ibid).

[7] Zapffe argues that if the need for meaning could have been satisfied in a different way, it would have been the most important issue: then, we could have thought about giving up on God and immortality. But such a decision would have caused us troubles: that is why we hold the idea of metaphysical salvation, which is entailed in the probability of analogy anyway (Ibid, p. 67). In this context, Zapffe points out that many people confuse their metaphysical need with the religious one (Ibid, p. 68).

[8] According to Zapffe, both morality and justice presume a certain kind of “developed consciousness” to be adopted (utviklet bevissthet) (which again questions the role of biological morality and its bearers), as well as a given degree of non-fixation that does not have to lead to
relativism but rather to avoiding absolutism. However, thinking about morality and justice by adopting oppositions, on the principle A-not A, contributes merely to showing that they are not absolute categories, which can be justified by employing certain imperatives, as Zapffe suggests.

[9] Furthermore, he provides well-grounded arguments in distinguishing biological hubris from heroism, which represents in a conflict situation the quantitative, more dynamic (active) idealism in contrast to the qualitative static one, which can appear in all combinations (Ibid, p. 223).

[10] Johannes Müller (1801-1858) is referred to as the father of experimental physiology. In his monograph *Handbook of Man’s Physiology. Lectures (Handbuch der Physiologie des Menschen: für Vorlesungen.*) (1834-1840), Müller argued that physiology and psychology are to be subsumed under a broader philosophy of nature. According to Macleod, his philosophical views show the influence of the German metaphysical idealists, but he “might be more properly classed as an Aristotelian in his conception of nature, and his approach to science was very close to that of Goethe” (Macleod, 1968).

[11] I introduce the concept of experiential morality as based on rehabilitating the role of moral experience by reviving the normative validity of our feelings and emotions in respect with clarifying both the complexity of moral motivation and decision-making process.

[12] Zapffe argues that one does not want to think for a long time (laenge), but to think globally (Ibid).

[13] This idea is gradually elaborated in Schopenhauer’s writings (most explicitly in *The World as a Will and Representation* (1818/1819), §67).

[14] According to Zapffe, autotelic self-expression is defined as ahistorical because it is capsulated “in and with its existence” (Ibid, p. 62). It cannot turn into something new (Ibid). Since it is autotelic, the autotelic experience can be detached from all connections with life in general, and to appear as discontinuing in respect with the grounding biological-social strive inasmuch it has an indicator of sterility (Ibid).

[15] Zapffe argues that world’s responsibility is the optimal expression of man’s awareness of acting”, which requires a moral norm having a similar validity: “one norm, which encompasses and supplies all the partial norms we know from the given interest fronts” (Ibid, pp. 111-112).

[16] Zapffe talks about so-called metaphysical-moral scruple (den metafysisk-moralske anføgtelse) (Ibid, p. 124). According to him, the one who is sensitive to morality feels oneself also responsible for the consequences of actions, which cannot be predicted (Ibid, p.125). One knows that one’s “prima causa”, which carries out from now until the end of the world, is something no one can have a notion of (Ibid). That is why there is something repulsive for him/her in the requirement to stop the work on motivation (Ibid). Analyzing the aforementioned theory, I argue that such an interpretation leads to justifying autotelic-metaphysical morality, which in turn would affect the establishment of a certain type of moral absolutism resulting in determinism. Putting in question the role of moral motivation would cause morality to be misconceptualized as a form of fatalism. Regarding the status of the moral
subject, it would mean that the complexity of the interests would negatively affect his/her moral motivation, which in turn would make the latter entail some contradicting factors having different normative validity. According to Zapffe, the highly moral person chooses between on the one hand, violence against reason: an underrating of the “finest, deepest, and most ‘sacred’ in his /her being”, which is a betrayal of human in him/her and a refusal of the relevant “biological, social or autotelic” action, on the other one (Ibid, p. 126). One of the contradictions in this context is that Zapffe reduces morality to autotelic-metaphysical morality, namely, to the morality of the world order, at the expense of giving priority to an autotelic action, which is a micro-embodiment of this order indeed. Zapffe also provides the problematic interpretation of the autotelic in so far as he contradicts autotelic-metaphysical and autotelic, which is supposed to have a higher normative validity. However, if so, it remains unclear what are the criteria for distinguishing the autotelic-metaphysical morality of the world’s order from a given autotelic action, taking into account that in both cases ‘autotelism’ derives from the self-sufficient regulation of the reality as a result of a given order. In other words, it would mean that the metaphysical-moral scruple should motivate alone what Zapffe defines as an autotelically right action.

[17] This is a statement revealing Zapffe’s conception how animals try to overcome pain. However, he poses arguments against when one replaces a fact with a value by arguing that people have substantially ‘higher’ moral values. Such an interpretation would lead us to denying that the must-mode has a different normative validity compared to the ethical and biological points of view. Otherwise, it would mean to favor a certain form of ethical speciesism.

[18] Zapffe points out that the transition to the moral need is not something new. Most of the metaphysically aware individuals examine their biological-social environment as a part of their metaphysical environment; as the only one field where it is possible to gain an experience and do a trial (Ibid, p. 127). That is why they used to practice their metaphysical morality, as well as to elaborate a universal life course throughout partial courses (Ibid).

[19] The first definition of social morality takes place as a footnote (Ibid, p. 53, Note 1). Zapffe argues that the word morality is used in the sense of “social morality” in contrast to juridically relevant conduct (Ibid). Furthermore, he points out that such an interpretation, which is widespread in both everyday language and ethical literature, raises some “unnecessary difficulties” (Ibid). All the questions become simpler when one goes through the following way of thinking: The concept of morality is used regardless of the nature of the interest fronts. In turn, the one of social morality also entails the juridically relevant behavior. That is why one can make a distinction by using the expression ‘juridical ethics’ (Ibid). The parallels are drawn on the level of the variability of juridical directives and ethical norms, which change in time and place (Ibid, p. 55) by clarifying that the moral rules can be incorporated in the process of law giving (Ibid, p. 56). Later on in the monograph, Zapffe provides a more specific distinction between morality and law arguing that we have ethical justice and ethical injustice (Ibid, p. 77). However, this specification is a result of the way he examines the polifrontal engagements rather than of finding some reasons within the framework of morality by specifying why it is irreducible to the field of law.

According to Zapffe, sympathetic environment is closely tied with the metaphysical tragic since the indifferent environment gives more room to the chance, while within the sympathetic environment, tragic should be “preferably evoked” by misunderstandings, mistakes and ignorance (Ibid, p. 365). He also argues that we should make a distinction between sympathy concerned with the interest of greatness and some other interests of the bearer (Ibid).

Zapffe argues that the issues of pain and suffering (spiritual suffering in particular) are examined in detail in chapter sixth in On the Tragic. They are defined as a possible means for achieving high autotelic, social and moral, and metaphysical objectives (Ibid, p. 85).

In Studies in Pessimism, Schopenhauer argued that one of the greatest absurdities regarding philosophical systems is that they declare evil “to be negative in its character” (Schopenhauer, 2004, p. 1). However, it is positive because it makes “its own existence felt” (Ibid). Since Zapffe mentioned only the last name, he might have meant Schopenhauer’s student Eduard von Hartmann (1842-1906) and his three stages of illusion (Zapffe, 1941, p. 553), which ground the tragic. Referring to Freud, Hartmann advocated the theory of the necessary conflict between happiness and culture (Ibid). Regardless of the lack of a detailed examination, he contributed to the “Renaissance” after the idealistic optimism concerning the “tragic dark time” (“tragiske mørketid”) disappeared (Ibid). The last reference is to the Italian poet and philosopher Giacomo Leopardi and his theory of pleasure saying that everything is evil because the purpose of the universe is evil (Leopardi, 2013).

See Zapffe, 1941, p. 220-221.

According to Zapffe, one can work with a scale, which has two poles, namely, the “factual” (“saklig”) pole, on the right side, and the “neurotic” (“nevrotisk”) pole, on the left side (Ibid, p. 220). Thus a given case of pessimism can be placed on the right or on the left depending on the circumstances (Ibid).

According to Zapffe, for the purposes of giving real help for life, the idea of the entity of metaphysical environment should be “supplied” with a moral learning (morallaere), which connects the organic (organisk) with the experience picture, the desire picture, or the work picture (Ibid, p. 221). In turn, the morality of experience picture provides a future metaphysical perspective, which neither would it change the character of the picture itself, nor it would bring some changes in the morality (Ibid, p. 222). By contrast, the work picture (with its flexibility) may provoke more varying diversity (mere broget mangfoldighet) of moral rules than the one displayed by religions (Ibid).

The word redelighet in Norwegian has two meanings (‘honesty’ and ‘integrity’), which, can be used as ontologically interchangeable in Zapffe’s theory of pessimism since the latter concerns the existential wholeness of the individual. One is recognized in the process of development of his/her intellectual capabilities that are inseparable from his/her emotions and feelings.

Such a distinction requires going beyond the genealogy of the principles of overcompensation in which the experiential picture is neutralized by building desire picture (ønskebillede). Due to the latter, the metaphysical matter is “tightened in the contours” and reduced to a partly manageable task (Ibid, p. 207).
[29] Zapfè argues that in the foreground, we have the ‘personal’ tragic, where the interest bearer is an individual. In this case, collective interest is experienced as a personally grounded one (Ibid, p. 341).

[30] Zapfè discusses the case of the apple tree, which is examined regardless of man’s understanding (Ibid, p. 336). He argues that from tree’s point of view, there is nothing dissatisfying every single year it to get the same number of relevant big apples, with a periodical variation of what average is (Ibid, pp. 336-337). Since the tree does not have the ability to choose and the strive for perfection (from the point of view of unrealized substrates and inherited tendencies of fixation), it is deprived (avskarret) of the possibility to experience a tragic destiny (Ibid). Everything changes if the tree or the bunches of trees combine a value with the current growth and for that reason, it feels a stimulus or finds a reason to strive for, or recognizes it and is proud of it, when it (the tree) appears of itself (Ibid). According to Zapfè, the alarming point is first the situation, when the new value starts to compete with the continuum’s consideration (Ibid). In the process of production of more and big enough apples, the tree sees the only one meaning of its existence. Zapfè emphasizes that with the new value, a new catastrophe and a new perspective take place (Ibid) quoting E. Berggrav that the tree becomes tragic when man projects on it his/her own need of confirmation, his/her urge for perfection, his/her strive for endlessness, his/her tendency for going beyond borders (”graenseoverskriddende tendens”) (Ibid). Such a need for affiliation is not triggered by the principle of ontological participation (i.e. by a physical analogy), but rather by providing a normative analogy, which is defined as justifying the metaphysical interests as such.

[31] Extrapolating Zapfè’s statement, I argue that the confrontation is a result of the clash of real and unreal autotelic interests.

[32] Zapfè discusses the role of factual and principal hope since the latter functions as a nonfactual hope grounding the ‘surplus’ pessimism (Ibid). He also examines the impact of hope in respect with the definition of tragic pointing out that in the tragic course, the destruction of hope’s way is embodied (Ibid, p. 410). Thus the tragic finds its place on the way between hope and no hope since in the beginning of the tragic course, there should be also some hope available, which to be killed in the end (Ibid).

[33] However, even if we adopt Zapfè’s own arguments regarding animals’ biological pessimism as a form of simple pessimism, it raises the following question. How can we discern pessimism from the purely physical states of animals’ immediate suffering?

[34] Arnold Christian Felix Kowalewski (1973-1945) was a professor in philosophy in Köningsberg. Except his monograph Studies in Psychology of Pessimism (Studien zur Psychologie des Pessimismus) (1904), he has published several works on Kant’s and Schopenhauer’s philosophical theories.

[35] I mainly refer to chapter eight (On Ethics) in the second volume of Parerga and Paralipomena (1851), as well as to The World as Will and Representation (Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung)( 1818-1819) and the essay Studies in Pessimism: the Essays of Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) (in its English translation of 2004).
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