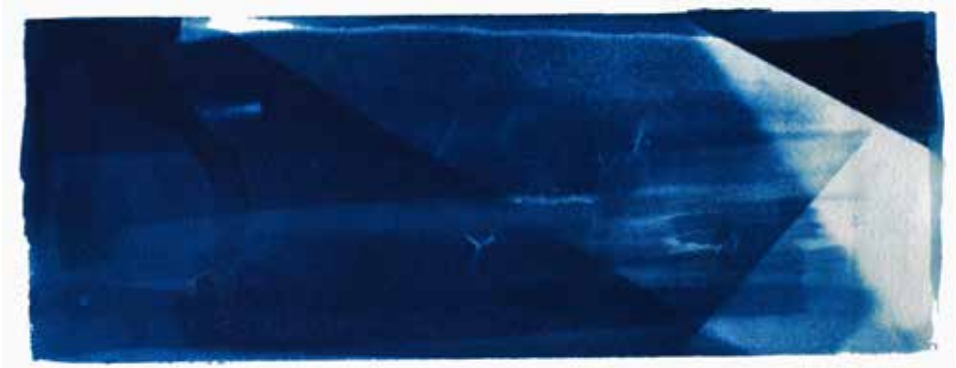


FILOSOFIJA



Violeta Mackialo. *Kelionė tęsiasi. Gilyn*, 2022
21,5 × 19 cm, cianotipija, ofortas, monotipija

Existential Crisis

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The essay explores the nature of human existence and the basis of all existentialisms in Spanish and Russian literatures. Such literatures appear in the times of crisis – the parting of the ways between two social orders or life worlds; they depict figures which reflect and compare such life worlds and are asked to make a choice between them not in terms of the way they categorize nature or humans, but by raising the question which of the worlds allows the human Self to act honorably, truthfully, with full respect of others and oneself. This suggests that the true existential Self cannot be adequately understood in terms of social categories and systems of values, but only in concrete existential action, revealing the unconditional *self and other worth*.

Keywords: value, Self worth, freedom, crisis, life world, comparison, transcendental reflection.

Introduction

The discussion focuses on human crisis not as it appears in the Critical School of Horkheimer, Adorno and others, but as it is depicted at the most fundamental level by writers such as Cervantes in Spain and Russian writers, including Dostoyevsky in Russia. Other figures from these regions will be mentioned, but what is significant, is that they write „between“ two life worlds – one dying and the other being born. The one being born is called by Cervantes the „iron age“ and by Dostoyevsky, the „age of science“. Being „between“ the writers depict both worlds and make them transparent one through the other. But to understand the crisis, the parting of the ways, it is advisable to explicate the emerging world – the iron-scientific world in the modern West. The emergence is made clear by contrast-

ing it to another world apparent through specific figures which show the difference between them and are asked to make a radical, *existential choice which world is acceptable*. These figures experience and *existential crisis which must negate an unacceptable life world on the principle – the arche – of Self-worth*. As we shall see, such *arche* is distinct from any social value and from social, scientific and philosophical categories: it is singular and appears only in *existential commitment to action*. We must point out that values are social constructs, imposed on environment and humans: they might be the value of labor, religious values, scientific, technical and many other “functional values” serving a great variety of interests. The latter are regarded as subjective and even arbitrary – they could be sold, bought, discarded and changed – best exhibited in any market place in the signs:

“values for sale”. But *Self-worth* is not a value and it is the most objective human presence, specifically appearing during the crisis of a life world demanding an answer: is this life world adequate to respect human *Self-worth* beyond any social value; if not, I must commit myself to concrete, existential action which would demand the recognition of *my and the Self-worth of all others*. As all existentialisms would have it, in many cases there appear „limiting figures“ challenging our habitual assumptions. Thus figures, such as Don Quixote, Dimitri, Bazarov, Tolstoy, Gandhi, Frankl, Socrates, show us the ultimate, “objective” standard of who we are beyond any value and price. The task of this writing is to disclose such figures as *existential measure* of all values.

The World of Values

The modern Western world it is a process of valuation. Everything in the universe assumes a value to the extent that it serves our material interests. Contrary to claims that the world has no value, the world constructed by modern West is full of values: values for sale, values produced and to be produced, values of stocks and bonds, value of life and even calculated death, social values, and persons are judged as to their value in all of these settings. Indeed, the basic mode of awareness is valuative selectivity. It should be clear also that awareness and perception are no longer given in some pure empirical sense, but are selected on the grounds of valuation. What is given as a plethora of empirical environment is, for the most part, ignored. What is perceived depends on its specific value. There are so-

cial mechanisms which not only consist of values, but evaluation of values that select specific ones deemed relevant in terms of future material benefits. It has been argued that all these values are human and hence the primacy is placed on modern subject as the source of values. This claim would hold if the human were a distinct and decisive category, wherein all other categories and processes were subservient to humans. But this is no longer the case, since other values, such as technologies of various sorts, from electronic media to genetic biochemistry, compel the human to be equivalent to the rest of the values. This means that genetic biochemistry will not treat the human as a special category, but will have to reduce all human functions to biochemistry. Thus the environment, that is constructed on the basis of valuation and is deemed to be objective, requires that the human be treated equally objectively in terms of what such an environment demands, i.e. interpretation of the human as material, chemical, biological, physical entity in order that such constructed technical values could be applied and thus useful and valuable. All these features comprise the modern *iron age*.

The materialistic ontology, as a foundation of the *iron age*, also shifted the understanding of the “nature” of what constitutes humans, and nature was regarded at the lowest common denominator: biological and physiological, where the only reason for human life is to survive. Thus there are the major writers and philosophers (including the entire British crowd, such as Hobbes) claiming that life is a constant war of all against all, as means for self preservation. In Cervantes’ text, *Don Quixote*, the

knight Don Quixote is constantly shocked by the crudeness, the aggressiveness and belligerence of people who, in the emerging *iron age* are paraded as normal. The famous writer Zola already “naturalizes” human life to extol the biological and physiological aspects as the way humans are in reality. His writings explicate the following composition. First, there is the modern materialist world of the emerging and unchecked capitalism; everything is a value commodity, a means for profit and production, so much raw resources whose force has its own logic. Everyone, the boss as well as the masses of grimy, hungry, dull, and reduced workers to social productive labor value, are compelled to subsist at the level of raw materiality, dig and claw, kill and be killed in order to live one more day. All are exposed to the whims of forces which no one can master. All are subject to the very process they thought to have created freely only to discover that the very creations, as material forces, have their own overwhelming “logic”. Second, the extolling of scientific explanation – basically mechanistic-causal with tinges of its collapse toward the conception of „vital needs“, as a legitimization of the entire *iron age*. While this world is deemed to be material, the forces breaking out are vital. Third, the literary language of the time, debunking as best it could the romantic and orphic traditions, purifying itself from the earlier mannerisms, and finally selecting subject matters and persons which are more in line with modern common and daily existence. If there is an inner-critique among writers of each other, it is a critique of an inadequate depiction of the way things really are. Fourth, there

seems to be a constant debunking of the regime or the established and institutionalized order. It is inept or in collusion with unsavory impulses and characters. The figures that people such institutions are either corrupt or easily corruptible by „material“ forces and interests.

This foursome context structures what Zola proclaims to be naturalism. Although Zola was writing in the milieu of all triumphant science, the naturalism of his time cannot be equated with the conceptions of science where squeaky clean atoms and well scrubbed chemicals were orbiting and bonding in accordance with the precision of mathematical rules. The naturalism borrowed only what was mandatory to yield an explanatory order of the murky and at times vitally painted beauty of a daily iron life world. Starting with general impressions we find Zola’s writing to be composed of themes and figures which are reduced to carnality. Zola is not engaged in any scientific explanation but has elevated the iron life world into a literary principle. He parades brute and blind instincts, carnal love and the base side of human nature. He is interested in the animal in human. He distorts the human visage to look like an animal. Thus *Nana*, a beautiful animal, is irresistible due to the power of her sex, an earthy Venus with coarse legs. She is simply a crude adventure of flesh minus progress or tragedy, evil or good; she is obscene. But what of the non-obscene, the seemingly virtuous; in some other works, such as *Bonheur des Dames* or *Joye de Vivre*, where *Denise* is not a heroine thorn between vast choices and tragic decisions; she is simply healthy. In *Pauline* it is not her will that

wins but her health. They are basic forces that have no other purpose except being a flat statement that this is the way life is. Despite the glitter of contemporary environment with technically produced „consumer needs“, whatever is sold is transparent with this natural reflection: healthy sex sells everything and hardly clad „maidens“ flash and wiggle their rumps on mass media to the appreciative cheers of the adoring fans. Nothing new, just one more explicit value: bared body parts sell everything.

All descriptions emerged in a confusion: honor is identified with wealth, imprudence with courage, cunning, lying, exploitation with wisdom. The constant meanings of words overflow into obscure references. Sailors speak one way, traders another, and transporters yet another; their manners of speech appear very aggressive, exploiting, and contentious over insignificant trifles. The new emergent world is dominated by material values, and the value of an Ego is his function in society, achieved by competition against others. All that once was seen as noble and grand, all figures that once dominated the literary scene, the romantic, the heroic, noble, honorable, are either replaced or reduced to something that is most primitive and vital, leading to the elevation of such vitality to “vital national interests”, so obvious in Fascism, or “blood racism” in Nazism. This is part of the *iron age* and it compels some figures to raise a question whether all of it's values can allow a human *Self-worth* to have a place. Here an existential question arises: can I act in such a world and be accepted, or is such a world closed to me, forcing me into an

existential crisis, a parting of the ways from such a life world?

Such parting – *krisis* – provides an opportunity for figures to emerge which fluctuate between two worlds: this fluctuation discloses differences between such worlds, and these differences reveal the essence of each world. The figures such as Don Quixote emerge when a new life world, in his case the emergent *iron age*, demands to know if it is worth living in it or if it should be denied, asking these figures to choose another, such as the passing world. The differences between life worlds appear in the transitional consciousness, lived by figures such as Don Quixote of Cervantes, and Dimitri of Dostoyevsky, Gandhi of India, Socrates of Athens, is how the essence of a crisis is disclosed. All the demands of Don Quixote are in principle related to the *Self-worth*, which, even if not recognized by the individual, shapes his life's way of being and the ways all events and others are seen.

Between two worlds

Don Quixote emerges between an old and a new world and no longer belongs to either, and thus makes transparent one through the other. Occasionally, some features of one world appear in another, no longer relevant for it and thus comprises a reflection of the difference between two life worlds, a difference which usually is obscured. It is important to notice that Don Quixote still does not recognize the coarseness of a new iron age and its general degradation; he perceives such events as permeated by dark, unknown powers – perhaps injustice, corruption, perhaps greed. Such permeation

becomes obvious to him when he describes the changes in Dulcinea. Suddenly he beholds her as a country maid – rough, crude, dour peasant – but not as an angelic Madonna. He wonders what powers could create such a debasement. Though he still sees all women as images of Madonna, he also sees that newly permeating powers can transform them completely into something quite opposite. Don Quixote encounters a fluctuation: Dulcinea appears both as a Madonna of exalted pedigree, and a daughter of her own actions, which are more significant than her geneology. The latter is no longer adequate to guarantee nobility. A person born into a lower layer can, through his actions, become more noble than a person born into a higher layer – simply defined by social categories. Hence, a new world can create an individual whose essence of Self is self-creation. No doubt, Don Quixote is a figure which is a critique of decadent aristocracy and its birthright requiring no noble or honorable deeds; to be a true knight and a noble person, one must earn such a position by deeds. In this sense, nobility of Don Quixote, in the *iron age*, is an active disclosure of *Self and others worth*. It is obvious that at this juncture there appears a confrontation between the passing world – past, but still lived by Don Quixote – and the future world. The latter is manifested in two ways: rough, debasing, exploitative, and aggressive, and, at the same time, opening up an opportunity for a person to become someone who he could not have been before. Don Quixote's desire to retain and to transmit his honorable, dedicated, noble and sensitive life of a knight to the new world is overwhelming,

and its crudeness, for him, is a result of mysterious forces. However, such a transfer from one world to another is based on hope that one's insistence on *Self-worth in action* can surpass the new world's commonness. Although slowly, the question that emerges is not one of knowledge, but a question of *Self worth*.

The description of the first level, mentioned above, indicates two possible life worlds; each has its own structure or a coherence to which every event, as a part, belongs. The logic of the parts and whole is the very essence of hermeneutics. A life world is composed of meanings which can be either perceptually confirmed or canceled. At this level of the life world it is necessary to confine the experience of those within it to their expressed actions. Why? The meant actions are congruent when the actions find empirical, symbolical experiences that acknowledge the structure of given meanings. Hence, knowledge within this level of the life world is defined by the relationship between the intention of one's actions and the empirical or symbolic acceptance of that intention. Otherwise, if references to the world are not congruent with their meaning, do not find the concretely meaningful events of experience, then the intentions remain empty of events to fill them. In these cases, there are no parts or partial events which unite with other parts, with other givens.

Here we find gentleman Alonso Quijana from La Mancha living in an infertile and impoverished province where he spends his days and nights immersed in tales about knights – strong guardians of innocent and oppressed peoples – gal-

lantly and ardently fighting for truth, honor, respect of self and others, dedicated to Madonnas and the ultimate good, expounded by classical philosophy. Here Quejana, day by day and night by night, finds references to a world which is filled with already lived and congruent images. The world is the universe that is ripe with spiritual tension, by the callings of honorable people and angelic Madonnas. This is the living awareness of Alonso Quejana: an age of golden dignity and of knightly tasks, separated from a new *iron age*. The *iron age*, as mentioned before, is the incarnation of the evil wishes of magicians and knaves somehow angered by Quejana. He also knows the *iron age* is not worthy of a true human life: this is a devaluing and debased age. He prefers the life of chivalry and knighthood over the life he shares with his niece, maid, and his neighbors. He knows the difference that the *iron age* consists of countrywomen who belch garlic and are not graceful, though they are nimble, while the *golden age* found in the books, contains ineffable beauty of honorable and noble Madonnas and knights. In this layer arises an important problem: Cervantes' work indicates that Quejana, living in the province of La Mancha, had possibly seen the country girl Aldonsa Lorenzo before starting his adventure. For him Aldonsa is a debased Dulcinea by the strange powers of the *iron age*. Here Quejana experiences a first *crisis*: Dulcinea, who represents all women as noble, worthy of respect and honor, appearing through debased Aldonsa, has no place in the *iron age*. Quejana faces a question of existential choice: the *iron age* in which he is living has no value;

all the values of *iron age* life world become degrading and worthless. No self and other respecting person, no honorable, truthful person, no person demanding justice would be of value. Little, narrow-minded, lying, self-serving ideologues, completely enslaved by their irrational squabbles, rule the day.

While freedom is extolled by all existential thinkers, it is depicted ontologically and not as it appears in a *crisis revealing a difference between two life world wherein one has all the values, while negating human arche as Self-worth*. Thus it is important to note that the question of *Self-worth* has no relative boundaries. Quejana does not ask, "Is it valuable to live in this world? because the *Self-worth* of life cannot be ascertained in it by the one who lives: ,I' as a doer of action, already belongs to this world. That is why he has to ask: "Is it worth to live in this life world at all?"; and eventually: "If I have only one life, does it authentically represent human *Self-worth* that I would live it in this life world?" While in contemporary life worlds it is „impolite“ to speak of absolutes, the *existential crisis* poses an absolute negation of any life world and its values in which *Self-worth* has no place. This is precisely the origin where *existential freedom* is manifested. By being between two life worlds, the *Self* no longer belongs to the world of values but can choose a life of human *Self-worth*, which is a standard for all life worlds. It should be obvious that even French existentialism – unnoticed by itself, posed the same question during the *crisis*: the Nazi life world demanding a decision, and the answer was existential: we shall forfeit our lives rather than live in such a

life world – an absolute choice between two absolutes: A world of absolute degradation and a world of human *arche* – *Self-worth beyond life and death*. **Contemporary American ideologues forget that this is the principle embodied in the actions of the revolutionaries – we shall forfeit our fortunes, our life....**

The activity of Don Quixote gives the fundamental answer through transitional awareness as an opportunity to gain liberation in a specific life world from this very world. It is the case that his *Self-worth* is not given in the empirical world of values of the *iron age*. Instead, it is experienced only symbolically as a vision of human *arche*. Hence our impoverished gentleman seeks the life world's *Self-worth* but does not find any event in his life world which would help him retain *such a worth*. Quejana's most profound *existential crisis* is disclosed and is preserved during this moment: *to take up the quest of Self-worth and distance from the present life world*. He assumes the name of Don Quixote, mounts his bony mare, takes his battered sword and crooked lance, and becomes a noble knight on a venerable steed. He takes a shaving basin from the barber and requires that the owner of the inn – who is now the lord of a castle – promote him to a knight by the end of a ritual. A shaving basin becomes Mambrino's golden helmet. Don Quixote becomes a living consciousness, retained and described in novels about good knights, noble and honorable fighters for truth and protectors of the weak and oppressed. He becomes a knight and his actions embody *Self-worth* of honor, truthfulness, nobility, respect and

goodness. These phenomena are beyond value of life and at the same time lived as the very essence of his actions.

Here an essential distinction must be made. By a specific ontology, things are depicted by categories: we know what is a tree, an angel and many others. We too are categorized socially in terms of various functional values. But *Self-worth* is not a category and it is present only in action: one is truthful in speech, respectful of others and oneself, honorable and honors others, and noble in his deeds, calling for the nobility of others. An essential feature is now present: Quejana's search for *Self-worth* requires the recognition of the *worth* of others, regardless whether the other is seen as Dulcinea through Aldonsa, as a capable bar maid, or a knight seen through his neighbor Carcaso. Don Quixote is a consciousness which makes transparent our blindness: he sees through the degraded the truth – the *arche of the others as equally Self-worth, honorable, noble, truthful, respectful of self and others*. All have *Self-worth* and thus Don Quixote's *worth*, as a noble and honorable knight is, and must be confirmed by others of equal nobility. Thus, led by his search for *Self-worth*, he finds it even in the degraded others. In this context emerges the logic of *Self-worth*: the degrading, coarse and dark forces of the *iron age*, where everything is a trash bin of constructed values, implies an intruding *Self-worth*, appearing in a person, enacting honor, nobility, truthfulness and justice. Don Quixote discloses a significant awareness: in the *iron age* it would not be possible to degrade, despise human *worth* if it were not recognized. We cannot degrade a creature in its life world and demand of it

to justify its actions and to choose another life world. In other words, to call dog a dog is not a degradation. Degrading and despising is possible only in light of recognition of the *worth* of another and *Self* as noble, honorable, just and truthful. It should be obvious that Don Quixote's quest for *Self-worth* is only possible as a reflective recognition of the *worth of others*. He sees such *worth* through the degraded figures and in turn, makes them see themselves as bearers of *Self-worth*. This is the principle of *existential freedom: the recognition of Self-worth in the others, liberates them from a degraded life world and opens the choice for another life world. All liberation movements, even in their failure, assume such reflective existential freedom.*

This recognition founds numerous contemporary phenomena, inclusive of racism, religions, ethnocentrism, and ideologies. Degradation of others by self elevation, reveals the other's elevation, and our anxiety in face of the other's *Self-worth*, his/her significance – beyond any social value. This logic leads all the way to condemning the other to death: unable to withstand the presence of *Self-worth* of the other, we condemn him to death and thus reveal that we have denied our *Self-worth*, have degraded ourselves, and thus hate the other not only for exhibiting his/her dignity, but also for revealing our own self degradation. This is well depicted by Victor Frankl's experience in concentration camp. If a prisoner would show any self and other respect, treat oneself and others with respect, he would be either beaten or immediately eliminated; he was a reminder to the camp guards and "valuable" functionaries, that

they have lost *Self-worth*, specifically visible in their obscene pretense to be "superior." The pretence is a transparent effort to avoid their awareness of their own *Self-worth and freedom*.

An awareness, liberated from one life world, is open to other life worlds. Such opening reveals a difference between them, but through such difference appears a *Self* who does not seem to belong to either world. Such a *Self* is a reflective dimension which recognizes its limitation in a particular life world and the limitations of others in their life worlds, but also a recognition of the others as equivalent to the *Self* through those limitations. This dimensional *Self*, an *arche*, reflects an inadequacy of a lived life world, with all its known values as categorical, social functions, and allows for a question of mutual respect of others as another *Self*, of equivalence no longer of knowledge, but of existence: *Self* and *Other* are more than a life world offers in such a way, that the life world might pose a danger to that *arche*, since the latter is tacitly present, but cannot be lived existentially it that life world. As noted above, this is an *existential crisis* demanding a decision, either to live in a world of values, or to live otherwise. In order to better understand the emerging existential question of action, it is advisable to sharpen some of the linguistic points. A life world is delimited by known linguistic classifications, used mainly in second or third personal pronomina. Yet from Don Quixote flows an effort to understand oneself in first person terms. This mode of language can be called *tautogorical*. *It is not a narrower use of categories; this language has a very different logic. When a categorical*

language deals with truth as a correspondence to „reality“, for tautological language truth is not lying. Thus to say that „I am not a lyer“ is not the same as categorical statement. Moreover, categorical language describes general features, while tautological is unique and not repeatable – existentially authentic.

Russian existential self

Self-worth embodies such requirements as honor, honesty, dignity, self and other respect, and justice. If honor, honesty, dignity and respect cannot be fulfilled in person's activities, then the legitimacy of a life world is placed in absolute question, revealing equally the awareness of *absolute Self-worth*. It is at this juncture that the transcendental lived awareness in Russian literature recognizes that the world of values, constructed by modern West and the world of decadent Russian aristocracy, require evaluation as to their adequacy for human *worth*. Such a question is one of principle that required an essential delimitation of the constructs of both worlds and whether they could be adjusted, discarded or become open to the absolute requirement of the awareness of *Self-worth*. We are in a position now to attempt our venture into lived awareness as an intention correlated to *Self-worth* and thus place Russian writers at the point of *existential crisis*. The Russian Revolution was best expounded by writers who, very notably, were persecuted by the traditional aristocracy, some for becoming Westernizers, others for challenging the life world of autocracy. The figures that the writers

depicted were akin to the ones expounded by Cervantes at the point of *existential crisis* reflecting two life worlds. An important observation: not all traditions produce „professional“ philosophers; the profound questions to be discussed are left to others, using different means. The best Russian philosophy was present in literature written during a turbulent period of social life.

Philosophical critique of Russian aristocracy and Western scientific *iron age*, was offered by major writers who raised most basic questions. Thus, while tradition demands respect for customary rules and social arrangements, we find in Turgenyev's *Father's and Sons*, a question raised which rightly asks from what such respect follows? This question is reflected from two sources, one from Western modern scientific position, and one which implies that respect for both tradition and science must be evaluated on a basis of lived awareness that connects to the *Self-worth* of a person. Such a person is beyond his/her value for a tradition or for science and demands a treatment of oneself and the others in an honorable, noble, truthful, elevating manner *for its own sake*. It is, then, the task to unfold the lived awareness in Russian literature that is compelled to bracket, to place out of action, the life world of tradition and modern West, and to note the presence of the lived awareness across diverse phenomena. In *Fathers and Sons* a suspension is performed raising the question of legitimation of the traditional Russian life world of aristocratic privilege in contrast to the value of the world of the *iron age*; this very question places the questioner in a *crisis* situation. While we may

think that this provides a comparison for choice, in lived awareness there appears an intention that connects to a question: which life world would provide actual fulfillment of the *arche* of *Self-worth*.

The question of legitimation of a life world may appear in a quiet and solitary figure, such as the one shown by Gogol in his story called *The Great Coat*. There is no doubt that the main character is depicted to comprise a search for *Self worth* in face of a most bleak life world. It has been argued that this figure is driven by psychological desire for self importance or by a search for the appearance of a higher social status. Such desires may well be part of a personal morphology and a social situation, but they do not provide an adequate understanding of the intentionality involved in these drives or desires. Subtending and covered over both by psychologically and socially constructed value phenomena, appears an almost *quixotic* quest to reach something psychologically and socially unreachable and yet totally present in his lived awareness: *I am worthy, I have dignity, self and other respect, and honor*. The point is that such an awareness is not within the realm of prevalent social values or psychological feelings, since his social value will in no wise change with the acquisition of *The Great Coat*. He will remain in his meager occupation, still hungry and without a candle light at night, without any hope for a better tomorrow. In brief, he will not get any value out of his struggling and striving apart from the recognition of his *Self-worth* for its own sake. Across Russian literature appears something given to awareness that is akin to Kant's *thing in itself* possessing

no purpose no value, but is to be respected unconditionally. While Enlightenment opened up an entire level of constructs called values and announced that the thing in itself is unknowable, Russian literature is intent in showing that any question of legitimation of a given life world discloses a transcendental awareness of *Self-worth as the thing in itself*.

Let us look at the logic of *Self-worth*. In the life world where everything is a trash bin of values, there emerge personal actions and expressions that demand honor, dignity, respect, truthfulness, not only of themselves but of others. Indeed, their actions are equally an indication of *Self-worth* of others. The intentionality of consciousness as teleological is accepted both by the "rationalistic" Westernizers, from Belinsky through Herzen wherein consciousness is irreducible to scientific explanations, and the writers who emphasize Russian spirituality. This intentionality aims at its telos which is the point of critique of Russian and Western life worlds. Both reject the materialistic-rationalistic West as decadent, purposeless and even nihilistic despite its technical sophistication and extol the Russian man as a model of salvation. This model is distinguished from Western and Asiatic types by its striving, despite the Russian cultural veneer, to exhibit dignity, honor, truthfulness in action. Thus, Mikhailovsky makes a distinction between types and levels of civilization. West may have a higher level of material civilization but Russia is a superior type due to its intuitive understanding of the personal dignity and intrinsic *Self-worth* of an individual. Even Herzen and Bakunin, while living

as exiles, extolled the superiority of the Russian type of awareness of this dignity. Indeed, all the social degradations imposed by serfdom as a traditional value gradation reveal the common Russian acceptance of the absolute *worth* of a person. After all, it would be impossible to degrade others without recognizing the other as a possessor of *Self-worth*. To repeat the „logic“ we cannot degrade a creature who, in its life world, does not recognize a need to justify its deeds, to make a choice between two life worlds; in short, to call a dog – dog, is neither a degradation nor a negation of *Self-worth*. Only another person can be degraded on the basis of recognition of her *Self-worth*. This is to say, degradation, reduction, insult, are possible only when we recognize hers and our own, honor, nobility and dignity.

In the most degraded figures and the most elevated rebels there is a presence of *Self-worth*. Dostoyevsky gives back the key to paradise because the ruler of paradise values equally an innocent child and a decadent master. For the master, a favorite dog is more valuable than a child, and in the life world of feudal lords this is an acceptable standard. Such values are even accepted by „heaven itself“, but not for Dostoyevsky’s characters who reject such „heaven“. Dostoyevsky’s rejection is an affirmation of human *Self-worth* for its own sake. He will face an *existential crisis* and accept eternal damnation but will not accept a life world in which crimes against children are permitted. He raises an absolute question: is life worth living in a world where such a degradation of human *Self-worth* is a standard, sanctioned

and accepted even by the highest authority. Indeed, the entire corpus of Dostoyevsky’s writings is a striving to disclose this awareness. The prisoners in Siberia comprising the „lowest“ elements of society do their best to look „decent“ among the worst conditions of life. Although forced to degrade themselves and others, they show their self and other respect and ask for respect in return.

While these outcasts have lost all social value they still strive to exhibit dignity, honor, respect and thus reveal the final human position for its own sake that cannot be abolished even when threatened by death. This is the Russian positive negativity: Even at the pain of death I shall say no to a life world that does not allow my *Self-worth* to be fulfilled. This merely discloses the constitution of *Self-worth* as transcendental given that is beyond life and death. This appears in extreme cases where the guards who manage prisons immediately condemn to death anyone who shows self and other respect, dignity and honor. Here is a recognition and a lack of honor and dignity in the guards who function as valuable servants of the state. This logic calls to the others to recognize the *existential crisis* in their lives, to legitimate the life world in which they live and to ask whether such a life world fulfills their lived awareness of their *Self-worth*. This is to say, the very presence of the other who is aware of her *Self-worth* performs a tacit phenomenological bracketing and hence challenges a blind inherence in this life world. Once again, this is a moment of *existential freedom*, allowing to raise a question whether such a life world is worthy of one’s *Self-worth*.

In Dostoyevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*, the main figure, Karamazov Dimitri, is a member of decadent aristocracy with its privileges and family squabbles over money. His father is the degenerate and hypocritical „Christian“ hated by his sons (apart from the young priest Alyosha). One son Ivan, the intellectual is Westernized, secular atheist, who frivolously debates the question of God's existence, suggesting that the aristocratic rules of power are relevant only if they are sanctioned by the absolute power of authority. If such authority – God – does not exist, then indeed there is an *absolute, existential crisis of the aristocratic life world*. *The crisis is enacted by one of the brothers, Smirdikov, who follows the rule that if there is no God, everything is permitted – and kills his father*. In a perverse way, this brother, Smirdikov is suddenly released or liberated from his Feudal life world and feels free to act as an instrument of the „will of Ivan“. Meanwhile the main character, Dimitri, lives a life of decadence and debauchery. He demeans women exploits them for money and love, incures debt, and is even accused of killing his father. His intrigues get involved a retired and impoverished captain who has a dying son. Dimitri insults and degrades this impoverished elderly captain who no longer has any social value. Yet toward the end of the story, Dimitri attempts to apologize to the captain by offering money, a money which would surely help with medical treatment of the dying child. Dimitri also offers nice toys to the child, but the child says no. Impoverished as he is, the captain refuses to be bought and thus degraded again. Indeed, in face of his own death, the child tells the father not to accept

money as a value which is offered to repay for the degradation of his father. No social value has any meaning; here we encounter an *existential crisis where Self-worth is placed beyond any social value and even beyond life and death*. Such a worth liberates everyone from all the values of an unacceptable life world. The captain and his dying son reveal *Self-worth* as being above any price, above any social value, and “compels” Dimitri to recognize his own *Self-worth* in face of the other and his nobility, dignity and honor. In short, it is “illegitimate” to attempt to place a monetary value on *Self-worth*. This is the place where *Self-worth* of both persons is disclosed, accepted and recognized. The very presence of the other who is aware of his *Self-worth* performs a tacit phenomenological bracketing and hence challenges a blind inherence in this life world. One can then raise a question whether such a life world is worthy of one's *Self-worth*. The only release for Dimitri is to recognize the others dignity, honor, truthfulness, nobility, and reflecting from the other, to recognize his own *Self-worth*. And this is the moment of truth: Dimitri asks for forgiveness for his deeds which degraded another human, even if the latter no longer had any social value in his life world. Through this recognition, Dimitri is liberated from his own Feudal life world.

Self-worth, as a discovered given, appears not only through degradations and oppressions, but also through actions demanding mutual recognition of self and other. And it appears irrespective of culture, historical period, or social standing. Gandhi angered colonial rulers by his bearing, his dignity, his dignifying those who were at

the lowest social rung, his demand that the colonial rulers have truthfulness and honor and thus made them recognize their own *worth* and not merely their value for the empire. Gandhi reminded all that the life world of an empire is illegitimate because it does not allow the fulfillment of the lived awareness of *Self-worth*. Hence he asked for legitimation of his own value in such a life world and whether he must rise to a transcendental level and reveal an *existential crisis* in his own life and that of the empire based on recognition of what is the ground of final human self awareness and all the values. While being an object of derision and *quixotic* depictions, he took the blows with dignity, demanding dignity from those who administered the blows. It is to be noted that he did not claim *Self-worth* as a value of a specific culture, but as an unconditional and absolute ground that raises the question of legitimation of any life world and demands the fulfillment of transcendental awareness that correlates to *Self-worth*. Einstein once pondered the phenomenon of Gandhi by wondering “that such a person could have walked among us.” In face of the *Self-worth* of this slight person, the British empire lost all of its moral, political, and military superiority – and lost to, what Churchill called, a „naked fakir.“ We know that Gandhi was dressed in dignity, honor, respect of others and himself, and not in suits produced in the factories of the British empire.

Existential arche of philosophy: beyond value

We reached a juncture at which the expounder of Western philosophy – So-

crates – can make his entrance. Although scholars locate Socrates as the relentless seeker of truth, i. e. categorical epistemologist, we must also recall that the first condition of the search for truth is the good and a life world where a person can live in accordance with the demands of the good as one expression of *Self-worth*. Only under these conditions that Socrates can search for truth as another aspect of human worth. After all, the search for truth was, for Socrates, a practical-existential commitment and activity of a good and truthful life. Thus Socrates, like many others, was an object of derision and caricatures. In short, he was a person without a social value, since he had no position, and raised strange questions of unsuspecting citizens, challenging them to search for truth and justice in mutual respect. We might even surmise that Socrates did not propose the final truth, but was an upholder of a dialogical and free domain in which every person was respected and honored as an equal partner in a common venture. He accepted the Athenian verdict of death in order to show that his and others *Self-worth* demands a life world in which the search for truth cannot be forbidden. He placed his *Self-worth* as the good above his personal life and could demand that such a good should be a part of his life world.

The decision by the jury to forbid Socrates his *daimon*, his eros, to “philosophize” was equivalent to a destruction of a life world in which his *Self-worth* once had a place. Socrates is compelled to face an *existential crisis* and reveal a crisis of his life world. He reaches and lives an awareness that places his entire life world into

question and demands a decision: is the life world, offered by Athenians, adequate to fulfill his *Self-worth*. In turn, did the Athenians, by their action, degraded themselves to a level of social value where truth, dignity, honor, will have no place. After all, such a degradation to social value is obvious from the trial when Socrates is offered a chance to surrender his quest and thus become a valuable citizen, and when Socrates offers, ironically, to accept a pension from the state for “whatever little services that I might render.” Here appears a depiction of the first *crisis of democracy* and Socrates reaches a lived awareness which demands a legitimation of the life world which is being offered to him. Can his lived awareness, correlated as it is to *Self-worth*, have any perceptual affirmation in such a life world? The latter, after all, demands self degradation and thus the denial of *Self-worth*. Socrates resolves the crisis by accepting the verdict of the Athenians with a warning: If you condemn me, my fame will spread far and wide; do not do this, because it will be forever a black mark on Athens.

Values and valuations have to be evaluated not by their own self proliferating construction, but by a discovery of a constitutive awareness that is correlated to a tacitly lived presence offering the possibility of performing a suspension of commitment to a given life world and its numerous values. The transcendental requirement was and is to disclose this dimension as an all pervasive reflective presence, an *arche*, demanding a transformation of a given, and specifically of the life world of modern *iron age*, explicated as political and scientific enlightenment. Kant’s offer of criterion as

good will, is quite inadequate, since it offers a psychological condition, or a *transcendental psychologism*, which belongs as a sign of autonomy in the *iron world*. Instead of constructed values, this presence of *Self-worth is uncontestable*. As we saw, the latter cannot be constructed and appears as the *existential crisis* background of all values and valuations. It also provides a background on which every life world can be reflected in its essential morphology and questioned concerning its legitimacy.

This is not to say that Kant it is therefore invalidated. Rather, its limits are exhibited from a transcendental lived awareness that demands “more” and does so on the basis of discovery what this more is. The constitution of this more – *Self-worth* – is not a construction but a disclosure of an intentionality whose meant objectivity, its *eidos* as *worth*, is present as absolute. We should not despair while using the term absolute; after all, in all awareness there are such terms comprising a pre-given *arche* whose denial is its unavoidable inclusion. This is to say, to attempt to negate an *arche* is to include it in the very negation and hence to comprise its absolute affirmation. We shall call this the *principle of self inclusion* and venture a claim that only critical existential philosophy, is in a position to function within this principle. Obviously, Socrates, Don Quixote, Gandhi, Dimitri, are embodiments of this principle. By discovering *Self-worth* in his encounter with the stories of knights, Don Quixote does not leave the meaning of their deeds to be dormant: he includes himself as the awareness that means the world and others as *worthy*, and does so with a pure passion.

He is aware that the deeds to be accomplished must accept of the actor a total and unwavering commitment.

As was noted, Alonso Quejana knows himself both as devalued participant in devalued world created by overwhelming evil sorcerers and impostors, as well as a presence in this world of a striving of *Self-worth* that must be available in the devalued world. Recognizing the transparency of these two life worlds one through the other, he chooses the deeds of knightly actions to be fulfilled in a way where the *iron age* figures are reflected from a dimension of a world that allows for *Self-worth* to become manifest in anyone. Thus, he selects names that more appropriately express a knightly life world: Alonso Quejana becomes Don Quixote, his horse becomes Rocinante, and Aldonsa Lorenzo becomes Dulcinea. It is important to note that the moment of transparency of *Self-worth* is, in the case of Don Quixote, the encounter with Aldonsa / Dulcinea, such that Dulcinea, as an embodiment of *Self-worth*, manages to shine through Aldonsa. In short, despite the evil forces of the *iron age*, a crude peasant girl is transparent with a true lady – beautiful, honorable, noble, and truthful – as is every woman. Through the crude, raggedy exiles of Dostoyevsky, shine a presence of this dimension which is more, an *arche* whose denial is its affirmation. . Don Quixote demands that *Self-worth* is not a category but a total commitment to action – being noble, respectful, truthful, returning us to the very essence of philosophy: search for truth without any obfuscation and respect for others who are engaged in the same venture. Here the Self as *Self-worth* recognizes

human fallibility and hence engages with others in this most profound, respectful and honorable venture.

Just to be clear: all awareness is world oriented and coincides with what is given in the world. Alonso Quejana is reading books in his library. The actors in the books constitutes a background, covered over by a surrounding life world. Once again Quejana finds himself in a crisis position: the dimly visible reality compels a question how to legitimate his currently lived world. This dimly visible reality allows for the suspension in participation in his currently lived world as transparent with its inadequacy, not worth living in light of the other reality. An added recognition is apparent: *Self-worth*, demanding a worthy world, such that it signifies not a categorical composition but an embodiment of a tautogorical action. In such a world the intension toward the world as *Self-worth* corresponds to reality. Woman is honored, noble, beautiful, the actions of others are just, trustworthy, stable, and a given word is identical with life. Thus with the shift of awareness to Don Quixote, Quejana seeks his *Self-worth* as a permanent transcendental condition that frees him from the iron life world and its degrading shiftiness, and opens a world as a different background, demanding deeds worthy of a noble knight, justifying all actions. The same sort of dim awareness appears in Dostoyevsky's Dimi tri. He lends money to an aristocratic girl to help her save the honor of her family; she offers herself to him for his generous deed, but he refuses to dishonor her for money. Meanwhile he encounters a woman who owns a bar – a low class person, just as

Aldonsa in Don Quixote. Yet almost imperceptibly, Dimitry sees through this lower lady a woman he wants to honor, treat with respect and, in a final scene, leave Russia with her. In fact, on a way out of Russia, he stops to visit the mentioned captain and his son where he finally is clear what this dimension is: mutual *Self-worth*.

One misunderstanding must be avoided: *Self-worth* is not a projected future utopian society to be achieved once some material conditions will be established, or once humanity evolves; it is the ever present recognition of the *absolute arche*, whether in the actions of Don Quixote, Gandhi, Dimitri, Socrates or a concentration camp guard and prisoner. It is the enactment as an existential disclosure of such an *arche* which is a measure of any social, theological and scientific value. It is Gandhi in the encounter with the British governor of India which reveal the recognition of both, even if the governor denies this recognition of Gandhi's *Self-worth*, he accepts it by requesting Gandhi's presence at the governor's mansion. There was no hint of any utopian future, but a presence of two humans.

Our existential crisis

Socrates disclosed a crisis in Athenian democracy where he was denied his responsibility and duty to philosophize and to invite everyone in search for truth. In the modern *iron age*, which has reached an extreme success in the proliferation of technical disciplines and progress, societies are extolling nothing but technical values and technical training. Such train-

ing becomes identical with individual's social value. Philosophizing is a Socratic nuisance and is being discarded as having no value. In short, philosophical thinking, whether in "formal" seminars, or in literatures, disclosing the inadequacies of such *iron age* for the life of human *Self-worth in truthful, noble honorable action*, is being abolished. The crudeness, the jargon, the "winner take all" through corruption, lying, without honor, dignity even self respect, in every area is the "natural norm". Hence any person, who still regards himself as a "place" where *Self-worth* can be enacted, will be regarded as "funny" or *quicksotic*. Just as for Don Quixote, Dimitri, Gandhi, as for anyone, the fulfillment of *Self-worth* in the *iron age gone wild*, is to make evident the presence of this most basic human *arche* through the phenomenon of transparency. Not a value function constructed in a society, dominating the modern life world – depicted above – but a given presence that is transparent even through the images of drab and crude persons of an *iron age*. Through everyone we must see a noble and honorable knight, through the smell of garlic and peasant's attire, through a bar maid we must see a woman – and for that matter any woman – as noble, honorable, and respectable. Just as all the mentioned figures between life worlds, it is our responsibility as humans – and thus *existential philosophers* – to strip the veil of a demeaning world to reveal the presence of himself and others for what they truly are in essence – to reveal their *existential crisis and with it our mutual freedom*. It is now somewhat evident that all awareness discloses a universal yearning for a reflective

presence of *Self-worth*, available only in action and not in epistemological, scientific, knowledge. With this awareness nihilism, as the aged sick man did for Buddha, is a sign that we, on the way to philosophy,

should also launch our Quixotic quest in search of adventures that would disclose ours and others *Self-worth*. Don Quixote, Dimitri, Socrates, Gandhi beckon: come and follow the brightest star.

Suggested readings

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Edie, James. ed. *Russian Philosophy*. Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1965.

Zola, Emile. *The Best Known Works of Emile Zola*. New York: Blue Ribbon Books, 1941.