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Self-Presentation as the Modus Vivendi of a Magnanimous Man

Abstract:

The article discusses satisfaction with self-presentation as the way of functioning (*modus vivendi*) of a magnanimous man in relation to Aristotelian ethics. Even though self-presentation is usually considered as a kind of biologically determined instinct, it may be argued that self-presentation is also an aspect of the actions of a magnanimous man. Naturalist social theories concerning moral norms are rooted in nineteenth and twentieth century psychologism, which claims that the starting point for reflection on the nature of social morality are the psychological characteristics of individuals. One example of psychologism is the concept of Sorokin who compares two basic mentalities determining culture: *sensate* and *ideational*. On the other hand, there are theories in the current of normative naturalism which postulate a reduction of ethical values to certain biological – mostly psychological – properties or states. This current includes Portmann's theory referring to the instinct of self-presentation discussed in this article. Portman's reflections are confirmed by the cultural concept of *homo ludens* proposed by Huizinga. Self-presentation may be considered not only as a biologically determined instinct on the grounds of normative naturalism, but also on the grounds of realist ethics as a value in itself, non-reducible to any particular biological facts. It is in the perspective of Aristotle's ethics of virtue that self-presentation becomes an expression of the actions of a magnanimous man correlated with ethical value, as it recognizes satisfaction with self-presentation as a state that depends on the success of human activity. This explains why it is satisfaction, or pleasure, or happiness that can be reasonably regarded as the goal of human life. Satisfaction is an emotion that accompanies the achievement of perfection in various forms of human activity. However, satisfaction, pleasure, or happiness are not, in this context, a criterion that determines our behavior, for satisfaction alone is not a reason to perform a particular type of activity. What one finds satisfaction in depends primarily on the virtues one possesses. This is why self-presentation becomes an ethical value only in the case of a magnanimous man, one of an ideational mentality; in the case of a proud man, one of a *sensate* mentality, self-presentation proves to be an anti-value. An embodiment of this latter attitude in modern liberal democracy is Ortega y Gasset's arrogant mass-man, as well as the mass-man engulfed in apathy described by Sloterdijk.

Keywords:

Aristotelian ethics, mass-man, magnanimous man, normative naturalism, self-presentation

Introduction

Self-presentation as the *modus vivendi* of human existence may sound controversial to some when juxtaposed with Aristotle's *megalopsychos* and *eudaimonia*. However, when describing a man of this type, Aristotle pointed out that the basis of his functioning is on self-improvement and awareness of his own worth. A *megalopsychos* does not accept undue credit, abhors hypocrisy and falsehood, and is honorable, proud, and truthful in expressing his virtue. Thus, self-presentation in the case of a *megalopsychos* brings together positive, ethical traits of character with an aesthetic appearance. Ancient Greeks combined beauty and goodness in the expression "*kalos kai agathos*" – *kalokagathia*, which meant beautiful and good at the same time. It is worth considering whether there is now a procedure by which one can become a noble man, that is, in Aristotelian terms, a justly proud one. It would be a procedure that emphasizes the self-improvement of body and soul, the results of one's own efforts, which to some extent would continue the ancient concept of a *megalopsychos*.

From today's point of view, it is often argued that the principles of conduct offered by the ancients, emphasizing the heteronomy of ethics and rivalry as a necessary element in the pursuit of ethical virtue, become impossible to implement on a mass scale, and are thus unattractive and not recommended. Therefore, the appetite for being justly proud diminishes in the face of the appetite for being liked by a large group of fans – not because of heroic deeds, but mainly because of a cheap replica of nobility transformed into fashionable adornment with conventional, or with shocking, vanity-exposing looks and behavior. This attitude can be described as a kind of cultural scandal resulting from self-objectification and self-degradation. If that is the case, have pride and honor treated as virtues in antiquity, as well as in later centuries, become a relic of archaic times?

According to Aristotle, ethical excellence in the conduct of a *megalopsychos* occurs when noble conduct is accompanied by noble feelings. So not only the deed, but also the feeling and the will which accompany it must form an inseparable unity. Because, "in order to be good one must be in a certain state when one does the several acts, i.e., one must do them as a result of choice and for the sake of the acts themselves."¹

1) Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VI, 12, p. 103 (1144a).

Therefore, the path to ethical excellence is based on a special kind of upbringing, for virtue is not man's natural, inherent property, and consequently, in order for him to gain the ability to possess it, it must become something natural, transform into what feels like his second nature. The technique of the proposed educational method is to practice virtue by acting in accordance with its precepts. For example, we become just by acting justly; moderate by practicing the virtue of moderation; valiant by acting valiantly. Who we become as a result of the process of education and upbringing determines not only our behavior, but also our view of the world, other people, and ourselves. Feeling the desire to be deservedly proud becomes at the same time a commitment to constant effort in the process of improving oneself for the sake of the beauty of one's own existence.

During the times of Athenian democracy, Aristotle advocated the principle of the golden mean, or a middle ground between extremes in the establishment of a society. He proposed a system called *politeia*, in which he assumed the coexistence of democracy and oligarchy, for he criticized democracy as a degenerate system. In his view, equality in democracy was based on the assumption that equality in some respect was equivalent to absolute equality, which he believed to be false. Thus, he proposed a form of refined democracy by transforming it into the rule of the middle class (a middle ground between the rich and the poor), which he believed was possible once citizens were properly educated.

When outlining the differences between a megalopsychos and the modern mass man, it should be emphasized that the exodus into equality and so-called mass individualism observed today – evident in, among other places, the proclamation of the principle of equal opportunities and mass-scale education – is hardly effective in identifying the brightest and most talented ones from among all those being educated. The consequences of this are the difficulties and failures in educating such a diverse and large number of citizens at an adequate level. Does the assumption of non-elitism in favor of equality in education promote the development of society, then, or does it lead to a kind of degradation? After all, despite the advocacy for equal opportunities, there are various types of elite schools that are the opposite of educational equality in a democracy. The protégés at these schools are primarily the descendants of aristocratic families and the children of world business leaders, as well as particularly talented individuals who are funded with scholarships in this exclusive setting. The

overriding principle is that if you are rich enough and come from the right family, or are recommended by a sponsor, we will bring out the excellence in you and shape it. This type of school has a clear, simple, and strict system of discipline reflects ethical norms and develops a sense of responsibility among its students. Was this the kind of education that Aristotle had in mind?

Some believe that Aristotle's ethics of virtue is an excellent tool of indoctrination.² Those who advocate this view are convinced that by using ethical virtues in the education process and developing habits among students to act in accordance with the virtues, some non-obvious truths are being imposed on them. And this, in turn, causes students to be regularly subjected to manipulation that is hard to accept until they acquire the ability of critical thinking. Such an assessment of Aristotle's concept of ethics may be surprising and cause an outrage; after all, he was a great educator and a great philosopher.

The *Nicomachean Ethics*, to which I refer, is a treatise on the art of living in a world we do not always understand. Practicing virtue was an end in itself for Aristotle, since virtues are inclinations that may be displayed in various acts that are manifestations of human excellence, with virtue ethics bringing the love of goodness, moderation, and utility to the forefront. Thus, the attitude of a megalopsychos is to approve of what is good, while also seeking to be as self-sufficient as possible, and this type of behavior applied in the wrong proportions can also generate inaccessibility, overweening pride, egotism, and consequently, loneliness.

Aristotle's virtue ethics has been revitalized in the views of modern philosophers, including G.E.M. Anscombe,³ A. MacIntyre,⁴ and R. Hursthouse.⁵ I believe that Aristotle's views are still inspiring and worthy of attention, especially in these times of vogue for the shoddy, the easy, the vulgar, the trivialization of important matters. Can the Aristotelian model of a megalopsychos – who adores all that is good and also reveres the good in other people, but at the same time remains isolated and inaccessible in his sublime virtue – nevertheless become a contemporary role model?

2) Szutta, "Moral Education."

3) Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy."

4) MacIntyre, *After Virtue*.

5) Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*.

MacIntyre concludes that the old Aristotelian tradition can be reformulated in a way that restores intelligibility and rationality to our moral and social attitudes and choices. Yet it may also be the case that: “Traditions do on occasion founder, that is, by their own standards of flourishing and foundering, and an encounter with a rival tradition may in this way provide good reasons either for attempting to reconstitute one’s tradition in some radical way or for deserting it.”⁶

Naturalist Social Theories: Sorokin and Malinowski

In the concept proposed by Sorokin⁷, the history of civilization is not linear, but cyclical. In every cycle, there is a dominant current and marginal currents contrasting the main one. Sorokin’s concept of cultural dynamics distinguishes between two opposing cultures originating from two opposite mentalities: a sensate and an ideational one.

People whose mentality is dominated by the senses aim at the satisfaction of their sensual needs, while representatives of the ideational culture remain, according to Sorokin, in touch with a super-sensate reality. Sensate, sensual needs are for example the need to satisfy thirst or hunger, the need for shelter, sex, and comfort; spiritual needs, on the other hand, focus our attention on achieving salvation, moral obligations, or spiritual principles that should be obeyed irrespective of social reception. At the same time, gradation in the satisfaction of needs in both forms of culture begins with the absolute minimum and ends in extremely inflated claims. Also, the ways of satisfying needs may focus on changing one’s surroundings or one’s inner self, with various intermediate forms in between.

An ideational culture may adopt two forms, emphasizing two attitudes: an ascetic and an active one. The ascetic attitude consists in minimizing one’s physical needs, by deprecating the sensual world, or even oneself, and considering material things to be unreal, illusory, nonexistent. The active attitude consists not only in minimizing one’s needs, but also in trying to change the sensate reality, particularly in the social and cultural dimension, to be in line with spiritual logic and values.

6) MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 277.

7) Sorokin, *Contemporary Sociological Theories*, 600.

The sensate culture comes in three forms. Sorokin calls the first one “active Epicureanism,” as it looks for the most efficient change, adaptation, and submission of the environment to oneself. Examples include leading conquerors, emperors, or managers. The second type of mentality, so-called “passive Epicureanism,” focuses on satisfying needs not by changing oneself or one’s surroundings, but more on a hedonistic view of the world in accordance with Aristippus’s saying that one should live as easy and pleasurable a life as possible, and thus seek sensual pleasure. The third form turns into cynicism; it is concealed, and uses ideals in order to manipulate them depending on what benefit they may bring. It is thus a type of hypocrisy, as it duplicitously adjusts to mainstream currents and systems of values. The cultural forms described by Sorokin do not occur in their pure form, but become predominant in certain historical phases.

While the ideational culture seeks to spiritualize all reality, including the material one, the tendency of the sensate culture is the opposite, as the physical world satisfies most of man’s needs. This view goes hand in hand with scientific and technical expansion, aimed at unraveling the world’s mysteries and controlling them with ever-improving technology. The main trends in science are empiricism and determinism, which encompass not only science, but increasingly penetrate the humanities and social sciences as well. This is linked to a strictly biological approach to human affairs. Awareness of the impermanence of the material world emphasized in the sensate culture leads to a relativization of moral and legal norms. Hence, according to Sorokin, are the relativistic, utilitarian, and hedonistic tendencies present in ethics. The same is true in the field of law. Sorokin believes that law deprived of its absolute character becomes a man-made instrument for subjugating one human group to another. The law is not intended to regulate the relationship between man and the Absolute; its task is to ensure social order and security. The relativism of legal norms, like in the case of moral norms, adjusts them to the needs of a particular society, so both types of norms differ and vary.

As regards the issue of free choice in man’s actions, Sorokin creates his own formula of freedom. In his opinion, the sum of all desires is related to the sum of the means available to satisfy them. Free choice is therefore expressed by the ratio of the ability to satisfy one’s desires to the desires one feels: the more the means to satisfy one’s desires exceed the sum of those desires, the greater the degree of freedom.⁸ An

8) Sorokin, *Social and Cultural Dynamics*, 517–518.

individual, on the other hand, feels a restriction in their field of action if the number of his or her desires drastically exceeds the possibility of their satisfaction. Sorokin admits that for the majority of mankind, regardless of culture, nationality, or race, meeting a certain minimum of freedom is tantamount to meeting the most basic needs in life. He warns, however, against the frequent and imperceptible transition from freedom understood this way to a situation in which the pursuit of freedom becomes a kind of slavery, turning against man and his creative possibilities.

Naturalist social theories also include the concept of functionalism in the anthropology of culture proposed by Malinowski, who believed that cultural imperatives are founded on man's biological needs. This view was later confirmed by Abram Kardiner in his psychodynamic theory of personality.⁹

Malinowski was one of the first representatives of the social sciences to apply Freud's psychological theory to the field of sociology and anthropology, and to make an attempt at verifying some of his concepts in field studies.¹⁰ His findings, however, resulted either in a reinterpretation or in rejection of Freud's ideas including his claims about the role of subconscious emotional conflicts in collective life, the Oedipus complex, and the incest taboo. Nevertheless, the impact of psychoanalytic deliberations on Malinowski's studies was significant. Major influence also came from Emil Durkheim as the precursor of functionalism which inspired Malinowski.¹¹ Yet, even though he acknowledged this inspiration, he repeatedly criticized Durkheim's concept of collective awareness and his views on the origins of religion and magic.

Malinowski argued that scientific research directly related to reality uses the concept of functions. He considered them to be the ultimate scientific tool describing phenomena and facts.¹² Malinowski studied the concept of functions, as well as man-made institutions, language and its meaning in the context of culture, and other more detailed ideas related to his analyses of the structures of kinship, or to the social role of myth. In his opinion, what gives man ultimate supremacy over animals is the ability

9) Kardiner and Preble, *The Studied Man*, 174.

10) Malinowski, *Sex and Repression in Savage Society*.

11) Firth, "An Appraisal of Modern Social Anthropology."

12) Malinowski, "O zasadzie ekonomii myślenia," 367.

to think symbolically and constructively, which makes him aware that his existence is uncertain and limited.¹³

According to Malinowski, the basic needs of the human body, namely the need for food, reproduction, security, and liberty (understood as freedom of movement), are satisfied by culture through *ad hoc* systems of organized activities. Culture thus creates methods of obtaining food, crafting, technical constructions, courtship and marriage, kinship schemes, and military organizations. However, this state of affairs gives rise to secondary or derived needs, and derived needs are no longer innate urges of the organism, but to a large extent derivatives of man's cultural reactions to innate needs. Therefore, economic needs, values and ideals, legal prohibitions and awareness of human rights and privileges, social ambitions and ancestral feelings, a sense of political prestige, and the willingness to obey are essential human characteristics. These needs are determined by the conditions of human existence in organized societies and not by instinct or some other factor of innate endowment.

Self-presentation as a Natural Need Endowing Vital Functions with Meaning

In the context of the naturalistic paradigm, relevant to our discussion is the theory proposed by Portmann in *Das Tier als sociales Wesen*.¹⁴ Portmann says that phenomena occurring in the world do not only serve the survival of the individual and the species, but point to a specific attitude of self-presentation observed in both animals and humans. He writes that even before the task of preserving the individual and the species, there is the simple fact of self-expression which gives meaning to vital functions.¹⁵

Could self-presentation be one of man's basic, instinctively realized needs? After all, self-presentation is often the reason for exposing oneself to conflict with others, or even the risk of losing one's life, health, or freedom. And yet, in addition to putting the individual in danger, this irresistible temptation of self-presentation

13) Malinowski, *Kultura jako wyznacznik zachowania się*.

14) Portmann, *Das Tier als sociales Wesen*.

15) Ibid., 252.

and the pleasure derived from it may also lead to establishing relationships based on cooperation and friendship.

According to Portmann, it is a mistake to interpret the external shape of an animal, including man, as an essential element that serves through movement, the intake of food, avoidance of enemies, or finding sexual partners, to the preservation of that which is important, that is, the existence of the inner apparatus and the existence of its body. An important problem is not what an individual is, but how it appears.¹⁶ It is an expressive and self-expressive function.¹⁷ Manifestation through self-presentation of the external surface serves communication purposes and thus provides the living being with dynamism and power. For this reason, the relationship between living organisms becomes more varied and abundant, and the relational sphere expands, enabling and realizing the need for social life.¹⁸

The main effect of the morphological change noted by Portmann in more complex organisms is the designation of their inside for the realization primarily of vital functions. The external part of the body then becomes a field of expression, that is, the way one expresses oneself. This significant change in the structure of living organisms, which took place at some point in evolution, not only became the basis for their survival, but introduced a new quality of relations between organisms, those which required communication. Portmann calls this change *selbstdarstellung*, meaning self-expression, self-presentation, and *selbststeigerung*, which means self-improvement, self-development. For Portmann, this social dimension of the animal based on communication might appear as detached from the function of preserving individual life. However, the bi-dimensionality of existence in the state of nature, consisting in self-presentation of the outside of the organism and in the invisible inside, probably fostered the emergence of some form of self-reflection, which gave rise to conscience and thus a superior form of life.

Human life is expressed not only in the need for survival, but also in the need to communicate with the world and derive pleasure from being in the world, resulting in a culture founded not only on vital values, but also on ethical and aesthetic ones. It

16) Ibid.

17) Tolone, "Adolf Portmann."

18) Ibid., 233.

may therefore be argued that self-presentation is a motivation and a kind of manifestation of the need for activity through contact and communication both within and without the species. An analysis of the shape of an animal, including that of man, is therefore related to the analysis of the eye watching them. The eye and the image they see create a certain functional unity, as does the digestive system and food.

The abundance of the forms of living organisms on the Earth is unimaginably great. Such forms often follow the laws of symmetry, so they can be seen as beautiful according to the classical rules of beauty. It seems that the double-sided symmetry of higher animals is created to be viewed by something or someone with two eyes, someone who recognizes and can understand bilateral symmetry. According to Portmann, the nature of creatures emphasizes paying attention to that part of the body which constitutes the head. To understand the organism as a whole, we need to look at the head, because the head is the principle that organizes the animal, the head shows us and other creatures where and how to look at the animal.

It may appear that the internal organs of living beings are very similar to one another. They are also usually perceived as not very pleasing to the eye. By seeing the outer shell of living organisms, we have become accustomed to looking at the outside. We prefer to see the external. The irresistible need to “present oneself,” that is, to manifest one’s presence, is no less powerful than the instinct of self-preservation.¹⁹ It seems that the dominance of that which is external activates the spontaneous operation of our cognitive receptors. Therefore; whatever can be seen, wants to be seen; whatever can be heard, to be heard; whatever can be touched, to be touched.

So, all that is alive wants to be seen and known not as the inner self, but as the external individual, harmonious and beautiful. The process of self-presentation occurs very clearly in higher forms of animal life, and in the case of the human species reaches its climax. Paradoxically, modern psychology reveals a monotonous repetitiveness of the human inside which contrasts with the richness of man’s external actions. And this difference corresponds exactly to the difference between the inside and outside of the human body. It might teasingly be said that our diversity in the flesh as a result of evolution is at the same time evidence of the natural need for self-presentation. If this were not the case, our bodily diversity would be an excessive

19) Portmann, *Das Tier als sociales Wesen*, 113.

waste of evolutionary energy, since too great an accumulation of bodies, unable to move freely, interfere with the flesh and provokes aggression, threatening the safety of both animal and man.

Portmann claims that the absence of certain instincts in humans is not a negative thing, for he believes that their presence would prevent a person from acting creatively, which is excluded by instinct. Man is destined for creativity as manifested free activity by nature, which has given him the longest period of youth so he might have time to assimilate the cultural achievements of his environment. Man's physicality harmonizes with his creative abilities and meets them halfway. Nature, by giving man a long youth, has designed him to be formed in a cultural environment. Provided with the longest period of youth, man is a being of history and tradition.²⁰

Portmann notes that the extended period of adolescence promotes the teaching and prolongation of the period of cultural influences. Man does not naturally inherit the life patterns of his surroundings, but learns them by assimilating tradition. He must be young and malleable in order to fully assimilate these patterns (the cultural environment). According to Portmann, man in his development is focused on undergoing as long a process of formation as possible, and therefore on living in culture, creating it, and drawing from it. Thus, for Portmann nature is not something that needs to be overcome, nor is it a lack or a shortage. Nature is part of the essence of man.

In support of Portmann's thesis on the need for self-presentation, one can cite the behavior of peacocks and pheasants which display their magnificent plumage while dancing in front of females. A much more intriguing example of self-presentation is the fashion for wigs, which were known already in antiquity but reached their apogee in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when they not only embellished men and women, but also ennobled and elevated those who wore them. The size of the *allonge* wig was huge during the time of King Louis XIV of France. This cumbersome and insanitary fashion lasted for as many as 150 years. The appearance of the wig gradually ceased to resemble a natural hairstyle, as it was styled with stiff curls, powder, and bows. The wig was no longer an imitation of natural hair, but was treated as a kind of ornament that lost its power of influence only after the French Revolution.

20) Portmann, *Biologische Fragmente zu einer Lehre vom Menschen*.

Significant support to Portmann's thesis that self-presentation is a natural manifestation of man's need for activity was provided by the views of Huizinga, who writes in his famous book *Homo Ludens* that play is one of the essential manifestations of free activity. In his opinion, it is the wig, among other things, as a kind of cultural phenomenon, that may be classified as an explicit manifestation of the ludic factor in culture.²¹

Huizinga believes that there is something in play and games that goes beyond the instinct to stay alive, as it gives a certain libertarian and creative meaning to activities in life. Play is founded on the natural need for laughter and the pursuit of pleasure. On its basis, man creates for himself an imaginary world of culture alongside the often threatening and dangerous world of nature. Huizinga writes:

First and foremost, then, all play is a voluntary activity. Play to order is no longer play... By this quality of freedom alone, play marks itself off from the course of the natural process. It is something added thereto and spread out over it like a flowering, an ornament, a garment... It is never imposed by physical necessity or moral duty. It is never a task. It is done at leisure, during "free time." ... It is free, it is in fact freedom.²²

Play, therefore, is an adornment to life, it complements it and triggers in us a sense of pleasure. Play exceeds the purely biological process of nutrition, pairing, and self-defense. It is beyond the necessity to directly satisfy urges and desires. Huizinga argues that play in its higher forms (i.e. when it signifies something or sanctifies something), belongs to the sphere of festival and ritual, that is, the sacred sphere. Play becomes culture, and as a cultural form takes on a particular shape.²³ It is full of rhythm and harmony, it brings and bonds together, captivates, enchants, and keeps one in suspense, which while causing uncertainty, offers a chance to win.²⁴

When referring to Huizinga's reflections, it is worth considering in this context the meaning of the word *epideixis*, which means exhibition, display, performance.

21) Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 185–86.

22) Ibid., 7–8.

23) Ibid., 8.

24) Ibid., 10.

Interestingly, this word was used in ancient Greece to refer to the speeches of sophists, philosophers whom Socrates and Plato often polemicized with. Why them? Because the sophists had some ideas at their disposal which they knew how to visualize and demonstrate in public speeches.

Huizinga again: "It was an event when a famous sophist visited a town. He was gaped at like a miraculous being... . The spectators applauded and laughed at every well-aimed crack. It was pure play, catching your opponent in a net of argument or giving him a knock-out blow. It was a point of honour to put nothing but twisters, to which every answer must be wrong."²⁵

Clearly, sophistical oratory did not draw a sharp line between seriousness and responsibility for one's words required of a philosopher, and play. Also, philosophy had its origins in the ludic oratorical contests which Socrates was so much irritated with. It should be noted, however, as Huizinga claims, that it was the sophists who contributed to a large extent to creating the specific conditions in which the Hellenic ideals of education and culture formed. This was so because knowledge and learning in ancient Greece was not taught in school in the present sense of the word. For Greeks, knowledge and learning were the fruit of leisure time which a free man, a citizen, could use to think. This free time appeared when it was not claimed by his duties to the state, war, or worship. Ancient Greece was therefore the place where, in his spare time, man became the first representative of the philosophical way of life spent on reflection and study.²⁶

It might therefore be supposed that the mind-employing games during which attempts were made to ambush one another with tricky questions and thus make the interlocutors exercise their minds, occupied a very important place in the leisure time of the Greeks. But once the agonal factor took the dominant place in the Hellenic world, its influence proved so important that the philosophical dispute replaced oratorical feats, and rhetoric as a culture for the masses began to dominate over philosophy. So, when the speeches of rhetoricians became a way to show off, flaunt and boast through clever and often false use of words, this rhetorical dueling risked ignorance of the fundamental difference between arguments based on true premises and those based

25) Ibid., 147.

26) Ibid., 147–48.

on falsehood. For it was not always easy to realize clearly the logical errors which were made all too often by rhetoricians and demagogues in front of the crowd listening to their oratorical performances.

In this context, it is impossible to ignore the concept of *agon*, which in Greek means fighting, rivalry that from the perspective of Olympus could be seen in the eternal games. The eternal *agon* which man's *psyche* and *soma* faced up to ever since he first came to exist. According to Huizinga,²⁷ the agonistic basis of culture had been formed in play as prior to and earlier than all culture. It was not a transition from battle to play, much less from play to battle, but a transition in play-like contests to culture, to the layer of ideas, systems of concepts and norms, abilities and conventions.²⁸ Which is why the concept of noble play involves honor, dignity, rivalry, and magnanimity. "Magic and mystery, heroic longings, the foreshadowings of music, sculpture and logic all seek form and expression in noble play."²⁹

Thus, any action detached from everyday life and referring to the child-like sense of play may in various forms turn into self-presentation, exhibition, creative performance, an act, which may also, however, become a transgression, exhibitionism, or an action lacking good taste and harmony. Self-presentation is, in a sense, a kind of spectacle that can become reason for pride or cause for contempt and disgrace.

The Magnanimous Man and the Mass-man in the Context of Activity Combined With Pleasure

Self-presentation may be analyzed not only as a biologically determined instinct based on normative naturalism, but also based on the premises of ethics as a value in itself that is not reducible to any biological facts. For when we consider the phenomenon of self-presentation in the context of Aristotle's ethics of virtue, it becomes an essential aspect of the activity of a magnanimous man.

A magnanimous man is proud of his ethos and has the right to present his moral superiority, that is, the right to present himself. But self-presentation is an ethical

27) Ibid., 112.

28) Ibid., 113.

29) Ibid., 75.

value in the case of a magnanimous man; in the case of a proud or dishonorable man, self-presentation becomes an anti-value and an expression of arrogance.

A megalopsychos, whose actions reflect the natural order in the human world, was described by Aristotle. As a tutor to Alexandre of Macedon, he was responsible for his proper training, and to this end he developed a model of conduct becoming a magnanimous man during both war and peace. He presents this model in Book IV of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.³⁰ The common understanding of the word “magnanimous” refers to the character of a man who lets a defeated foe go free, who is not envious or vindictive, who forgets the wrongs he has suffered, etc. When reading Aristotle’s reflections on the megalopsychos, one also has other connotations with this attitude, however. Aristotle believes that a man who is to be called magnanimous should be one who considers himself worthy of great things, which is verified as an actual merit. Therefore, it seems reasonable to replace the word “magnanimous” with the expression “justly proud,” or “deservedly proud.” For such is a man who has found the proper measure between exaggerated humility and conceit.³¹ The self-presentation of a deservedly proud man can also give pleasure both to him and to those who look at him. It is therefore important to point out, in the context of the natural need for self-presentation discussed in the section of the article on the views of Portmann and Huizinga, that this problem was already present in the views of Aristotle. He considered the question of pleasure, opposing anti-hedonism which claimed that pleasure is evil. In contrast to Plato, who downplayed the importance of pleasure, the category of pleasure is at the center of Aristotle’s reflections. Looking for a correlation between pleasure and man’s highest good, or *eudaimonia*, he asked whether pleasure is a human good or perhaps only an animal good. If it is a human good, to what extent is it a condition for *eudaimonia* (i.e. well-being, prosperity, and happiness). And consequently, does pleasure have anything to do with *arete*? The question of pleasure is discussed by Aristotle in the *Rhetorics* and the *Nicomachean Ethics* (i.e. in Book VII and Book X).³² According to Maciej Smolak’s interesting reflections on the good of pleasure and types of friendship in Aristotle’s lectures:

30) Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, op.cit.

31) Ossowska, *Ethos rycerski i jego odmiany*, 39.

32) Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* VII, 11–14 and X 1–5.26; Aristotle, *Rhetorics* I, 1369b, 33–35.

Aristotle makes it clear that pleasure is neither a process nor an autotelic activity, but something that belongs to them (*oikeia*). Aristotle makes it clear that pleasure accompanies *energeia*, but *energeia* in this context means not only an autotelic activity, but also a non-autotelic activity, i.e. a process. This can be seen in the examples he provides, which include building, among other things. It can therefore be assumed that every activity is correlated with its proper pleasure. Additional confirmation of this conjecture is the fact that a difference in the type of activity implies a difference in the type of pleasure. For example, shameful activity is correlated with shameful pleasure, while righteous activity is correlated with pleasure of the highest order. The fact that pleasure and activity are two different things is evidenced by the fact that: an activity may occur without pleasure but not *vice versa*; pleasure complements activity; as the intensity of activity decreases, the intensity of pleasure decreases as well.³³

Plato's concept that all pleasure has an aesthetic origin became the object of Aristotle's criticism on both the metaphysical and ethical levels.³⁴ The definition of pleasure proposed by Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics* can be presented as follows: every activity, when unimpeded and perfected, gives rise to its own specific pleasure, one that is derived from pre-existing grounds.³⁵ The source of pleasure, then, is an action, an activity that is unimpeded and faces no obstacles or resistance, that is further perfected, meaning that the subject of the action has the capacity and disposition to perform it. However, the right conditions must exist for an activity to be pleasurable. First of all, the subject who performs the activity must have the necessary ability to perform it. According to Smolak, Aristotle claims that the ability which is the source of an activity must be in a good condition, and moreover the object that stimulates the ability to act must be the most beautiful or valuable of those that belong to the range of things that stimulate action. Thus, the object of pleasure subjectively experienced

33) Smolak, "Dobro, przyjemność, a typy przyjaźni," 198–99.

34) Rudebusch, "Pleasure," 406.

35) Smolak, "Dobro, przyjemność, a typy przyjaźni," 168. See also Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1174b 14–19.

by a human being should be the most perfect, and have value. However, the question arises as to whether, by performing an activity that gives us pleasure, it is possible to experience this pleasure permanently? Aristotle will answer that no human ability can be continuously active and consequently be a permanent source of activity. And since pleasure is linked to activity because it accompanies it, pleasure must also cease when activity ceases.

Aristotle does not mix morality and pleasure, but does not radically contrast the two, for he does not state that what is pleasurable is morally wrong, or that what is moral cannot be pleasurable. Pleasure, then, cannot be separated from human activity, for it is present in intrinsically good behavior and, consequently, becomes naturally pleasurable. Moral excellence is thus a disposition expressed in compliance with the principles of reason and in positive feelings toward what is morally good. It is through reason and the moral virtue of *arete* that man can achieve harmony in moral life, whereby he is not fatigued by either excess or lack of desires. Aristotle's concept makes us realize that a good man has a sensitive sense of what is good, and so can employ his emotions in choosing and realizing the good. He believes actions guided by *arete* do not deform the emotional sphere, but harmoniously integrate it into our morality. It is natural, then, for megalopsychos (i.e. a justly proud man), to feel pleasure in doing what is right.

Aristotle describes even the appearance of such a man in great detail. He should be tall, for such are the demands of beauty; while short people may be good-looking and proportionately built, they are not beautiful.³⁶ This type of man should move at a slow pace and in a dignified manner; a justly proud man should never hurry, talk too fast, or use superfluous gestures, as this would point to irritability. The highest good for a megalopsychos is his honor, or self-worth, and justified pride.

Now the proud man, since he deserves most, must be good in the highest degree; for the better man always deserves more, and the best man most... . And it would be most unbecoming for a proud man to fly from danger, swinging his arms by his sides, or to wrong another; for to what end should he do disgraceful acts, he to whom nothing is great? ... Pride, then,

36) Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 60 (1123b).

seems to be a sort of crown of the virtues; for it makes them greater, and it is not found without them.³⁷

A justly proud man only appreciates the praise received from people as noble as himself. He should not let any insults thrown at him pass, however, since suffering insults is proper more to the nature of a slave than a noble man. Generosity, beneficence, and charity are also characteristic of this kind of attitude. In such a man, his just pride is based on veracity, as truthfulness requires courage and independence. Aristotle writes:

Let us now describe those who pursue truth or falsehood alike in words and deeds and in the claims they put forward. The boastful man, then, is thought to be apt to claim the things that bring glory, when he has not got them, or to claim more of them than he has, and the mock-modest man on the other hand to disclaim what he has or belittle it, while the man who observes the mean (i.e., the megalopsychos – AD) is one who calls a thing by its own name, being truthful both in life and in word, owning to what he has, and neither more nor less.³⁸

Thus, a megalopsychos is an upright man, a lover of truth, who considers falsehood an unsightly thing. A justly proud man cannot indulge in any kind of weakness. He would find it humiliating to admire someone else's abilities in an area where he claims to have high achievements himself. But the most humiliating for a megalopsychos is the duress and inevitability of death. He overcomes this fear by holding death in disregard. In *Politics*,³⁹ Aristotle adds yet another trait to this detailed description, namely that a justly proud man needs noble descent and wealth, explaining that "the noble, or free-born, or rich, may with good reason claim office."

We may compare a justly proud man with the simpleton described by Aristotle's disciple, Theophrastus, in his *Characters*. This description emphasizes features oppo-

37) Ibid., 61 (1124a).

38) Ibid., 65 (1127a).

39) Aristotle, *Politics*, 69, Book III, 1283a.

site to the image of a megalopsychos described above, beautiful in terms of character and aesthetic appearance. In discussing the simpleton, Theophrastus points to his loudness, immoderate movements, suspiciousness of household members, indiscretion, stinginess, excessive interest in prices, wearing oversized shoes, and doing shameful things.⁴⁰

These examples highlight the fundamental difference between the self-presentation of a magnanimous man and a man who behaves like a simpleton. This difference is also noted and described by Ortega y Gasset in his famous book *The Revolt of the Masses*.⁴¹ In his opinion, by making a most radical division of human attitudes that we observe every day, two types of behavior can be identified. There are people who demand a lot from themselves and work on self-improvement, not shunning any difficulty and responsibility. There are also others, however, who do not put any demands on themselves, do not force themselves to perfect their actions, but are like buoys floating without any effort on the waves of life. Such attitudes have become even more evident once the mass-man appeared on the horizon of history. According to Ortega y Gasset, he has begun to dominate and determine the fate of mankind. Ortega y Gasset presents a kind of psychological analysis of the mass-man, also called crowd-man in his writings. His concept of mass is sociological and psychological. In *The Revolt of the Masses*, he writes:

There can be no doubt that it is technicism – in combination with liberal democracy – which has engendered mass-man in the quantitative sense of the expression. But these pages have attempted to show that it is also responsible for the existence of mass-man in the qualitative and pejorative sense of the term. By mass ... is not to be specially understood the workers; it does not indicate a social class, but a kind of man to be found to-day in all social classes, who consequently represents our age, in which he is the predominant, ruling power.⁴²

40) Theophrastus, *Characters*.

41) Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses*.

42) Ibid., 108.

The mass-man is first of all characterized by an inborn and deep-seated belief that life is easy, prosperous, and free of any tragic constraints. Therefore, this average man has a sense of power that leads him to accept himself and his own moral and intellectual views, which he considers to be perfect. This uncritical state of complacency makes the mass-man believe he answers to no one, while at the same time imposing his common beliefs on everyone using the method of immediate action. This set of characteristics, according to Ortega y Gasset, indicates the type of man he calls “the spoiled child of human history,” the “heir-man,” the “primitive in revolt,” or even the “barbarian.”⁴³ The philosopher believes that a world offering an excess of possibilities gives birth to deformed and even pathological human types.

Therefore, according to Ortega y Gasset an hereditary aristocrat, born in abundance and splendor, does not live life authentically unless he encounters on his way some difficulties to overcome that might ennoble his character. The comfort-seeking and conservative attitude of the old aristocracy had inevitably led to its degradation. Ortega y Gasset refers to the deformed human types by the common name of “heir-man,” of whom the aristocrat is only a particular variety; another variety is the spoilt child, and yet another, the most complete and radical one, is the modern mass-man. The mass-man, also called the vulgar man, is the new barbarian, the product of modern civilization.

The above ways of self-presentation by the magnanimous man and the mass-man and the differences resulting from their manifestations of freedom make us aware that self-presentation can turn into a fault, into an action devoid of good taste and harmony. Consequently, the creative, authentic commitment and actions guided by virtue in the case of the megalopsychos have been presented in opposition to the attitude of the mass-man.

The mass-man and his attitude may further be described, as has been done by Sloterdijk, by using the term indifference.⁴⁴ It means a state of malaise, apathy, inertia, detachment, passivity, lethargy. It is a notion which, in a way, defines the contemporary man who does not have any of the energy or passionate commitment characteristic of a megalopsychos. The contemporary man, described as indifferent, is in

43) Ibid., 98.

44) Sloterdijk, *Die Verachtung der Massen*.

a way, forced by circumstances resulting from the principles of liberal democracy to embrace inactivity, passivity, a dispassionate non-involvement.

According to Sloterdijk, the mass-man is no longer characterized by the qualities which Elias Canetti, whom he called “an anarchist of anthropological thought,” described in his *Crowds and Power*.⁴⁵ First of all, the mass-man is expressed today not by a state of organized multitudes and physical gatherings, but by virtual participation in mass media programs.⁴⁶ The mass-man “is a mass, not seeing others, ... post-modern societies are no longer primarily aware of their own bodily experience, but only observe themselves through media symbols, through discourses, fashions, programs and mainstream values.”⁴⁷

This situation may be described using the paradoxical concept of mass individualism.⁴⁸ However, this mass individualism which according to Sloterdijk characterizes the post-modern mass-man, indicates an increasingly apparent unwillingness to act, and loneliness. His activity boils down to micro-anarchizing statements posted on social media.

Sloterdijk notes that the modern mass culture destroys individualism and anticipates the failure of all attempts at making oneself interesting; “we differ from one another only on the assumption that our differences make no difference. The mass obliges.”⁴⁹ Non-differentiation as a principle of the mass eliminates man’s natural need for recognition and self-presentation. The struggle for recognition is hindered because recognition and the resulting satisfaction is not and cannot be understood, unlike in the case of the megalopsychos, as special respect and admiration of someone’s perfection.

Conclusions

It is difficult to answer unequivocally the question of how moral principles, even clearly defined, might become a model of conduct warranting individual and social satisfac-

45) Canetti, *Crowds and Power*; see also Barnouw, “Anthropologische Phantasie.”

46) Sloterdijk, *Die Verachtung der Massen*, 22.

47) Ibid., 23.

48) Freyer, *Theorie des gegenwertigen Zeitalters*, 224.

49) Sloterdijk, *Die Verachtung der Massen*, 143.

tion and wellbeing. One must immediately make the proviso that it is inconceivable to act in accordance with rules or to follow rules outside a community. It is above all the community's response, as well as regularity in its behavior and conduct that forms the basis and starting point in creating a pattern of conduct which it accepts. It is worth paying attention to man's special ability to identify with representatives of his own species and to learn by imitation. These factors generate the emergence of culture and the transmission of intergenerational cultural communication.

However, certain skills and abilities, including the sense of satisfaction and fulfillment, may be shaped by biological factors – primarily psychological ones, which are the result of evolution. In the process of civilizational development, some attitudes dominate at a certain time, while others are marginalized. The theoretical framework for this type of reflection is provided by the concept proposed by Sorokin who distinguishes ideational from sensate mentality. The current of social psychologism also includes Malinowski's functionalism.

On the other hand, on the basis of normative ethics in the current of naturalism, ethical values are reduced to specific biological needs or instincts, determined by evolution and accompanied by an instinctively realized need for self-presentation analyzed by Portmann. Portmann's theory is supported by Huizinga's conclusions summing up his reflections on play. Although according to Huizinga, play is a cultural fact, it has a lot to do with satisfaction resulting from self-presentation as it is determined by the natural need for laughter and the pursuit of pleasure.

The article also presents self-presentation as an important aspect of activity and the pursuit of good and self-improvement configured with the pursuit of pleasure on the grounds of Aristoteles' concept of *megalopsychos*. *Megalopsychos*, who is a man of a typically ideational mentality, must be a free man so that he can manifest his ethos, which makes him magnanimous and thus distinguishes him from other people and places him above them. By manifesting his ethos, the *megalopsychos* presents himself – otherwise he would not be able to win the recognition of others who match his noble attitude. Self-presentation is therefore an expression of the activity of a magnanimous man.

In the article, the ideational attitude of a *megalopsychos* has been confronted with the sensate attitude of Ortega y Gasset's mass-man. Through self-presentation, a magnanimous man manifests virtue, while the mass-man – its absence. Mass-man's

initially strong need for self-presentation gradually becomes dulled and transforms into the indifference and apathy described by Sloterdijk. Reflections presented in the article lead to the conclusion that the attitude of the mass-man seems to ultimately eliminate the original need for and pleasure of self-presentation and being among others. The mass man hidden behind a computer screen or a smartphone rarely presents himself as he truly is. And this attitude affects the strength of basic instincts and thus changes the nature of man.

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