

# THE COURAGE TO BE AND THE END OF THE WORLD

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## *Introduction*

One of the greatest values of human being and her/his unique role in the world is giving life to forms created in their minds into shared world. Once this ability has been obstructed, humans rebel against the destiny they themselves or fate has brought and confronted them with. In this text we will analyse the proper human attitude in front of the threats of self-affirmation in existence, spiritual level, morals and their true, unique being. The best approach to the meaning of those threats is in understanding their most extensive scales, like the threats of different visions of the end of the world are. Each vision demands a proper human attitude. Consequently, each 'the end of the world' gives a new perspective of what courage is and what human could become and in potential already is.

*Keywords:* courage, virtue, the end of the world, world, nothingness, spiritual world, personal world, crises, Paul Tillich, Aristotle

### 1. *The end of the world*

Manifold forms of thinking about *the end of the world* have led human beings to create various concepts for their visions and ideas, expressed in terms of dooms day, Armageddon, last hour, absolute destruction, personal, moral, economic collapse, downfall, world disaster, nothingness, emptiness. All visions, grounded on an essential idea of the end of the world, depend greatly on significantly different contents of the words 'the world' and 'the end'. For any further discussions, domains of the content of these words need to be defined and their properties and relations enlightened.<sup>1</sup> Domains of the concepts 'the

1 Statements of Willard van Orman Quine about no facts of the matter about people's mental lives are taken under serious consideration! For, if there is no fact of the matter about whether two people mean the same thing by their words, then there is no fact of the matter about whether they ever have mental states with the same content; and consequently no fact of the matter about what anyone ever thinks. Still, those statements should be the theme of the next, following article or chapter.

end' and 'the world' are interrelated. If we speak about 'absolute end of the world', where there is nothing more at all, then we must speak about the world as a whole, including every *in potentia et actus* being.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, if we, for example, speak about the 'end of the personal world', then the discussions follow the path of describing and analyzing properties and relations of our personal world, in order to understand how this reality can cease to exist. In first option of the 'absolute end of the world', the concept of 'the end' deducts the concept of 'the world', and in other, only by defining of the type of the world, we can understand with what kind of 'the end' we are dealing with. 'The end' in this discussion has starting neutral value, leaving to the gradual steps of argumentation to gain its positive or negative meaning.

Additionally, if we would like to understand the impact of our cultural language on these concepts, we ought to consider Sapir–Worfs hypothesis.<sup>3</sup> The words that we use in our language of culture do not have only a descriptive role of events, but our perceptions of reality directly depend upon them. If our language does not have a concept for example the torn on the stalk, our perception of the plant will not be concentrated on the torn as such, but on a stalk as whole, so if we get a sting from the torn in that imaginary culture, we would blame the stalk and its properties. Similarly, if our western culture would not speak in the words of spiritual and physical dualism, we would not think of the end of the physical and beginning of the spiritual world. Understanding reality depends upon existence of certain terms in language, the words have the power to emphasize and obscure our perceptions. Rather than any other expression mentioned above, the phrase 'the end of the world' in English language gives to our minds the closest perception to the German word 'Weltuntergang' and Croatian 'propast svijeta'.<sup>4</sup>

2 Aristotle has introduced principle dichotomy of potentiality and actuality to explain many of his philosophical theories (motion, causality, ethics, psychology, etc.) and is still widely used among Aristotelianism and philosophies of another kind to explain dichotomy between 'what it is' and 'what could it be'.

3 "Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society. It is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language is merely an incidental means of solving specific problems of communication or reflection. The fact of the matter is that the 'real world' is to a large extent unconsciously built upon the language habits of the group. No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached ... We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation." Sapir, Edward: *Culture, Language and Personality*, Berkeley: University of California Press 1958, 69.

4 This was important to emphasise on intercultural discussion at the conference in Klagenfurt in September 2012, where this lecture was represented for a first time.

In the author's opinion, there are four basic concepts of 'the end of the world'. Regarding the first meaning, which gives the grounds for all of the rest, the fourth one has the most metaphorical sense. Still, it gains its importance due to its most common experience and its frequent language use. Those are:

- a. The end of world as *nothingness*
- b. The end of the *physical* and beginning of the *spiritual* world
- c. The end of the *human* world based on *moral* principles and virtues
- d. The end of the *personal* world we used to know

## 2. *Courage*

A beautifully written *novum* in philosophical thoughts about courage, in the year 1952, was given by German philosopher and theologian Paul Tillich, when he published the book "The courage to be"<sup>5</sup>. The author could not even imagine the proportion of the incurred success. Although written with strong philosophical vocabulary and references to philosophical authors, inspired by the powers and love of Being (God), publication has been widely read among the people with different educational background and beliefs.<sup>6</sup> The period after Second World War, the period of the worst kind of human deviance, the times of economical crises, depressions, lost souls, worlds, virtues and values, human kind needed to hear the words of reasonable and believable answers to their questions. What is the answer to the end of the goods that they have built, developed and burned? The threat of existence was present on each step of their everyday living. Everything they touched it could have perish in another second, again.

Paul Tillich in the book "The courage to be" stresses out that human beings can find their strength to continue to live in the form of the courage, in spite of the fact that their existence has been seriously threatened by nothingness, meaninglessness and judgment. Anxieties of death and fate, meaninglessness and emptiness, guilt and condemnations<sup>7</sup> that lead humans to despair, the state of true being with oneself should be accepted, but also over-

5 Tillich, Paul: *The courage to be*, New Haven & London: Yale University, 2000.

6 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oXoH0Rtc7OQ>, "A conversation with dr. Paul Tillich", Harvard, 1956

7 Tillich, Paul: *The courage to be*, 41: "The awareness of this threefold threat is anxiety appearing in three forms, that of fate and death (briefly, the anxiety of death), that of emptiness and loss of meaning (briefly, the anxiety of meaninglessness), that of guilt and condemnation (briefly, the anxiety of condemnation). In all three forms anxiety is existential in the sense that it belongs to existence as such and not to an abnormal state of mind as in neurotic (and psychotic) anxiety."

come in the state of courage. Courageous human accepts the possibilities of nonbeing in his/hers limitations of contingent being, and at the same time admits the greater power of the being (or Being). Therefore, courage for Tillich is the moral virtue only on the level of moral self-affirmation, while accepting the own being in its pure existence (in spite of the possibilities of non-existence) courage is the state of the ontological self-affirmation as well as the path to spiritual self-affirmation (in spite of possibilities of meaninglessness).

Even the character of Socrates, in Plato's dialogue *Laches*, says that if we reconsider what courage is, we could conclude that the courage has been understood only partially; courage could not be just a part of the virtue but the whole virtue itself.<sup>8</sup> To act courageously a person needs to be reasonable, noble and just.<sup>9</sup> Courage encompasses much more of human abilities than standing up and fighting for one's own goals. Plato continues the discussion in dialogues *Protagoras*<sup>10</sup> and *Republic*,<sup>11</sup> arguing that the courage includes knowledge of what we should and should not be frightened of.<sup>12</sup> Further on, Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics* adopts the same opinion that the courageous man have to feel the fear,<sup>13</sup> but accept and handle it on the proper way in order to realise beauty and good.<sup>14</sup>

8 Plato: *Laches* 198b, Zagreb: Biblioteka Scopus 1998

9 *Laches* belongs to aporetic style of dialogue, longer than the others, but by its standards it gives the paths to discuss about certain themes, at the same time all of the conclusions belongs to the reader, not to final Plato's teaching or attitude.

10 Plato: *Protagoras* 349 d–e, Zagreb: Naprijed 1975

11 Plato: *Republic* 430 b, Zagreb: Naklada Jurčić 2004

12 Linda R. Rabieh explains how courage can lead philosophers out of Plato's cave: "Rather than being simply the obstacle to reflection that Socrates at times presents it as being, spiritedness may in some cases help to propel one out of the cave in two different but related ways. First, if the moral concerns at the heart of spiritedness can lead people tenaciously to defend what they take to be the elements of their honour or worthiness, it can lead them to want not to be fools who are deceived by the cave's images; anyone who cares about honours and dignity would consider it slavish to persist in remaining so deluded. Spiritedness then can help the level the obstacles blocking ascent from the cave. Second, spiritedness can inspire (inspire) one with a sense of grandeur that enables one to persist in a project despite the difficulties encountered along the way. If it takes the right form, the very thing that maintains people in their illusions can help to overcome them", chapter "Courage and the Path to Philosophy" Rabieh, Linda R: *Plato and the virtue of courage*, Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press 2006, 153

13 Miller, William Ian: *The mystery of Courage*, Lonon: Harvard University Press 2000, 209: "Fear jumps from one person to another despite the will of the recipient. To catch courage, it seems, I also have to want to catch it. Fear only has to overcome my sense of well-being to win control of my inner spaces; and my sense of well-being is very fragile. It doesn't make too much to undo it. Courage, in contrast, has to overcome much more robust defences before it can infect me. Courage must battle my fear and roil, and the battle is not an easy one to win, for courage is called for only in situations in which it is natural to fear, in which the setting is indeed dangerous; my fear, in other words, has every reason to stick around."

14 Aristotle: *Nicomachean ethics*, 1115 b10, Zagreb: Biblioteka Episteme 1988

However, the courage is always a *state of affirmation of value in spite of threatening aspects in reality* (affirmed value could be the value of the subject or object, or their synthesis). If we are standing in front of ultimate negation of reality, as any version of the end of the world is, then the highest and the strongest level of affirmation is needed.

### 3. *The end of the world as nothingness*

Our existence includes possibility of non-existence. Through creativity of life the existence and non-existence make a perplexed whole, which indicates in our daily lives that even though we continue to exist, other items, objects, people, circumstances around us are perishing. The symbolism of nothingness is present in everyday losses and disappearances. All items around us have an expiry date. What if everything is under the expiry date?

Existentialists and their precursors through the whole area of the existentialists' movement kept their thoughts tight to the possibilities of nothing, not just human lives, but the whole world as unstable possibility of becoming nothing. Can we contrary claim that nothing is not possible to happen in its fullest proportions as absolute end, when we do not understand the nature of being, why and how something is? If being does not hold in itself a sufficient reason to be, (as represented in Leibniz' Principle of sufficient reason<sup>15</sup> and Schopenhauer first form of The Principle of Sufficient Reason of Becoming<sup>16</sup>) and depends upon other, then we can expect their ending.

Believing that the world's end is in nothing can easily lead to desperation, because man cannot do absolutely anything to prevent that destiny. However, humans like to believe that they have influence on their future circumstances, either through their powers or through the powers of their gods. But, what if there is nothing to be done? Then there is *hope* that our belief about the end of the world is wrong! In this stance believer and non-believer in God have different reasons for their attitude. Belief in God as an absolute Being gives to the believer a reason that God will prefer 'being' to 'not being'. Absolute Being, in traditional scholastic philosophy,<sup>17</sup> is also understood as a Good and Reasonable Creator who pertains in its intentions, therefore world's fate is in 'continuing to be'. Even more, if God and Nature are understood as inseparable!<sup>18</sup> Unlike the believers in Absolute Being, those who share belief

15 Leibniz, G.W in Principles of Grace and Nature (first edition 1715)

16 Schopenhauer, Arthur: On The Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason, S 36, Open Court Publishing Company 1997

17 Aquinas, Thomas: Compendium of theology, chapters 100 and 101, published on Internet:

18 »A substance which is absolutely infinite is indivisible« Spinoza, Baruch: Ethics, London: J.M. Dent & Sons 1989 (Part I, Propositions 12 and 13)

in *contingency* are lacking strong supportive premise for their conclusion on existence. Still, she/he can have a hope, if anything, for a simple reason that the future is unknown. The hope in existence itself gives a non-believer a reason to continue to live, to exist. Aristotle dedicates few paragraphs in Nicomachean ethics describing that the courage is full of good hope.<sup>19</sup> The courage is the mean which holds the hope alive. Only courageous human continue to exist believing and hoping that she/he can reach the goal, despite of the dangers on the path. To be courageous is to affirm the basic existence. Process of existing is not the process that just happens, simply by itself; there are efforts continually, all the way through. Each human pushes a rolling stone which she/he rolls in order to remove obstacles opposed to his/hers being. That rolling stone is not Sisyphus' stone. Though they both have a strong will to carry on, this stone is carried by hope in order to achieve the purpose and purpose on this level is existence in its purity. The will to keep the existence is primordial attitude and the courage is the mean how this attitude is preserved, how being is confronted to non-being.

In front of the threatening thoughts of the end of the world as nothingness, courageous man stands firmly beside the belief in God as Good Being, who creates the world with Reason, or if not, holds a hope that in uncertain future of the world as long as it exists, he/she should exist in its fullest proportion of existence. Courageous man does not withhold his/hers step in front of the symbolism of limitations — that would mean stepping back to widen the gap for non-existence. The courage affirms the value of existence. If tomorrow can cease to exist, then only today is what I can affirm entirely. If there is no complete and perfect being, then I confirm this, *hic at nunc*, contingent being; this is mine, the most precious way, the most beautiful way of possible being.

#### 4. *The end of the physical and beginning of the spiritual world*

Although the title of this vision of the end of the world presupposes radical dualism of reality, where there are at least two worlds in co-existence, we will refer in this discussion only to the one world, with two classes of properties: physical and spiritual. Also, any vision of this kind of the end of the world holds presumption, found in almost all religious traditions and numerous philosophical systems, that spiritual properties make foundation for the world itself and its other properties and accidentals.

19 Aristotle: Nicomachean ethics, 1116 a 1–5

If the physical properties of the world<sup>20</sup> can be destroyed and vanished, than the question raised up in many religions gains its fullest meaning: What is the value of the current physical entities/properties in this world? How can we recognize and understand spiritual? If there is a possibility for this sensory world to cease to exist, or if one believes in the visions of Apocalypse, Armageddon, Last hour, Shambhala etc., then its efforts, or more closely in Spinoza's words, *conatus essendi*, he/she will be focused on affirmation of spiritual values.<sup>21</sup> Yet, despite of the perishable properties, there is no reason not to value the physical entities of the world today (out of the similar reasons mentioned in the chapter above about the *hic and nunc* existence). This state of courage includes self-affirmation with allowance of drastic changes, reaching to the level of its qualitative (but not substantial) changes of self-being.

Courageous man is confronted with the possibility of disappearance of physical properties of the world in order to preserve and unleash its essential value. Accepting the fundamental changes, brave human beings are approaching to the world of freedom where *options, paths and means* are much broader than those of cowards. Contrary, for cowards *goals* are much broader, since they do not dare to approach a proper one, frightened of the presumed risk underneath. The risk is in losing their lives; the risk of losing their physical identity is in entirely losing their identity. The risk is in believing in endurance of intangible features of spiritual world.

According to Stoicism,<sup>22</sup> the courage is the attitude of affirmation of our nature of reason, despite of all accidental occurrences. Humans transcend their fears (and passions) of body only by developing their *logoi spermatokoi*. Courageous human can reach the values of reasonable spirit and act upon its cognition.

20 In religious texts the phrase of disappearance of "material world" is more common than physical, but due to the different understanding of material features in ancient period and those of today, in this text we use the term "physical properties" as explained in the text above.

21 Discussions about spiritual values have gained its significance in philosophy thanks to the book of Max Scheler, where he classifies four types of values: Sinnliche Werte, Lebenswerte, Geistige Werte and Werte des Heiligen. Scheler, Max: *Formalism and Non-formal Ethics of Values*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press 1973, 104–110. Scheler's last two categories can be applied to our concept of spiritual values.

22 "Stoicism — broadly conceived — is the view that the pain of living can be held at bay by inner resources of spiritual power which are available to us all, but which most of us have left unexplored. When tapped into, they can protect us from the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, because they give us the courage to detach ourselves from those things that cause us pain." Rouner, Leroy S.: *Stoics, Christians and the Courage to be*, in: *Courage* (ed. Barbara Darling Smith), Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press 2002, 32.

## 5. *The end of the human world based on moral principles and values*

Most commonly the end of the world is seen in the world today as complete destruction of relations between man and nature, animals, people and nations amongst each other. These visions are partially taken from religion's images about the end times, but more and more are constructed on historical and current events on our planet.

Despite of the decadence human being affirms himself as moral being and the courage has the most important role in keeping his/hers habitus alive.

Despite of the belief that the courage is just one of the four or the third of four cardinal virtues, Paul Tillich notices: "Courage, united with wisdom, includes temperance in relation to oneself as well as justice in relation to others. The question then is whether courage or wisdom is the more comprehensive virtue."<sup>23</sup> He does not analyse this thought any further, but indeed, to act courageously, human needs to be wise, have inner temperance and be led by justice. Brave action encompasses inner moral capacities to enable *good reason to become good will* (and other way around, reason and will always work together, without inner hierarchy), which will consequently form joint reality by its personal moral standards. Brave deeds arise only from the appropriate habitus. Aristotle underlines that the courage is an action, but it is primary a state. He claims that the courage is expressed in the circumstances which are most commonly unexpected,<sup>24</sup> so in those situations only persons with inner propositions of brave man can act bravely. If we take into account, argumentation mentioned above then it is clear the habitus of being courageous is fundamental for every aspect of human being and acting.

Likewise, the virtue of courage should not be understood as special asset of exceptional human beings, which we call heroes and saints. The possibility of creating 'the world based on moral principles and values' is grounded on affirmation of courage in each human being. This kind of world has been created in society and it depends on individual attitudes and actions. More than in any other level of courage, here humans have the feeling that their powers can influence future world's outcome.

Economic crises are consequences of improper relations between institutions, men and nature, humans etc., repeatedly connected to moral crises of the world today or those in history of mankind. I agree and within this discussion give two hypothesis about causes of economic crises: a) managers understand the virtue of courage in its persuasion of taking the risk despite of the

23 Paul Tillich: *The Courage to be*, 7

24 Aristotle: *Nicomachean ethics*, 1117 a 15–20



obstacles, but diminish the importance of the just cause, temperance, wisdom underneath the decision, humility, honesty and all other features of virtue that courage includes;<sup>25</sup> b) employees ignore the responsibility to actualize the courage of virtue at the workplace. Courage is not the virtue reserved for managers.

## 6. *The end of the personal world*

This is the end of the world we are the most commonly confronted with and probably the main source for visions for the rest of the ends of the worlds. When circumstances in our life change the forms of our usual way of living our being rebels. No innocent and pure being likes the prison boundaries made by others. When the light on the shadow seems darker and perceptions narrow and fall on the floor, brave people accept the call for serious, inner investigation: What makes my personal world whole, what protects it, what needs to remain intangible?

As we said above, a courageous man accepts the possibilities of radical changes, but as long as humans can still refer to the same I. This does not even mean keeping our lives by any cost, because this is the battle for what we consider by *truly* being. Socrates will rather die than allow his principles to be changed, which he believed to represent the core of his beliefs, his identity. He bows, I bow to true Socrates.

## *Conclusion*

The thought about the end of the world as a life boundary situation, such as conflict, guilt, suffering, death, could stimulate philosophical reflections. Every version of the end of the world stipulates a new perspective of what courageous human beings are and supposed to be. In situations where there is nothing to be done, where we are confronted with absolute end, our love for being protrudes and illuminates the existence in its closest and dearest meaning. Confronted with the absolute end humans pursuit the final reasons, which make them fall or rise with a hope in their daily existence. Going one step further, once the priorities, principles and true values has been personally defined for the brave being the choices of paths have been widen up, because in order to achieve the goals, she/he will accept even its own radical changes. Successes of the brave deeds are defined by the outcomes and they could

25 Cf. Lee, Gus. Elliott Lee, Diane: *Courage the Backbone of Leadership*, New Jersey: Jossey Bass 2006, 31–43.

bring joy, but what stands underneath, the habitus of the brave man is what makes man happy and peaceful. The fear and the thought on the end of the world, cosmological, physical, spiritual, ethical, economical, personal or any other is a springboard for ideas for brave people to create those same worlds by their own visions.

The British government in 1939 at the beginning of the Second World War created a poster to raise the public morale; on red background with huge capital letters it was written: "Keep calm and carry on".