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Review article

GUARDINI, PLATO AND NEARNESS OF DYING. THE EXPERIENCE OF FINALITY IN GUARDINI'S INTERPRETATION OF DIALOGUES IN *THE DEATH OF SOCRATES*

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Abstract

The authors of the article have tried to present the experience of closeness of death in Guardini's interpretation of Plato's dialogues between Socrates and his devoted disciples who could not accept the decision of their master and friend. Guardini's interpretations were written as a philosophical analysis of the state of Socrates' mind, it is not a psychological analysis of his emotions or emotional states. Guardini wishes to reveal how Socrates faces the mystery of death as a philosopher. The authors focused on the dialogues between Socrates and his disciples and how Plato as his disciple and chronicler describes his conflict with oneself and the mentality of his followers on the mythological, political and philosophical meaning of death. In line with this topic, the article is divided into four sections. The first introduces the reader with the philosophical and religious meaning of death, and the second with disclosure of myths in dialogues, Euthyphro, judges and Crito. In the third section, the authors outline why the dialogue with Phaedo is most important of the dialogues on the issue of death. The fourth part of the article reveals the reasons why this interpretation is crucial for the later development of Guardini's philosophical opus.

Key words: interpretation, Dialogues of Socrates, Plato, death, mythology, religion.

Introduction

Romano Guardini published his work *Der Toth des Sokrates* (The Death of Socrates) in the early 1940s, during the National-Socialist regime in Germany, while Europe was suffering from a horrible war. Guardini himself had been outcast from social and academic life. In that difficult dissident period, he dedicated to the interpretation of one of the most relevant literal works that has influenced the development of philosophical thought in the Western World. In these interpretations, Guardini is focused on the figure and philosophical character of Socrates, who prepares himself for death, calmly accepting the judgment determined by three Athenian magistrates. If we exclude religious interpretations, death is an epistemically unapproachable state of personality: on the level of common sense understanding, experience of someone's death is always described according to an experience of another person as a witness of the event of death, Socrates faces similar philosophical question in his dialogues (*Apology, Crito, Phaedo*) before his own death. Ignorance is the obstacle to knowing the beings and entities, and to knowing of death (if it is an entity).

Socrates on the grounds of experiences of finality of all wordly things presupposes that he, himself is a subject to physical deterioration and evanescence as everyone. In his interpretation of Socrates' encounter with finality, Guardini starts within existential and phenomenological methodical frame in which he interprets his »state of mind« under the words and terms in dialogues with Euthyphro, magistrates, friends and disciples. The purpose of his interpretation, as he describes, » *is philosophical interpretation of that which lies behind the words of Socrates.*¹« He assumes that they are not emotional states or reactions, but deep reflections of the mind on the experience of near death and dying. In the first part we shall expose the philosophical assumptions on finality, in the second and third part we shall abstract certain places in Guardini's interpretations of dialogues, and in the fourth, we shall consider his interpretation in the context of later critique of idealism and world views of the New Era.

1. Philosophical and religious question of human finality

Thinking about the attitude of Socrates toward the death, especially in his dialogues recorded by his disciple Plato, soon before the death sentence and

¹ Romano GUARDINI, Introduction, in: *The Death of Socrates. An Interpretation of Platonic Dialogues: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito and Phaedo*, London, 1948., ix.

after it, Karl Jaspers emphasises how ignorance is the beginning and the end of every discussion on the subject of death.² The question of finality is present equally in philosophical thought as it is in religious awareness and experience. Philosophical thought in pre-Socratic age at a time of Eleatics, matures by comprehending the confronting concepts of infinity and finality – on one side, *arché* (Zeno, Empedocles, Heraclitus), that which is infinite, absolute and one, in contrast to the empirically accessible and spatial-temporal entities that are bounded, in other words, finite, contingent, subjected to the processes of becoming and decline. In later philosophical development, personal questions about death as a question of » my own « self-reflection about death as a decline of (personal) physical/material body becomes actual with Plato who contemplates the finality of material substance inside the frame of his dualistic system in which the finality of all things, including human body is only a » surface « of that genuine reality where the ideas of Good, Beautiful and Truth are infinite. Guardini adopts this Platonic background in his interpretation of Socrates' finality, although we can approach his interpretation considering phenomenological and existential questioning on finality in Jaspers, Heidegger and Tillich.

The experience of finality in Guardini, as Croatian theologian Đuro Zalar thinks, is one of the forms of religious experience in which man reflects on the world of things as finite, vulnerable from nothingness, which is intensively manifested in encountering death as the end of living.³ In relation to the issue of personal death, finality can be reflected as »numbness« of Fregean dynamics, the evanescence of opposition between »my Ego« and reality as »non-Ego«, but not as synthesis of new, in Hegelian dialectical conception, but in *nothing*. If we consider death as nothingness, we suppose that we already know what death is, but then it would not be mysterious nor would there be any space for our reconsiderations. If the evanescence of death is identical to threatening nothingness which will attain my »world of living« it may be understood as *unconditioned*, because it demands nothing and with nothing it is conditioned for. This is a concrete and not an abstractive meaning, but *not entirely* concrete.⁴ If we understood it in an *entirely concrete* manner, death as threatening nothingness that »devours« the Being, leaving not a particle of

² See: Karl JASPERS, *Ljudi sudbine: Isus Krist, Buda, Sokrat*, Zagreb, 2008, 42.

³ Đuro ZALAR, *Susret vjere i svijeta. Doprinos Romana Guardinija načelu korelacije*, in: *Bogoslovska smotra* 75 (2005) 2, 601–626, 620.

⁴ See: Bernhard WELTE, *Filozofija religije*, Zagreb, 1996, 62.

existence behind – our search for »transcending« the death, in religious belief, or philosophical speculation would be absurd.

1.1. *Can we find in Guardini's work the reflections of »self-transcendence«?*

The experience of finality does not necessarily lead to despair or nihilism, and the individual can bring to consciousness the finality as overcoming, as self-transcendence.⁵ The experience, taken and considered on emotional, reflective level can result in an emotional reaction but this is not the core of Guardini's interpretation. If Socrates accepted on the basis of the mere fact that our knowledge of it is insufficient, then death can mean nothingness and this is the only thing-worth knowing (an entirely concrete understanding), in that case, he would be fatalistically passive towards it. Guardini's interpretation does not aim to that assumption, contrary, it aims to the fact that Socrates is not anxiously worried nor is he passively indifferent towards death either. Can we say that this is the possible form of self-transcendence that Guardini finds behind the questions and answers of Socrates?

We will not encounter in his work the philological analysis of epistemic concepts as in Heidegger or Gadamer. As Richard Wisser finds, interpretation for Guardini is an original way of taking responsibility, and that means how all that concerns me I must comprehend in way to answer what is truly happening.⁶ Guardini integrates in his interpretation all circumstances and backgrounds: the social and cultural ambient, the collocutors and their questions, the space where discussions were held, mythological and political background on which the discussion contextually refers. Thus, the valuation of the experience of finality of Socrates can be demonstrated on two levels, conceptually and contextually: on the first level, Guardini interprets the experience of finality in relation to the meaning of the myth, piety, obligation and polis; on the second level, which takes place Socrates' mind, his » interior », expressed in *Phaedo*, in his encounter with nearness of death, and his arguments on the existence of religious knowledge of the world of ideas and immortality of the soul. Guardini does not elaborate them in the form of philosophical discussion, but in an attempt of *reading* concrete reflection of Socrates' mind on the personal end of living, and the possibility of transcending it.

⁵ See: Danijel TOLVAJČIĆ, *Religija kao »ono što nas se bezuvjetno tiče«*, in: *Bogoslovska smotra*, 84 (2014.) 2, 221–233, 226.

⁶ See: Richard WISSER, *Odgovornost u mjeni vremena. Vježbe pronicanja u duhovno djelanje: Jaspers, Buber, C.F.v.Weizsäcker, Guardini, Heidegger*, Sarajevo, 299.

2. Euthyphro, Apology and Crito: the »disclosure« of the myth and the search for the truth

As regards the dialogues *Euthyphro* and *Apologies*, Guardini moves to a greater extent between the meanings of mythos and logos, a myth that prevails on the mentality of polis which condemns him to death illustrated in sentences of three magistrates, and the logos, dominant in the opinions of Socrates. In Guardini's interpretation, the dialogue with Euthyphro and the judges on the moral good in relations with the divine good is not complete, but a glimpse of a conclusion can be recognized in the discussion with Crito. Guardini opens his interpretation of *Euthyphro* and *Apology* with a certain portrait of Socrates as an exemplar citizen not different from others, except in knowledge. However, as we read the interpretation we gradually leave this presentation and we near to the tragedy of Socrates' position. This turning point culminates in a dialogue with Crito, in which Socrates rounds off the defence of his own beliefs as an argument on which he is willing to accept the death.

2.1. *Euthyphro* and *Apologies*: The myth »discloses« the truth

In dialogues *Euthyphro* and *Apologies*, Guardini emphasises the mythological background of the trial against Socrates. Karl Jaspers said that a myth is equally, philosophically speaking, a priori a form of mind, as it is, psychologically speaking, a way of experiencing real, but the myth does not communicate the truth, neither in the first, nor in the second way.⁷ In other words, it can only »disclose«, as an image or a presentation of what is real, not in the way as it truly is, but what should be according to mythological narrative. And according to that narrative, the religious mentality of polis is established.

The dialogue with Euthyphro is held at a time when the philosophy of Ionians had certain intellectual influence, although the theory of beginning (arhé) is not a philosophical concept but only an image of primal reality,⁸ nonetheless, certain distance from mythological imaginary was imposed. In these circumstances, Socrates, in dialogue with Euthyphro presented as an individual who questions the mentality of polis, and transcends it, conducted with own awareness of personal value and responsibility,⁹ and by that he violated the established collective belief in the mythical image of authorities and their

⁷ Karl JASPERS – Rudolf BULTMANN, *Pitanje demitologiziranja*, Zagreb, 2004, 31.

⁸ See: Romano GUARDINI, *Euthyphro*, in: *The Death of Socrates*, 12.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.

position. Euthyphro had adopted the mythical image about justice with education and acquisition the mentality of the community in which he lives, and in that manner he comprehends the virtue of righteousness; psychologically, he reflects on the reality of crime that his father had committed through the prism of a mythical perception, that confronts him with a supposed difficulty of leaving the childish devotion and veneration before the authority of his parents.

Confronting this Euthyphro's perception, Socrates invites him to reconsider the virtues of piety and righteousness in light of the valuation of truth, not in boundaries of mythical narrative. Euthyphro exclusively begins from mythological belief, that someone from the Pantheon assembly must affirm the goodness of a deed that man has done, not from an unwritten principle that some deed is good because it is *rightfully* done.¹⁰ The question of essence, essence beyond mythical narrative, is relevant for Socrates: the issue before Euthyphro is obstinate – because he does not question the role of his own conscience. The bewildering nature of the opinion described in the character of Euthyphro presents the religious awareness of Socrates' fellow citizens: they did not surpass the mythological image of polis, questioning the intrinsic moral structure of a deed and why it is a reflection of the supreme idea (eidos) of Good. The issue of piety which covers the multitude of ceremonies and customs that instil the sense of security to polis is not in the medium of this discussion, but rather the issue of righteousness.¹¹ That is the question Euthyphro could not or would not find an answer to, but it will be more pertinent in the dialogue with the judges. For Guardini it is a »civil« innocence that is important in these dialogues, he is a man who fulfils all the duties according to the laws of polis¹², and since these laws outline the ways of offering sacrifice to the gods, and conducting participation in public devotion, we suppose that Socrates fulfils all the obligations of public piety.

In this context, the myth is indivisible from policy of polis in a theoretical sense, but this connectivity in a practical sense has an opportune purpose, which will be exposed in the process against Socrates. The accusations of three magistrates, Meletus, Anytus and Lycon against Socrates were based on his behaviour including the critique of a traditional belief and teaching the youth. Guardini briefly elaborates the legality of the accusation, how it was concluded and with which accents, but his interest lies in the reflection of So-

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, 28.

crates, in his contrary question to the judges, about the meaning of believes in legality of their power given by gods. More importantly, is their authority based on power, or on the truth.

2.1.1. Has Socrates *demystified* the mythical order of the world and polis?

In dialogues with Socrates, myths take the background of dialogue, because the issues that Socrates opens Socrates refer to concrete problems among the people, shown in the case of Euthyphro and the righteous punishment but they are still captured in the narrative of the myth. Plato himself thinks that myths can be dangerous to children's education because they contain the images about the gods who can be evil and treacherous.¹³ We ask ourselves how the pre-forming of the myth is settled in the distant past of cultural development of human beings. Guardini thus interprets the myth on the ground of irrational experience of nature, or he thinks it is a product of discursive mind. As he says: *»The realities of this natural world we perceive with our senses. The eyes capture light in figures, forms and colours; hearing reflects the rhythms and sounds, better to say, figures of sounds and images of rhythms; the skin senses surfaces of objects, their forms and properties; the hands or, more precisely, lively equilibrium of body senses the weight, his differences and proportions, and other.»*¹⁴ Perception determines the *material* of things, and does not involve the same deeper insights about them.

Therefore, Guardini thinks that the reflection of human spirit begins where sensual perception ends, and in that reflection dominate apprehensible constructions by which the surrounding world is depicted. Nevertheless, the perceptive experiences on which the mythical images were developed reflect the impression of the paradox states in the world, because the myth does not distinguish the opposites in the way they are distinguished by logos, that is, *»Myth does not include the way of cultivating nature by means of logos, just opposite: Mythical logic enlighten all that paradoxes existing between nature and spirit, chaos and cosmos, light and darkness, not valuating them, because they are equally respectful, that is, equally original and life-worthy.»*¹⁵ The myth does not present man with the reality in which absolute evil or absolute good exists, these concepts

¹³ See: PLATON, *Država*, Zagreb, 1997, 103.

¹⁴ Romano GUARDINI, *El mesianismo en el mito, la revelacion y la politica*, Madrid, 1956, 70.

¹⁵ Josip OSLIĆ, *Mit i kerigma. Pitanje demitologizacije k sebi nadolazećeg uma*, in: *Bogoslovska smotra*, 74 (2004.) 3, 705–727, 714.

will later become the matrix of gnostic narratives of conflicts between material and spiritual, light and dark.

Is this the way of certain demystification of myths present in arguments of Socrates before the magistrates? Is this the expressed intention of Guardini to present Socrates as a character who reveals the essential problem of religious mentality of polis? In a certain way, Guardini's attempt to present Socrates in this light corresponds to post-Enlightenment analysis in phenomenology, or as Paul Tillich defines it, as a »critical elaboration of all mythological elements present in Holy Scripture.«¹⁶ In that context, Xenophanes continues with critical judgement in Socratic way, when he claims that he does not believe in god, who would torture and put in chains other gods, because if he is truly god, he does not need anything.¹⁷ The goal of interpreting Socrates as somebody who demystifies the mythical content, is not in reviling the anthropomorphic image of gods, but revealing the relation between Pantheon and death. If gods and their described deeds and omnipotent power are real, then death is not an obstacle for their intervention.

Indeed, according to Ernst Cassirer, mythical perception does not recognize death as certain constant in the natural world, that is: »Mythical perception is always impregnated with these emotional qualities. Whatever is seen or felt is surrounded by a special atmosphere – an atmosphere of joy and grief, of an anguish, of excitement, of exultation or depression. Here we cannot speak of »things« as a dead or indifferent stuff. All objects are benignant or malignant, friendly or inimical, familiar or uncanny, alluring and fascinating or repellent and threatening.«¹⁸ In other words, in the mythical perception death seems to be not the constant in which the physical existence of someone of some creature stops, but a mere change of the form of the being. It is irrelevant for the moral of a story: gods can act on certain occasions on someone's behalf, on others against resulting in death, but the ancient Greeks and fellow citizens of Socrates among them, were already aware of personal liberty and decision making. Could it be that most of them were considering myths as bed-time stories for children, which does not mean that the enemies of Socrates neglected the emotive »potential« they could have: people are scared of gods, scared of death, accomplishments at war were attributed to heavenly influence, and when the crops were destroyed by hail,

¹⁶ See: Paul TILLICH, *Dynamics of Faith*, New York, 1957, 50.

¹⁷ See: KSENOFAN, *Sporni fragmenti, u: Predoskratovci. Fragmenti. I svezak*, Zagreb, 1893, 136.

¹⁸ Ernst CASSIRER, *An Essay on Man*, New York, 1956, 103.

they though it as a sign of divine wrath. On the individual and collective level mythical piety is full of emotions, but Socrates is, neither scared nor desperate.

2.1.2 The tragic meaning of the trial against Socrates

Accusations against Socrates were based on (unjustified) suspicion that his opinions were undermining the religion of the state and the religious mentality of polis. Finally, authorities who were conducting the laws seemed fanatically constrained by the mythical narrative, mainly because it had provided a sense of or an impression of stability of the establishment, so every attempt of »breaking the myth« was an element of awareness of this symbolical character.¹⁹ But in his interpretation Guardini does not linger on the assumption of Socrates as the one who demystifies the myths, he looks for a far more profound motive for his decision. Answering to judges, Socrates encountered his own destiny, the purpose of his engagement designated by gods, our more exactly, one god, »who cannot lie« *daimonion*, an offspring of Apollo. The meaning of *daimonion* (δαίμων) is significant for Guardini's interpretation of Crito, but in this context, Guardini emphasises that Socrates, when he speaks about *daimonion*, changes the image of gods, something that people and magistrates sought as novelty and sophistication of religion.²⁰ Firstly, Socrates describes *daimonion* as a god, not as a semi-god, or a form of ghostly entity living between the worlds of gods and men, but one god who is also different from other gods because he cannot lie, that is, he always tells truth; and secondly, he is a deity who intervenes, who directly speaks to someone's conscience. Although the meaning of *daimonion* is important for interpretation, Guardini searches for an even deeper, tragic sense of the trial against Socrates.

The trial against Socrates is tragic because we deal with a conflict of two opposite conceptions of good: one is mythically founded and pragmatic, manifested in a stable structure of social life and in sharing of common beliefs and values, while the other is the good of the individual (Socrates) ethically superior to the first, and rationally justified.²¹ According to the views on tragedy in the theatrical theory of Aristotle, there is no cathartic moment (κάθαρσις, purification), the moment when the hero prevails evil, because this is a conflict between two concepts of good! The magistrates condemned Socrates thinking that was a justified act, although the punishment is unjust, and Socrates ac-

¹⁹ See: Paul TILICH, *Dynamics of Faith*, New York, 1957, 51.

²⁰ Romano GUARDINI, The Apology, in: *The Death of Socrates*, 44.

²¹ *Ibid.*

cepted it in a manner of civil obedience. Guardini does not want to present Socrates as a mere victim of the system, or a martyr, he is not a hero in the classic sense. His victory against injustice lies in his search for truth, a motive that contextually connects the interpretations of *Euthyphro*, *Apologies* and *Crito* in one unique ensemble.

2.2. *Crito: Unconditional search for truth*

The reason why Socrates may be considered as winner of the trial will be enlightened in his answers to Crito, a friend who had encouraged him to flee the city, to save himself and his family. However in his answer to Crito he again referred to daimonion. Guardini thinks that the concept of voice of daimonion, that he heard in Delfi, is not analogical to biblical concept of the obedience to the voice of conscience, since voice of daimonion has obliged him to be devoted to the goal of his mission.²² It carries a character of unconditioned request, abstracted not from the concept of purpose, or the concept of authority.²³ Search for truth is a challenge for the individual, a task which Socrates had continuously imposed on the citizens of Athens. Those who condemned Socrates had not condemned him because they were defending the truth of their beliefs, but mainly because they did not believe in the significance of the validity of someone's life, that of the slave killed by Euthyphro's father or the life of Socrates. The act against Socrates had emerged from the belief of the masses, and Guardini finds the masses dangerous *in se*, because they believe in the significant number of those who assent to a certain idea (which can be delusive), and do not comprehend the real greatness of individuals such as Socrates, who not only assents to the truth but is prepared to die for it.²⁴ Thus, the experience of the truth cannot be explained in terms of ratio, but it carries a burden of moral responsibility and integrity of person who comprehends it.

For Hildebrand, Socrates is a »seeker for truth« because, if man strives to genuine values, he must become the seeker of truth, that liberates him from attachment to world of delusions.²⁵ Socrates is a seeker of truth that transcends finality of knowing framed in world view, finality that emerges from social and political system/organization in which an individual and his value

²² See: Romano GUARDINI, *Ibid*, 51.

²³ See: Karl JASPERS, *Filozofska vjera*, Zagreb, 2011, 28.

²⁴ See: Richard WISSE, *Odgovornost u mijeni vremena*, 317.

²⁵ Josip OSLIĆ, *Vrijednosni odgovor u filozofiji D. von Hildebranda*, in: *Izvor budućnosti. Fenomenološki i hermeneutički pristupi svijetu faktičnog životnog iskustva*, Zagreb, 2002, 298.

is forgotten or even endangered. Guardini thinks that we do not need to read the tragic character of his trial because it is an ontological issue that is crucial,²⁶ in distinguishing the way elaborated in the interpretation of Crito. In conversation with Crito, Socrates defends the bond between the laws of polis and conscience. They cannot be in conflict: if the laws are divine, he cannot escape from Athens, it would be against his moral obedience to daimonion, finally, he would do that what Euthyphro had missed to do. Furthermore, would it be pious? As Linda Zagzebski, describing this situation of Euthyphro says: »If God wills the good (right) because it is good (right), then goodness(rightness) is independent of God's will and letter does not explain the former. On the other hand, if something is good (right) because God wills it, then it looks as divine will is arbitrary.«²⁷ The question is if a certain good deed is done in obedience to divine will, we then suppose that this act is also pious, but in doing so, our actions are not in accordance with the divine will, but rather in accordance with to our aspirations to act, having in mind the essence of the Perfect Good – Socrates finds the same problem in his case. Socrates »resolves« this problem in coherency of the moral and theoretical (philosophical) knowledge. Knowing that Crito continuously reminds him about his innocence, Socrates answers him stating the fundamental difference between *doxa* and *noesis*: Guardini states that Socrates does not want to be a hero, he accepts the sentence believing in the divine origin of laws, in the value of the truth that transcends *doxa*, deceptive opinion of individual or folk in general, in other words, the knowing the truth comes from genuine *noesis*, insight in the Idea.²⁸ For Guardini this step is the step towards the issue of assent to the truth that transcendent boundaries of empirical perspective on corporeal realm, present in the further discussion described in *Phaedo*.

3. *Phaedo*: Dying is a »philosophical« way of living

The interpretation of *Phaedo* is the longest among these four dialogues, starting with the testimony of Phaedo to Echeocrates about the conversation with Socrates, Simmias and Cebes, which Guardini decomposes in several parts. He starts with the question on death, continues with argumentations on the immortality of human soul, and ends with the image of being. Guardini's in-

²⁶ See: Romano GUARDINI, Crito, in: *The Death of Socrates*, 82.

²⁷ Linda ZAGZEBSKI, Morality and Religion, in: *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion*, Oxford, 2000., 365.

²⁸ See: Romano GUARDINI, Crito, in: *The Death of Socrates*, 84.

terpretation of Phaedo is more extensive than the previous three, and we shall present it in two parts in which we shall try to answer these questions: is the experience of living for Socrates a way of dying? And referring the answer to Cebes, does the meaning of death lie in the spiritual intuition of ideas?

3.1 Discussion with Simmias and Cebes: from the structure of reality towards the world of ideas

In the previous interpretation Guardini focused on the understanding of Socrates as a philosopher who is prepared to die in order to prove his devotion to the service of the truth. However, in conversation with Crito, Socrates did not reveal the nature of his experience of the truth, one which is transcending, manifested in assent to the obligation revealed in divine voice of daimonion who, he believes, will guide him to the world of ideas. Guardini begins his interpretation with a description of the ambient where Socrates sits, discussing with his confused disciples. Their emotions are mixed, in one moment they accept the decision of their master; and then they ask themselves if it is really necessary to die, is it not, in some way, a treason, for a philosopher to commit suicide?²⁹ For Guardini, the experience of corporeality of the human being becomes the main issue for the disciples.

Simmias and Cebes begin with this concrete experience, and Socrates reminds them about the body as a »cage« where soul exists, and death as deliverance of soul from that particular state of being.³⁰ Although, the question about the experience and knowledge still remains open. The death of body presupposes the absence of perceptual data, information considering the outside world that perceptions gather. And in that context, Guardini interprets answers of Socrates on the conceptions of the awareness and the mind. It is not clear if, when Socrates speaks about awareness or about the mind. According to Guardini, the mind connects all the perceptive experiences in a certain union: »All that is particular seems to be integrated in one union: all that exists is constructed in manner outside-inside on foundation of pre-ordered plan. But I encounter, nevertheless, something more inside myself. I sense myself as a centre of the processes which are passing thru me, and also and before all, as their origin.«³¹ Simmias and Cebes do not have any idealistic image about death: it is difficult for them to

²⁹ See: Romano GUARDINI, Phaedo, in: *The Death of Socrates*, 99–100.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 100.

³¹ Alfonso LÓPEZ QUINTÁS, *Extraído de El Contraste. Ensayo de una filosofía de lo viviente concreto (Der Gegensatz. Versuche zu einer Philosophie des Lebendig-Konkreten)*;://guardini.

understand the decision of Socrates, because the search for the truth must be realized here, in »this« world of ours, a task that is undoubtedly worthy, and in that sense it is incomprehensible for them that one philosopher could, in such serenity, accept death.

Nevertheless, the dualistic form of human existence is neither theoretical, nor is it form of the mythical belief for Socrates, and this problem refers to the boundaries of the experience of finality, a possible form of self-awareness in the moment of death. If transition of soul was a mere theory, the issue on self-awareness would be irrelevant for discussions between Socrates, Simmias and Cebes, and Guardini refers more to Platonic doctrine than to the words of Socrates. The finality of things and beings that we experience is an obstacle or knowing the truth of ideas, » a fact it is the only real, self-subsistent, the Idea; while things represent mere half-realities. The senses, therefore, which co-ordinate with things grasp only half-truths, 'opinions'.«³² Socrates defines that turn as a turn towards intrinsic life. »If a man will possess himself of truth itself, his mind must free itself from all that is corporeal, even if from his own senses, and turn itself with purely spiritual intuition to the Ideas.«³³ Guardini emphasises that religious knowledge of this form is not only a mystical »liberation« from the chains of deceptive senses, the knowledge of ideas is pure spiritual intuition, not an act of ratio.³⁴ In other words, rational insight into the finality of beings can be regarded as partially nearing spiritual intuition. We should not consider this form of dualism, described in *Phaedo* as an argument of rigidity and hate toward the body, but a genuine wish for heroism, based on love for ideas, perfect and eternal.³⁵ Socrates endeavours to present this intention later in the discussion with Simmias and Cebes. Later, when interpreting arguments and counter arguments of collocutors, Guardini refers to an existence of the soul before a person is born, paraphrasing Plato. Is it the soul that is aware of death or it is awareness itself that counts? In Platonic thought the difference between what we define as identity, or soul or awareness is not so relevant, and Guardini states that in the case of Socrates experience of life-stream is important: an individual (Socrates) experiences himself as a mind who possess an immortal

wordpress.com/el-contraste-planteamiento-del-problema/ (Accessed: 28.X.2021). May 18, 2021.)

³² Romano GUARDINI, *Phaedo*, in: *The Death of Socrates*, 104.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 107.

soul in the world of ideas.³⁶ He is aware of his own life, his transiency, seeking the philosophical knowledge that leads him to spiritual intuition of eidos.

Among the arguments presented in the dialogue, the second argument is relevant in the context of the epistemic issue on finality and death, and it is focused on the concepts of thinking, awareness and anamnesis, reminiscence of prenatal knowledge of ideas. As Croatian philosopher Marijan Cipra states: » Since man has an ability to comprehend the equality and distinction between the things, an ability on which a human thinking is founded, and since this ability is not offered by existence of things – it is necessary to suppose that this ability man possess before he came in contact with beings, that is, before he was born. »³⁷ In other words, the abstractive nature of differences between things in the world is conceived as pre-theoretic and abstract, and needs one form of self-reference, in reminiscence of the personal ego before the birth, if the mind has the knowledge that all things are different »now« in the aspect of perception that fragments the unity of the world, how can reminiscence on ideas before birth prove the existence of eternal ideas after death?

The question of the transition *out of* the body and awareness of the one who possess it, is highly complex. We suppose that a dead man cannot be aware of the external world because of the absence of senses, but that does not mean that ideas are constructions of imagination that belong to the internal performance of the mind. In every sense divided from the realm we live in. Socrates firmly states that ideas are real, and defending this claim, he enters into dialogue with Cebes who demands clearer explication from Socrates. Cebes understands Socrates, although he finds some difficulties: »*That the soul which is under the influence of truth is stronger than the body, is evident; the only question is, whether this strengthening of the real by the valid, this irradiation of eternal power from the truth, is sufficient to overcome mortality altogether.* »³⁸ For Cebes, the mortality is a category that defines a man, and from that perspective he challenges Socrates to elaborate more precisely his statement about the transition of the soul on the basis of the argument that the truth is eternal.

3.1.1. Experience of temporality and the eternal nature of ideas

With reference to the question of mortality, Heidegger says that dying is a form of existence, Here-being that encounters its own »incompleteness«: he

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 112–113.

³⁷ Marijan CIPRA, *Metamorfoze metafizike*, Zagreb, 1996, 122.

³⁸ Romano GUARDINI, *Phaedo*, in: *The Death of Socrates*, 137.

possesses that »Not-Yet«, a certain *unsettledness*.³⁹In the context of the conversation with Cebes, in Guardini's interpretation, an incorporated soul has experience of time of life that is passing along, which, dualistically, is not »complete« time, and because of that, the soul is unsettled in experiences that it reflects. The finality of time is abstracted from physical categories of beings which stand in certain portions of time, they are contingent, effecting each other. The knowledge inferred from these experiences is limited, and ends in apprehension of laws of forms and logical meaningfulness of arrangement, truth does not lie in that particular data, but in figures that reflect eidos, ideas that are self-sufficient.⁴⁰ The process of anamnesis is a life enduring process in which the mind transcends these aspects of beings.

According to Gregory Vlastos: » *The transcendental ideas are a bridge between our current incorporated existence and our unincorporated past and future. Since we have known these entities in our life before birth, we can now 'remember' all valuable fragments of the knowledge that we had lost. For a philosopher this 'remembering' is a strenuous intellectual activity.* »⁴¹ An activity in which Socrates had spent all his life: a struggle in which he transcended finality, searching for the truth, leaving perceptible and material, and his struggle emerged from the dynamism of soul and mind. The difference between the concepts of mind and soul are not referring to mind that has certain degree of knowledge and the soul in role of passive recipient of that knowledge, but to mind in the state of dependence on soul which in anamnesis reaches freedom. The truth which soul tries to reach, for a philosopher includes the truth of all his life lived and contemplated, and his soul remains unsettled if it does not strive to settlement in the vision of eternal ideas.

3.2. *The answer to Cebes: From meaning of simplicity to spiritual intuition of ideas*

The dialogue with Cebes ends in an explication of Socrates on his Cebes goes further from philosophical experience of dying, in dialectical tension of the body and soul and at the beginning Cebes goes further from the topic of temporality seeking more profound argumentation proving immortality of the soul on grounds of simplicity of the being. For Plato, the truth is perfect because it is simple, we cannot add or subtract anything from it. Is our soul

³⁹ See: Martin HEIDEGGER, *Moguća cijelost tubitka i bitak pri smrti*, in: *Bitak i vrijeme*, Zagreb, 1985, 275.

⁴⁰ See: Romano GUARDINI, *Phaedo*, in: *The Death of Socrates*, 153.

⁴¹ Gregory VLASTOS, *Sokrat. Ironičar i moralni filozof*, Zagreb, 2016, 132.

identical to truth? Guardini emphasises an early preoccupation of Socrates in philosophy of nature and the meaning of aesthetic experience. In his answer to Cebes, Socrates returns to his early days when he studied philosophy of nature, and reminds him that our principle rational ability is that in which we can differentiate magnitudes of high and low, big and small, relations between numbers, addition, subtraction and other similar mathematical operations in observations of things in reality.⁴² But this argument about the insufficiency of knowledge gained by mere observations and measuring still proves nothing, so Guardini binds the crucial question of reality, »What is? « with that aesthetic: »What is beautiful? «⁴³ This question is relevant because the idea of beauty transcends the external attributes that we can measure and describe in mathematical terms.

From aesthetic experience we can extricate particular fragmented characteristics like colours, shades, geometrical symmetry between individual parts and similar qualities. They are important, but the awe on that what is beautiful does not depend on them. Aesthetic valuation on external beauty of things and beings that belongs to this world of illusions, necessarily leads towards the knowledge of *real world* of ideas. Thus, Guardini interprets the symbolism of the Sun in Platonic vision in a different way again connected with the reflection on the experience of finality. As the light of Sun enables the human eye to recognize colours and forms of beings around, so the idea of Good governs the hierarchy of values in the spheres of ideas, where the »images« become realities, as Guardini elaborates, »*It is no longer an 'image' but excels every image; it is not the subject of particular proposition, but lies beyond every particular proposition. To keep within the phraseology of the dialogue, it is the 'Sun', 'Light', simply, the significance of which does not consist in being contemplated, but in enabling the images to be contemplated and the corresponding particular propositions to be made about them.*«⁴⁴ In this step of interpretation, Guardini again takes the »concrete« ambient of perception, whatever man sees and judges, stands in analogy to the world of ideas. On the level of language the terms »Sun« and »Light« are not the only terms that describe the irradiating force of the supreme Good that governs all of the values, but the force that enables human mind to comprehend ideas fully and immediately.

Religious knowledge in that sense is not *only* the knowledge of something that is divine and transcendent, but a certain form of spiritual intuition

⁴² *Ibid.*, 145.

⁴³ See: Romano GUARDINI, *Phaedo*, in: *The Death of Socrates*, 149–150.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 158.

which culminates at the end of a life-time – search for the truth, the crown of philosophical temperance and strive. Concluding this analogy, Guardini in *brevis* exposes the image of the existence of cosmos present in the answer of Socrates, mythological described, but with a clear emphasis on the tenacity of soul wishing to transcend spheres of contingent beings to a sphere of pure existence. With that interpretation of an image of cosmos and the quotes of Socrates before death, Guardini ends his interpretation of the four dialogues.

4. Is this interpretation relevant for the later development of Guardini's opus?

If we reconsider the experience of finality in the dialogues of Socrates as it is exposed in Guardini's interpretations and including all his interests in his earlier and later works, the presentation of this issue certainly shows his distinguished critical insight. The interpretation of the death of Socrates presents his unique interpretative approach to classical works, he had interpreted Hölderlin, Pascal, works of Dante. Nonetheless, this interpretation is turning point of his theological and philosophical growth. Written in the middle of the Second World War during the Nazi regime, we can recognize same autobiographical lines in the description of Socrates. Similar to Socrates, Guardini also finds himself a misunderstood writer, different from others, unlike Carl Schmitt or Martin Heidegger who were more acceptable in the eyes of the new government imposing their mythology and ideological frame of the new world order.

Guardini even identifies Nordic mythology, recombined and rehabilitated in the Nazi vision as a certain return to living according to natural rhythms,⁴⁵ or if we may say, »atavistic« revive of the mythical perspective, suitable to new ruling. After the *Der Tod von Sokrates* was published, two years later, in March of 1945, Guardini published his autobiography *Berichte über Mein Leben*. Although we did not look for connections between these two works, we suppose that Guardini had installed his personal views on authority, political power and the role of masses in the interpretation of Socrates, and these insights will be elaborated with more clarity in his later work *Die Macht (The Power)* from 1951.

Besides this assumption that Guardini had portrayed Socrates with reference to his personal situation, the specific issue of epistemic valuation of his

⁴⁵ Romano GUARDINI, *El origen cristiano de los valores modernos*, //guardini.wordpress.com/el-origen-cristiano-de-los-valores-modernos/ (Accessed 6. VII. 2021).

experience of finality and nearness to death, brings us closer to his theology of melancholy. Serenity of a man who accepts death for higher causes, is not an exclusive achievement of a philosophical turn to interior, it is also a reflection of a deeper encounter with the absolute, the unconditioned, the sacred. As Raffaele Maiolini states, Guardini had never answered the question if melancholy was some special experience of nearness of transcendent, or whether it was an experience of a Christian believer.⁴⁶ If the state of melancholy is not exclusively a Christian experience of God, the interpretation, the interpretation of the state of mind that Socrates had, described in the dialogues, can be similar to melancholy: Socrates did not despair or grieve, he acted in this situation with serenity that can also be a sign of melancholy, in the case of Socrates, nostalgia for the world of ideas.

How can we value the experience of death of Socrates according to the words of Guardini in an epistemic context of the Modern Era that Guardini had criticized in his works? His critical analysis of the position that man has in Modern Era and in the perspective of days to come, is partially formed in German spiritual situation, conditioned and mediated, entirely by social, political and economic constellation,⁴⁷ anthropologically determined by the process of alienation, (Gehlen, Plessner) and unreserved confidence in technological and scientific progress (Rothacker, Habermas). As we have seen, Guardini has interpreted experience of Socrates relying on Platonic dualism and idealistic concept of religious knowledge, but he has also tried to present Socrates as a man who encountered death defying the mythical image of reality in seeking the truth. In that way, the character of Socrates is a metaphor for Guardini's fears of a situation we live in today, indifference for seeking the truth will be one step forward in losing integrity of the human being.

Conclusion

In this work we have tried to present the epistemic aspect of the experience of death in the last days of Socrates, interpreted by Guardini, and we have followed the intention of the author, who was not preoccupied with the integrity of the text, but with certain parts aligned with his interest of philosophical interpretation of the state of mind that Socrates had reflected. The experience of

⁴⁶ See: Raffaele MAIOLINI, *Melancholy is the Restlessness of the Man Who Senses the Proximity of Infinite*, in: Ivica RAGUŽ-Šimo ŠOKČEVIĆ, *Melancholy between Creativity and Depression*, Đakovo, 2017, 227.

⁴⁷ Abdulah ŠARČEVIĆ, *De homine. Mišljenje i moderni mit o čovjeku*, Sarajevo, 1986, 37.

finality that Socrates had had, Guardini interpreted starting with the question of the myth and mythological perception of the world and the being. Socrates was not a reformer of religion, he did not reject the moral of mythological narrative, but in his answers to judges, he only suggested them to be open to a different understanding of the divine, described in the notion of daimonion. Guardini has presented us how the problem of the mythical image of death present in the traditional religious mentality is also a question for Socrates. However, as we discover the character of Socrates in the interpretation of Apology and Crito, we find that Guardini has emphasized that his seeking of truth became an issue not of knowledge as an epistemic outcome of a specific kind of experience, experience of finality, the limitation, and vision of what lies ahead, but a genuine form of intuition. In the interpretation of Phaedo we have encountered dying that defines human life as it is, but it is not a physiological and a psychological process: it is a strive and struggle to finally obtain a position in world of ideas, in which the death is only a moment of transition of the soul. From this, we can state that the figure of Socrates that Guardini presents can either be » Platonic « or »dualistic«. It is more likely that Guardini had approached this problem as the Church fathers, finding elements familiar to the Christian meaning of the finality and death.

Sažetak

GUARDINI, PLATON I BLIZINA SMRTI. ISKUSTVO KONAČNOSTI U GUARDINIJEVOJ INTERPRETACIJI DIJALOGA U SOKRATOVOJ SMRTI

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Autori članka su nastojali prikazati iskustvo blizine smrti kako ga interpretira Guardini u Platonovim dijalozima između Sokrata i njegovih vjernih učenika koji ne prihvaćaju odluku svog učitelja i prijatelja. Guardinijeve interpretacije pisane u maniri filozofske analize Sokratovog stanja uma, daleko su od psihološkog analiziranja So-

kratovih emotionih stanja. Guardini razotkriva Sokratovo suočavanje s tajnom smrti kao filozofa. Autori su usredotočeni na dijaloge koje Sokrat vodi sa svojim učenicima, i kako Platon, kao kroničar ovih događaja i njegov učenik opisuje ovaj konflikt koji Sokrat doživljava, kako sa samim sobom, tako i sa svjetonazorom njegovih učenika kojeg uvjetuje mitološko, političko i filozofsko značenje smrti. Sukladno temi, članak je podijeljen na četiri dijela. Prvi upoznaje čitatelja s filozofsko-religijskim značenjem smrti, u drugom razotkrivanja mitološkog poimanja smrti u dijalozima Sokrata s Eutifronom, sucima i Kritonom. U trećem dijelu, autori iznose argumente zašto je dijalog s Fedonom najrelevantniji od četiri dijaloga glede pitanja iskustva blizine smrti. U četvrtom dijelu iznose se razlozi zašto je Guardinijeva interpretacija Sokratove smrti važna za kasniji razvoj njegovog filozofskog opusa.

Ključne riječi: *interpretacija, Sokratovi dijalozi, Platon, smrt, mitologija, religija*