

## RAZGOVOR S ALEXOM PETKASOM

Razgovarao: Marko Paradžik<sup>1</sup>

Alex Petkas američki je klasični filolog i povjesničar ideja, rođen 1980-ih u Sjedinjenim Američkim Državama (točan datum rođenja nije javno dostupan). Poznat je kao istraživač antičke filozofije, političke misli i intelektualnih tradicija, s posebnim naglaskom na Platona, antičke filozofske zajednice te ulogu klasične mudrosti u ra-



zvoju modernog vodstva. Doktorirao je klasičnu filologiju na Sveučilištu Princeton, gdje je proučavao odnos filozofije, političkog djelovanja i kulturne memorije u antičkoj Grčkoj. Nakon doktorata radio je kao predavač grčke i rimske povijesti, klasičnih jezika i političke filozofije na Furman University, no napustio je akademsku karijeru kako bi se posvetio široj misiji – prenošenju antičkih uzora izvrsnosti modernim društvenim, gospodarskim i političkim elitama. Najpoznatiji je kao autor i voditelj podcasta *The Cost of Glory*, u kojem oživljava Plutarhove životopise kao izvor praktične mudrosti za stratege, vođe i profesionalce. Kao suosnivač *The Classical Society* radi s poslovnim ljudima, državnicima i vojnim profesionalcima na razvoju vrline u vodstvu, povezujući antičku etiku sa stvarnim izazovima suvremenog svijeta. Njegov rad obilježava jedinstvena kombinacija filološke preciznosti, filozofske dubine i sposobnosti da drevne ideale pretvori u alate za osobni i profesionalni razvoj. Petkas predstavlja rijetku figuru koja uspješno povezuje akademsko istraživanje i praktičnu primjenu, utjelovljujući

<sup>1</sup> mag. iur., Javna ustanova Veteranski centar, Park Stara Trešnjevka 4, Zagreb

obnovljeni humanistički ideal da obrazovanje treba oblikovati čovjeka sposobnog za promišljeno, hrabro i moralno djelovanje.

Bivši američki ministar obrane i vojnik, "Mad Dog" Jim Mattis, javno je izjavio da uživa čitajući klasike iz antike, poput povijesnih djela grčkog povjesničara Tukidida i *Meditacija* mojeg imenjaka, filozofa-cara Marka Aurelija. Jednom je rekao: „Ako ne čitaš knjige, ne možeš voditi ljude.“ Čitaju li suvremeni državnici i poduzetnici, osobito oni poznati, klasike autentično i duboko, s razumijevanjem, i može li im to pomoći u svakodnevnom postizanju ciljeva? Možete li navesti neke svjetski poznate suvremene osobe, političare ili poduzetnike, koje je nadahnula biografija nekih figura iz antike?

Neki mi padaju na pamet. Mislim na Petera Thiela, kojeg je poglavlje o zavjerama u Machiavelijevim *Raspravama o Liviju* izravno nadahnulo da sruši zloglasni trolerski portal *Gawker* (gdje se obrađuju i neke antičke zavjere). Mislim i na Elona Muska, koji svojim pratiteljima preporučuje Homerove epove i Ksenofontovu *Anabazu*. Harry Truman govorio je da ga je Plutarh naučio više o politici nego sve druge knjige zajedno. Patton je bio duboko uronjen u klasike, posebno kao mladić, i poslije je mislio da je reinkarnirani drevni vojskovođa – najčešće Hanibal, ali katkad i drugi (zašto biti ekskluzivan u takvim stvarima?). Mislim da bi još mnogi takvi vođe bili inspirirani velikanima da im pokažemo kako im pristupiti i da to ponovno učinimo društveno prihvatljivim. Dio te potražnje vidim iz prve ruke u *The Classical Society*, novoj mreži za lidere koju sam suosnovao i kojoj je cilj dosegnuti ljude iz te demografske skupine.

Ne znam jeste li upoznati s *podcasterom* Bronze Age Pervertom i njegovom knjigom *Bronze Age Mindset*, jer je popularizirao antičku među desnim publikama kroz humor, čineći je čestom temom.

On tvrdi da je čovjek poput Alkibijada danas, nažalost, nemoguć, jer ne možemo zamisliti nekoga poput Trumpa kako vodi pohod na Grenland, da bi potom bio optužen u SAD-u za sudjelovanje u orgijama na Epsteinovim pedofilskim otocima, pobjegao u Rusiju, živio skromno, dobio dijete s Putinovom kćeri, a zatim pobjegao u Kinu, gdje planira napad na SAD. Je li takav tip čovjeka danas moguć?

BAP je učinio više za klasike nego svi suvremeni profesori s Ivy Leaguea i Oxbridgea zajedno. Ali da, teško je zamisliti Alkibijada baš takvog profila kao *političkog* vođu u našim vremenima. Mislim da to manje ima veze s navodnim gušćim kršćanskim moralom, a više s time da se moraš udvarati ženskim biračima. Istina, neke bi žene glasale za Alkibijada u trenutačnom zanosu... No u poduzetništvu postoji mnogo više prostora za ekscentričnost. Elona, bez obzira na povremene političke konfuzije, svojim životnim stilom ipak utjelovljuje *malo* te energije (bez stvarnog sjaja magnetične aristokratske političke karizme). Erik Prince je mnogo suzdržaniji u svojem stilu života, ali mnogi ga povezuju s takvim avanturističkim aspiracijama. Mislim da su obojica itekako bolji uzori mladim muškarcima nego ono što nam popularna kultura nudi većinu života. A takvi ljudi pokatkad mogu prijeći i u političko vodstvo.

Nedavno mi je prijatelj, inače sudac, rekao da drži da je Trump više poput Katiline nego Cezara. Koristite li analogije iz antike kada razmatrate moderne političare, ili koristite jedinstveniji, osobniji pristup analizi suvremenih državnika? Je li nemoguće uspoređivati ta dva svijeta?

Ove usporedbe s antičkim figurama vrlo su produktivne i oduvijek su bile. Uvijek postoje oni koji prigovaraju: „nemojte to raditi, previše su različiti“, ali katkad su upravo razlike ono što je zanimljivo i otkrivajuće – i opravdavaju usporedbu. Osobno mi se čini da je Trump mnogo više Cezar nego Katilina, u onoj mjeri u kojoj

mu je stvarno stalo do toga da stvari radi na ispravan način, legalan način (a granice sive zone gura samo kad je apsolutno nužno). No možete li zamisliti Trampa kako vodi oružanu pobunu? Ja ne mogu. Iako je vrlo popularan u vojsci, Trump jasno nema Cezarove vojne zasluge – i to je važna razlika. To je također razlika između njega i čovjeka kojeg držim jednako zanimljivim za usporedbu: Gaja Marija – populista i ratnog heroja, izazivača senatske elite, ali i čovjeka koji je na kraju želio učvrstiti svoje mjesto unutar uređenog poretka, ne potpuno ga srušiti (što, prema mojem mišljenju, nije bila ni Cezarova prva namjera).

**Filozof-povjesničar Oswald Spengler šokirao me, kao ljubitelja antike, kad je u *Propasti Zapada* tvrdio da se antika i Zapad fundamentalno razlikuju u više ključnih aspekata... Što mislite o toj tezi? Ako je točno, ima li smisla učiti išta iz antike za praktičan život danas?**

Nisam toliko upoznat sa Spenglerom koliko bih želio biti, ali on je izvanredan za razmišljanje. Kritičar bi mogao navesti mnoge protuprimjere svakom od tih navoda, ali osnovna je namjera uvjerljiva. Najvažnije što se može izvući od Spenglera jest to da te može naučiti kako tvoj vlastiti način pristupanja stvarnosti nije jedini ljudski način. To proširuje maštu i omogućuje da razmisliš o novim mogućnostima uređenja institucija, umjetničkih ili znanstvenih projekata. Opasnost je uvijek ista: precijeniti svoju sposobnost da promijeniš suvremena mišljenja i predrasude, pa izgubiti relevantnost. To često vidim kod intelektualnih projekata koji izgledaju osuđeni na propast, a koje pokreću pametni i sposobni ljudi. No nešto u meni oklijeva obeshrabriti ih – jer, što ja znam? Možda uspiju – i svaka im čast ako uspiju.

**Spengler je, kao i Vi, podučavao poslovne ljude lekcijama iz povijesti, tvrdeći da živimo u razdoblju u kojem je biografija najbolje**

## **štivo za poduzetnike... Preporučujete li pisanje autobiografije? I je li *Galski rat* vjerniji prikaz Cezara od Plutarha?**

Dobro je za potomstvo imati i autobiografsku i biografsku perspektivu o nekoj osobi. *Galski ratovi* su na neki način istinitiji, ali i manje potpun prikaz Cezara. Nevjerojatno je iskren, premda je očito i propagandno djelo određene vrste. No Plutarh (više nego Svetonije) daje osjećaj što je značilo biti oko njega, što su ljudi mislili o njemu, koja je bila veća sudbina i značenje njegova života. To su stvari koje najbolje pruža treća strana – pažljiv analitičar udaljen od stranačkih osjećaja (Tacitovo *sine ira et studio*). Vjerojatno je najbolje pisati autobiografiju nakon većine velikih postignuća, ali i dok si još na vrhuncu svojih sposobnosti. No ne šteti napraviti nekoliko verzija. Arnold je napisao jednu kao mladić, a drugu kao stariji čovjek. Obje se isplati pročitati.

## **Nietzsche je tvrdio da je židovski genij za osvetu... Jesu li kršćanski i antički sustavi vrijednosti nespojivi?**

Rekao bih da su u napetosti. Ahilej neće uskoro završiti u kanonu svetaca. Ali dovoljno su blizu, osobito za javne osobe, da vrijedi pokušati ih uskladiti što je više moguće. Aristotel je ključna figura za to (osobito kroz Akvinskog). Pogledajte njegovo poglavlje o *velikodušnosti* (Nikomahova etika 4.3). Taj napor izgradnje moralnog jedinstva Zapada mnogo je produktivniji od naglašavanja razlika. Iako cijenim BAP-a, Toma Rowsella, *The Golden Onea*, mislim da se ne možemo vjerodostojno vratiti poganskom politeizmu – ne kao društvo. Ostat će niša na rubovima. Nietzsche je bio u pravu o kvalitetama poganske izvrsnosti, ali slab u artikuliranju biti židovsko-kršćanske vrline.

## **Jesu li ljubitelji antike u Americi više desno ili lijevo politički orijentirani?**

Teško je reći. Oni koji cijene djela velikih ljudi i vide antiku kao uzor naginju snažno udesno. Ali na ljevici također ima mnogo ljubitelja antike, možda i više – oni se više zanimaju za umjetnost, arhitekturu, arheologiju, svakodnevni život, mitologiju i poeziju, društvenu povijest. Obično na način koji meni nije inspirativan, jer često poprima oblik pomalo „efeminirane štreberije“.

### **Je li Cezar pogriješio kad je poštedito Bruta i Kasija nakon Farsala?**

Mislim da je to bio dobar potez i u skladu s njegovom politikom. Prava pogriješka bila je pokušati ih ponovno uvesti u strukturu moći u Rimu. To je bilo previše. Trebali su biti ostavljeni da žive u dokolici u Marseilleu ili Draču, s mirovinom i nekom beznačajnom sinekurom. Ti su ljudi uspjeli okrenuti protiv Cezara neke od njegovih odanijih pristaša – Decima Bruta i Trebonija, primjeric. Što ne bi mogli da su bili živi, ali beznačajni.

### **Vjerujete li da je Aleksandar iskreno mislio da je Zeusov sin, ili je to bio marketing?**

Vjerojatno pomalo oboje. Bilo je donekle korisno da i sâm vjeruje u to. A u antičkom religijskom načinu razmišljanja, jedino vjerovanje koje je važno jest ono po kojem postupiš – a on je očito postupao tako (iako je morao biti oprezan u tome kako to predstavlja Grcima i Makedoncima u časničkoj dvorani).

### **Kad biste morali izabrati jednu osobu iz antike, čiji biste život željeli proživjeti – tko bi to bio i zašto?**

Obično izaberem Platona. Bio je u intimnom kontaktu s nekim od najzanimljivijih ljudi svojeg vremena – Dionizijem I. i II., Dionom sa Sirakuze, Arhitasom iz Tarenta, Izokratom, Aristotelom, Kritijom – a da ne spominjemo Sokrata i vjerojatno Ksenofonta. I lista se nastavlja. Ali volim i „tajnodruštvene“ / konspirativne

aspekte Akademije. Mislim da je Platon bio mnogo šarmantniji i zanimljiviji nego Sokrat kakvog prikazuje u djelima.

### **Je li moguće praktično primjenjivati uvide iz rimske povijesti na općoj razini...?**

Američki utemeljitelji to su svakako činili, osobito s Polibijevim pogledom na Rim. Mislim da je i atenska demokracija zanimljiva usporedba za nas u 20. stoljeću. Važno je ne zaglaviti u jednom paradigmatском uzoru, nego učiti od svih.

### **Može li antika otključati novi potencijal Amerike kroz Vaš projekt *Classical Society*?**

Nadam se. Na tome iskreno radimo. Amerika se suočava s krizom nacionalnog identiteta i čini se da se okuplja oko kršćanstva, što vidim kao dobru stvar. No imamo i značajan broj ozbiljnih Židova, uključujući i na desnici, i oni neće nestati – niti bi trebali. (Imamo i širi spektar drugih metafizičkih uvjerenja, neka se mogu uklopiti, neka ne.) „Judeo-kršćanska kultura“ ne prolazi kod politički aktivne generacije mladih muškaraca – s pravom – umjetna je i donekle umjetno stvorena. Sam Hazony to prepoznaje i izbjegava taj izraz (npr. na nedavnom NatConu). Ali klasici pružaju alternativan put prema ponovnom ujedinjenju praktičnoga kršćanskog zapadnog jedinstva – koncept koji je bolji – na način koji ne zahtijeva izjavu vjere od ikoga, što je iznimno važno danas. Taktički, državnici, generali i osnivači iz antike te šira književna i filozofska tradicija nude nevjerovatno mnogo praktične koristi za ljude s velikom odgovornošću. Trebali bismo učiniti sve što možemo da takvi ljudi imaju jednostavan pristup tom materijalu.

## Engleski izvornik

Alex Petkas is an American classicist and intellectual historian, born in the 1980s in the United States (his exact date of birth is not publicly available). He is widely known as a scholar of ancient philosophy, political thought, and intellectual traditions, with particular emphasis on Plato, ancient philosophical communities, and the role of classical wisdom in shaping modern leadership. He earned his PhD in Classical Philology at Princeton University, where he studied the relationship between philosophy, political action, and cultural memory in ancient Greece. After completing his doctorate, he worked as a lecturer in Greek and Roman history, classical languages, and political philosophy at Furman University. Although successful in academia, he left the university sector to pursue a broader mission: transmitting classical models of excellence to contemporary social, economic, and political elites. Petkas stands out as a figure dedicated to revitalizing the ancient ideal of education as the formation of character capable of thoughtful and responsible action. He is best known as the creator and host of *The Cost of Glory*, a podcast that revives Plutarch's *Lives* as a source of practical wisdom for strategists, leaders, and professionals. In this project, Petkas combines historical narrative, philosophical reflection, and moral insight to make the classical tradition applicable to challenges of the modern world. As the co-founder of The Classical Society, he works with business leaders, statesmen, and military professionals to cultivate virtue-driven leadership and to reintroduce classical ethics into contemporary decision-making. His work is distinguished by a unique combination of philological precision, philosophical depth, and the ability to transform ancient ideals into tools for personal and professional development. Petkas represents a rare figure who successfully bridges the gap between academic research and practical application, embodying a renewed

humanistic ideal: that education should form individuals capable of deliberate, courageous, and morally grounded action.

**Question:**

Former U.S. Secretary of Defense and soldier, Mad Dog Jim Mattis, publicly stated that he enjoys reading classics from antiquity, such as the historical works of the Greek historian Thucydides and *Meditations* by my namesake, the philosopher-king Marcus Aurelius. He once said, “If you don’t read books, you can’t lead people.” Do modern statesmen and entrepreneurs, especially those who are well-known, read the classics authentically and deeply with understanding, and can this help them in their everyday goal achievement? Could you name any world-famous contemporary figures, be they politicians or entrepreneurs, who have been inspired by the biographies of figures from antiquity?

**Answer:**

Some examples come to mind. I think of Peter Thiel being directly inspired to take down the notorious troll site *Gawker* by the conspiracy chapter of Machiavelli’s *Discourses on Livy* (which discusses some ancient conspiracies). I think of Elon Musk recommending his followers read Homer’s epics and Xenophon’s *Anabasis*. Harry Truman said Plutarch taught him more about politics than all the other books he read combined. Patton was steeped in the classics, especially as a young man, and later thought of himself as a reincarnated ancient warrior/general—usually Hannibal, but sometimes others (why be exclusive in such matters?). I think more such leaders would be inspired by the greats if we showed them how to approach these figures, and if we made it more socially acceptable once again. I see some of this demand firsthand in The Classical Society, a new leadership network I co-founded that aims to reach some people in this demographic.

**Question:**

I don't know if you are familiar with the podcaster Bronze Age Pervert and his book *Bronze Age Mindset*, as he has popularized antiquity among right-wing audiences through humor, making it a frequent topic. He argues that a man like Alcibiades is sadly impossible in today's world... Is such a type of man possible today?

**Answer:**

BAP has done more for the classics than all the contemporary Ivy League/Oxbridge faculties combined. But yes, it's hard to imagine an Alcibiades of quite that stamp rising as a *political* leader in our current times. I think it's less about the supposed suffocating Christian morality now, and more about the fact that you have to court women voters. Granted, some women would vote Alcibiades in a fluttering heartbeat... However, in the realm of entrepreneurship there is a lot more room for eccentricity. Elon, regardless of his sometimes confused political utterances, certainly with his lifestyle embodies *a little* bit of this energy (without the real polish of a magnetic aristocratic political charisma). Erik Prince is much more buttoned up in his lifestyle, but many attach those kinds of adventurist aspirations to a guy like him. I think they're both far better role models for young men than we've been offered by pop culture for most of my life. And such men can occasionally pivot into political leadership.

**Question:**

Recently, a friend of mine, who is a judge, told me that he considers Trump to be more like Catiline than Caesar. Do you use analogies from ancient history when considering modern politicians, or do you take a more unique, personal approach to analyzing contemporary statesmen? Is it impossible to make comparisons between the two?

**Answer:**

These comparisons with ancient figures are very productive and always have been. There are always those who quibble “don’t do this, they are so different,” but sometimes the differences are precisely what is interesting and illuminating and justify the comparisons. Personally I’d see Trump as much more of a Caesar than a Catiline insofar as he really cares about doing things the right way, the legal way (and only nudging the limits of the gray area where absolutely necessary). But can you imagine Trump actually leading an armed revolt? I can’t. Although he is very popular with the armed forces, Trump does not have Caesar’s military credentials—that’s an important difference. It’s also a difference between him and a guy I think is an equally interesting comparison to Trump, namely Gaius Marius—a populist and a war hero, a challenger of the Senate establishment, but also someone who ultimately cared about establishing himself within an ordered hierarchy, not completely overturning the system itself (which in my mind also was not Caesar’s original intent).

**Question:**

What is your opinion on Spengler’s thesis in *The Decline of the West* about the fundamental differences between antiquity and Western civilization? If it is accurate, does it make sense to learn something from antiquity for practical life today?

**Answer:**

I’m not as familiar with Spengler as I’d like to be, but he is great to think with. Again, a critic might point to plenty of counterexamples to all of these statements. But the general thrust is persuasive. I think the most important takeaway from a guy like Spengler is that he can coach you through thinking about how your own way of approaching the world is not the only human way. This expands your imagination and allows you to consider new possibilities for how institutions or artistic or scientific projects might be ordered

differently. The danger, as always, is that you overestimate your ability to change contemporary opinion and biases, and end up losing relevance. I see this a lot with seemingly doomed intellectual projects launched by smart and capable people. But something in me is hesitant to discourage them—because, what do I know? Maybe they’ll pull it off, and good on them for trying.

**Question:**

Would you recommend someone to write their autobiography, and at what age? Is Caesar’s *Commentarii de Bello Gallico* a truer depiction of Caesar than Plutarch’s *Caesar*?

**Answer:**

It’s good for posterity to have both the autobiographical and the biographical angle on a person. *The Gallic Wars* is in some sense a truer, but also a less complete, view of Caesar. He’s amazingly honest, despite the fact that it is clearly a propaganda work of sorts. But Plutarch (more than Suetonius) gives you a taste of what it was like to be around him, what people thought of him, what the bigger destiny and significance of his life might have been. Those are things best supplied by a third party—a careful analyst removed from partisan sentiments (Tacitus’ *sine ira et studio*). Probably best to write your autobiography after most of your major accomplishments but also while you’re still at the height of your faculties. But it doesn’t hurt to do a couple drafts. Arnold wrote one as a young man and another as an older man. Both are worth reading.

**Question:**

Are the Christian and ancient value systems incompatible?

**Answer:**

I’d say they are in tension—Achilles is not making it into the canon of saints anytime soon. But they are close enough, especially

for public men, that it's worth trying to harmonize them as much as possible. Aristotle is a key figure in this (very influential through Aquinas). See his chapter on Greatness of Soul (*Nicomachean Ethics* 4.3), for example. This effort of constructing a moral unity to the West is much more productive than pointing out all the differences, in my opinion. Though I admire and respect BAP, Tom Rowsell, The Golden One, etc., I think you can't go back to pagan polytheism credibly now, not as a society. It will remain a niche on the fringes. I think Nietzsche was more right about the qualities of pagan excellence but blinkered when it came to articulating the essence of Jewish/Christian virtue.

**Question:**

Are antiquity enthusiasts in America more right-wing or left-wing?

**Answer:**

Hard to say. Those who appreciate the deeds of great men and see antiquity as a model lean heavily right. But on the left you have many antiquity enthusiasts too—perhaps more—though they are interested in things like art and architecture, archaeology, daily life, myth and poetry, social history. Usually in a way that I personally find uninspiring, as it often takes the form of effete nerdery.

**Question:**

Did Caesar make a mistake sparing Brutus and Cassius after Pharsalus?

**Answer:**

I think it was a good move and consistent with his policies. The real mistake was trying to integrate them back into the power structure at Rome. That was going too far. They should have been left to wallow in indolence in Marseille or Dyrrhachium—give them

a stipend with some insignificant sinecure. Those men ended up turning some of Caesar's more loyal allies against him—Decimus Brutus and Trebonius, notably. Which they couldn't have done if they were alive but laughable.

**Question:**

Did Alexander truly believe he was the son of Zeus, or was it just political marketing?

**Answer:**

Probably a little bit of both. It was moderately advantageous for him to believe it. And in the ancient religious mindset, the only "belief" that matters is the one you act upon—which he clearly did (though he had to be measured in how he presented this to the Greeks and Macedonians he sat with at the officers' mess).

**Question:**

If you could live the life of one historical figure from antiquity, who would it be and why?

**Answer:**

I usually go to Plato for this. He had intimate contact with some of the world's most interesting people at the time—Dionysius I and II, Dion of Syracuse, Archytas of Tarentum, Isocrates, Aristotle, Critias—not to mention Socrates and probably Xenophon. And the list goes on. But I love the "secret society" or conspiratorial aspects of the Academy. I do think Plato was much more charming and interesting than Socrates as he depicts him in his works.

**Question:**

Is it possible to apply practical insights from Roman history at a general level?

**Answer:**

Well, the U.S. Founders certainly did it, especially with Polybius' take on Rome. I think Athenian democracy is also an interesting comparison for us in the 20th century. The important thing is not to get locked into one paradigm but to learn from them all.

**Question:**

Could antiquity unlock new potential in America through your Classical Society project?

**Answer:**

I sure hope so. We're working on it, genuinely. America is facing a national identity crisis and seems to be rallying around Christianity, which I see as a good thing. But we also have a significant number of serious Jews, including on the right, and they aren't going anywhere—and we shouldn't want them to. (We also have a larger mixed bag of other metaphysical commitments, some of which can be integrated into the whole, some not.) "Judeo-Christian" culture is a non-starter for much of the politically active generation of young men, and rightly so—it's artificial and arguably astro-turfed. Yoram Hazony himself seems to recognize this and avoids the term (e.g., at the recent NatCon conference). But the Classics provide an alternative route to refounding the practical unity of Christendom (a better concept) in a way that doesn't require a statement of faith from anyone, which is extremely important in our day. More tactically, the statesmen, generals, and founders of antiquity—and more broadly, the literary and philosophical tradition—offer so much of immediate use for people charged with great responsibility that I think we should do everything we can to make it easy for such people to access this material.