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Pathways

It was in a remote village in the Kyrgyz Pamir Mountains. I remember vividly the beauty of that night. It was a beautiful night with a bright and generous moon. The firmament of stars suspended so low. In the bright light of the moon the mountains were mighty, gorgeous and friendly. The night was silent. And the whole world seemed to be living in harmony and justice. No TV, no Internet, not even a telephone line in that house—so there no apocalyptic and other discomfiting news from this crazy world. The illusion would be complete if not for a bitter sadness and mourning for my mother who left this world recently—the world to which the beautiful night belonged. It was for me the greatest injustice. I remembered her life as an eternal struggle between the “empire” and “the artist.” This made me choose this theme for the “Pursuit of Justice” panel.

I was talking with my father that evening, and he told me, “If you choose this topic, then I hope you will tell the truth, that justice does not exist in this world.”

Justice—it is so elusive—is but a passionate and utopian notion. “In Pursuit of Justice” sounds very resolute, but don’t you think we pursue or chase something which doesn’t exist at all or at least here and now—something that escapes us thoroughly. In order to consider justice, I think it is probably best to discuss injustice, as it seems we are more familiar with it.

I decided to start from the top—from the life of Jesus Christ—more precisely, from his crucifixion. It would be very easy—in a sense, obvious—to talk about justice through the Passion of Christ. Taking the version in Mikhail Bulgakov’s “Master and Margarita,” I would start, for example: “Let’s imagine that Pontius Pilate didn’t have a headache that day, and the Pharisees would finally have pity and free Jesus, and not Barrabas. Jesus would be spared. What an accomplished act of justice it would have been; but it turned in a more sophisticated way. This is what the Crucifixion and the Redemption are about. A flagrant, awful and unjust fact of his crucifixion is the foundation and the force of the Redemption of Jesus, and namely, the acceptance of his death; for this belief made his life of high reverence. His preaching brought to humanity a type of ethic or justice that was yet to be seen: action and response based on love, and not on vengeance. And it opened a different inner dimension of justice and moral action based on love for humanity.

The Soviet Union proved for the seventy years of its dreary existence that their application of that ideal justice doesn’t work. But indeed the October Revolution was driven in the name of justice and all the meanings that hide within it: equality, fraternity, and land for farmers, factories and workers. And I think one of the reasons for that terrible failure is that the human being was forgotten behind all this monumental construction of paradise for “the people,” as well as the absence of a human dimension in Marxist theory in general.

In the Kirghiz language, the word *akyikat* (*Акыйкат*) has two meanings, justice and truth. Maybe the answer is here?! And there is a proverb that says, “One can find akyikat in the skies, but there are no stairs to get there.”

I am also thinking about this pure image of a lady with a pair of scales and a sword, her eyes blindfolded. The Roman goddess of law, *Justitia*, is, in effect, a wonderful allegory of impartiality in rendering justice. But, paradoxically, when it comes to reality, the scales are not always well-balanced.

Poverty, segregation, political repression, genocide, slavery, torture, and exploitation: here are some of the forms of injustice, which are still the reality in our world. We are still unable to respond to it. We created a non-punitive body of protection of human rights within the United Nations: the high commissioner for human rights, situated in Geneva, along with other international organisations designed to preserve human rights, to help refugees and migrants, and to manage emergency aid in cases of human catastrophes. They all do wonderful work. OHRHR has done tremendous work defending human rights through the system of non-binding covenants and procedures between states, by stressing and international moral responsibility of states. But today the whole system is in crisis. The highest body, the Commission for Human Rights, became a toy in the hands of politics. They have a system of personalities of integrity and respect that monitor the situation of human rights in the world. When I look only through their mandates, it makes me tremble. They talk of “Women and children trafficking and other forms of contemporary slavery,” or “cruel, inhuman or degrading treatments.”

Some of the larger countries are proud of their level of democracy and system of justice. Founded on the Bill of Rights, and a strong system of federal laws and apparatuses of surveillance, the United States of America seemed to fulfil the ideal of state of law. As one cleric noticed, without such a legal system, “America the beautiful” would be a nation in anarchy, a country uncommonly unfree.”

By the way, we have here an excellent recent local scoop demonstrating this—how perfectly justice works in the States. Yesterday at 2:25 pm, sharp, our dear colleague, showman and poet of dreams, Jose Eugenio Sanchez, from Monterrey, Mexico, was crossing the Clinton street of Iowa City on a red light and immediately was caught by two vigilant policemen, and given a penalty ticket. The impact was tremendous. The scene happened in front of hundreds of students of the University of Iowa. They will apply this lesson, I think. The poet, as usual, suffered. But justice was rendered: Jose Eugenio has to pay twenty dollars of penalty to the United States, plus the pedagogic impact both for the witnesses and Jose. In response to his non-explicit and discrete justifications, the policeman decisively answered: “Don’t forget that you live in a country where you shouldn’t break the law.”

Just as an anecdote I tell you that in a few hours it seems that the whole city learned about it. Jose was recognised in the Java House by a sympathizing waitress.

Here I have deliberately escaped from talking about pursuing justice in American foreign policy. I thought, at the very least, I wanted to avoid talking about justice from the perspective of politics in general. Politics is so corrupted in our day that sometimes it seems to be a great companion of injustice. I started to go through all those different philosophical theories of wise men we had to study in university: Aristotle, Confucius, Augustine, Kant, Marx, etc.

Then suddenly it came to my mind: Pythagoras! His wisdom is so archaic and so fresh at the same time! He used to teach his students, “If putting on your shoes, first you lace a right shoe, be sure that while taking them off, you will unlace first a left shoe.” What a wonderful piece about justice—the symmetry of justice!

I remember, as well, a visit to our country by Madame Danielle Mitterand, a widow of the former president of France. She came as a leader of her charitable organisation, France-Liberte. And one of the visits was to the orphanage for paralysed children near Bichkek (the capital of Kyrgyzstan). We were very sad. The children had terrible disabilities, and were in poor condition, and obviously they missed attention and love. We were shown “the special case,” the small couple of so-called, “Siamese twins.” Their heads and one arm were coupled; they were totally dependant. We were helpless, sad and devastated. Madame Mitterand then said: “I cannot believe how nature sometimes

can be so unjust.” That reflection astonished me. I never thought that nature could ever procure justice or injustice.

“To Each his Due”

For Meister Eckhart, an outstanding middle-aged mystic philosopher, who made the connexion between justice and a just man, justice was in the just man, and the just man was in justice. *“For a just man there is no interest or even a goal for his just action. The only goal he has is justice itself. Justice is not affected neither by space or time, neither by size nor quality, neither by this side nor that side. Justice is something whose purpose lies in itself. And there is no multiplicity: Justice is one and the just man is one, even if there are many just men, in capacity of just men they are one, indeed, they are justice itself. The just man does not possess justice, but rather is justice.* I liked this. His conception of unity is related to the idea of unity of man (any “rational form of life”) with the absolute. Of course, I am not here to talk on his paradigm (of unity), which is broader and quite unconventional and esoteric. But it leads me to the idea that it’s better to look for our answer in human nature.

Justice—and moral action in general—cannot be explained from one’s experience or from any ontology. It comes from our heart, from our inside. And justice is related to the fundamental process of *samopoznanie* the self-knowledge, learning about our selves moved by self-consciousness, freedom and moral responsibility.

What seems very important to me here is that justice is inherent to a just man and needs actions—good actions, as asking the lord from the great Bhagavad-Gita (famous Song of Lord from Mahabharata).

I am sitting here in Iowa, looking from my window of the friendly Iowa House Hotel, at the nice scenery. The Iowa River moves slowly, autumn starts tenderly to touch trees and three white geese—eternal friends of ours—are waiting for eventual crumbs. Everything seems so peaceful and in harmony. Only one thing troubles me. I am late with my paper. Roman is desperately waiting to check my poor English. I am a bit unjust to him. So I lace my shoes starting from the right side and run towards the Shambaugh House.

On the way there I am thinking how to answer my father: I think: “stairs to the sky” exist; but it is another big story.