

Shota Rustaveli against the utilitarians

Abstract: In the article are analyzed three aphorisms of “The knight in the panther’s skin” of Shota Rustaveli. The meaning of these aphorisms can be summarized as this: the joy cannot be fully enjoyed, unless you have experienced woe (grief, sorrow). This point of view opposes the utilitarian understanding about happiness, which is thus defined: “Happiness is maximization of pleasure and minimization or, even better, elimination of pain”. The aphorisms of “The knight in the panthers skin” inspires the important idea, namely, that life can only be really beautiful, if the joy and the woe balance each other.

Key words: *Rustaveli, utilitarians, happiness, joy, woe, balance.*

In the poem of Shota Rustaveli “The Man in the Panther’s Skin” often appear side by side the words “ღობი” (**joy, gladness**) and “ჸომი” (**grief, sorrow, woe**), what means, that the author gives great importance to the relationship of these antonymous concepts. Several examples:

“...hitherto **grief** has been upon me, now this **gladness** is my lot“
(Rustaveli 1966: 262);

“We have found the lost moon; what we desired that have we done;
now we shall have our fires quenched by Fate, our **sorrows** tu **joy**“
(Rustaveli 1966: 298);

“...but if thou bearest not **grief** what is the enduring of **joy**?“
(Rustaveli 1966: 216);

Let us regard a greater context:

“Accursed is the heart of man, greedy, insatiable;
sometimes the heart desiring **joys** endures all **grieves**;
blind is the heart, perverse in seeing, not at all able to measure itself;
no king, nor even death itself, can master it”.
(Rustaveli 1966: 700)

etc. etc. etc.

The author of “The Man in the Panther’s Skin” repeats several times the ideas, that he regards as important – often two times, sometimes – even three times. The dialectics of joy and sorrow, that interests him very much, as we can see from the whole poem, is mentioned three times in form of aphorisms in “The Man in the Panther’s Skin”.

- 1) “მაშა ლხინსა ვინ მოიმკის პირველ ჭირთა უმუშავო” (Rustaveli 1986: 285)
 (“Who then can harvest **joy** who hath not first travailed with **woe?**” – Rustaveli 1966: 197);
- 2) “მაშინ ლხინი ამო არის, რა გარდიხდის კაცი ჭირსა” (Rustaveli 1986: 476)
 (“Then is **joy** pleasant, when a man hath passed through **grief**” – Rustaveli 1966: 336);
- 3) “ყოლა ლხინთა ვერ იამებს კაცი ჭირთა გარდუხდელი” (Rustaveli 1986: 510)
 (“A man unacquainted with **sorrow** cannot find pleasure in **joy**” – Rustaveli 1966: 346).

The first one is from the strophe, that follows the parable about the rose and thorn, that uses Avtandil in the process of saving his friend Tariel from depression. The rose answered to the question, why such a beautiful thig, as it is, has thorns, why it is so hard to get it, as follows:

“Thou findest the sweet with the bitter; whatever costs dear is better ; when the lovely is cheapened it is no longer worth even dried fruit” (Rustaveli 1966: 197).

Commenting this questions of the rose Avtandil tells the first version of the aphorism of the relationship of joy and sorrow:

„Since the soulless, inanimate rose speaks thus,
who then can harvest joy who hath not first travailed with woe?”
(Rustaveli: 197).

The meaning is following: you can not reach joy, unless overcoming woe, we should understand it as follows: the way that leads to joy (happiness) is hard, it leads through withstanding and overcoming the woe.

The second time we find the aphorism with the same meaning in the chapter, where is told, how glad the king Rostevan and Avtandil were, as they saw each other after a long absence:

“The king embraced the neck of that lion and hero-like one,
he seats him close, he speaks to him, kisses him, gazes on his face.
That sun so met royalty, as he was worthy of it.
Then is joy pleasant, when a man hath passed through grief!”
(Rustaveli 1966: 336).

We find the aphorism with a slightly modified meaning in the chapter named “Here is the Marriage of Avthandil and Thinathin by the King of the Arabs”:

“What Tariel and his wife had desired fell to their lot,
seven royal thrones, (seats) of joy, unassailable;
this present solace makes them forget their sufferings.

A man unacquainted with sorrow cannot find pleasure in joy!"
(Rustaveli 1966: 346).

The meaning of these aphorisms can be summarized as this: the joy cannot be fully enjoyed, unless you have experienced woe (grief, sorrow). Or: if it is even possible to come to joy (to obtain joy) without hard work or grief, it is anyway better to come to it in overcoming the woe because only in this case can we fully enjoy it. Or, if we say it with the periphrasis of the well known saying, even if sorrow did not existed, we should have invented it.

* * *

The Utilitarianism (from the latin word *utilis* – useful) belongs to the sciences, that seem to be correct from the point of view of sanity and reason, but, if we examine it closely, they withstand no criticism. One of the founders of Utilitarianism is the English philosopher Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832). He determines happiness as follows: "Happiness is maximization of pleasure and minimization or, even better, elimination of pain" (Schmid 2007: 18).

Let us see, what does the modern German philosopher, new founder of the philosophy of the art of living, Wilhelm Schmid write about this:

"The definition, that became impactful, derives from the Utilitarians: Happiness is the maximization of joy and elimination of pain. The modern people have internalized it to the term, that they identify their self-realization with it. The modern joy- and experience-society is without the striving to the happiness in this sense not conceivable. Unfortunately, has this definition some weaknesses: the main feature of the pleasure is, that it does not last long; everyone can experience this in his own life. The maximization of pleasure, until everything makes only pleasure, has as a result, that pleasure is more and more failed and it turns to the unpleasantness. And also problematic is the second part of the definition of the modern happiness: wanting to switch off the pains, has as a consequence not only not to know the contrast to the pleasure, but to loose orientation in life – because pains are the thorns which oblige us time and again to think about the whole life" (Schmid 2003: 27-28).

The above quoted aphorisms of "The Man in the Panther's Skin" inspire us a very important idea, namely, that life can only be really beautiful, when joy and woe balance each other.

Let us see now the point of view of Wilhelm Schmid about what kind of life can be called beautiful:

"The real power of the beauty lies not in the perfection, not in superficial smoothening and harmonizing of existence, but in the possibility of its affirmation. Worth of affirmation can not only be something pleasant, joyful or as it was eagerly called in the ending 20th century, the "positive", but it can also be something unpleasant, painful, the "negative" – because it can be the deep experience that takes us further. The beautiful contains also failure, decisive is, if the life as a whole appears affirmative" (Schmid 2003: 29).

As we can see, the difficult question of the relationship between woe and joy, that is today even more current, than it was in the past (even alone because, that painkiller medicaments became

diverse easy to get), is at Rustaveli treated in exactly the same way, as is demanded by the modern progressive philosophical thinking.

Wilhelm Schmid uses fulfilled life (“erfülltes Leben”) as synonym of beautiful life and he defines it as follows:

“*The happiness of fulfilled life*, that means a wide experience of fluffiness; This is not necessarily, what is called an easy life, it is more likely a life full of difficulties, that need to be overcome, full of oppositions, complications, privations, conflicts, that need to be fought or endured, all this, that does not normally belong to the good life and to the happiness. This happiness is a trial to balance the life, not to maximize pleasure, but to realize the degree, that is thriving and not distractive for the self and for the relationship with others; not to eliminate every pain but to accept some of them, to put pain and joy in a relationship to each other and to balance them, not in every single second of life, but in the full length of the life” (Schmid 2003: 28).

In this very important discussion, that is about the managing of woe and joy by humans, uses the modern philosopher, as we have seen, the term of “balancing” – “to put pain and joy in a relationship to each other and to balance them”. Rustaveli uses the old Georgian equivalents exactly of the same terms in the discussion about the same question: გაათავნე (gaatavne), შევაწონე (shevats’one):

“შენი ყველა აქამდისი ჭირი ღობისა გაათავნე”, writes Phatman to Nestan, as she tells her the story of Tariel’s appearance (Rustaveli 1986: 404), that means: balance now with joy all the woe, that you have seen,

and

“ჩემი ყველა აქამდისი ჭირი ღობისა შევაწონე” (Rustaveli 1986: 410), writes Nestan to Tariel. He repeats almost exactly the words of Phatman, with the difference, that the word გაათავნე (gaatavne) changes with its synonym – “შევაწონე” (shevats’one). Both these words are old Georgian equivalents of balancing (Chubinashvili 1984: 1501; Dictionary... 2010: 35).

As crowning of Rustaveli’s arguing about this, quite actual question, we can use the following reasoning of Avtandil, as he tells it to himself before going to aid Tariel:

“If we desire happiness from God we must accept griefs also”

(Rustaveli 1966: 166).

The comment of the scholar of “The Man in the Panther’s Skin”, Tamaz Vasadze, about this (self)reasoning of Avtandil, is as follows: “It is the truth, seen by the eye of reason, that is beyond of the reach of the ‘heart’, that strives for joy and tries to avoid ‘woe’” (Vasadze 2011: 323).

Obviously Utilitarians will not like this reasoning of Avtandil!

The opinion of Tamaz Vasadze about the function of sorrow (woe) in “The Man in the Panther’s Skin” (and in life) is in full concordance with the view of Wilhelm Schmid mentioned above. Let us listen to the scholar of “The Man in the Panther’s Skin”:

“This reasoning (the reasoning of sorrow. – L. B.) is presented in the fable of the rose – sorrow is necessary, so that the values do not devalue; the values gain in strength and reality in overcoming difficulties, that makes it harder to get them: “It said: “The sweet is gained by the bitter, better it is more expensive, if the beautiful becomes cheap, its value diminishes to nothing”; Also the happiness, to be great and truly valuable, is gained by enduring of sorrow: “Who then can harvest joy who hath not first travailed with woe?” [...] Although God is not mentioned in the reasoning of Avtandil, but mainly it is a theodicy, the explaining of the supplementation of the good of God and the pain, that exists in life. His originality is determined by following, that Rustaveli lets the existence of sorrow as eliminating necessity that the life of a man becomes devalued and spiritually poor and simple”” (Vasadze 2011: 340).

The remark of the scholar is very important, about the difference between the opinion of Avtandil about sorrow (“woe”) and the traditional Christian view:

“The point of view of Avtandil about woe is different from the traditional religious point of view, according to that the highest value after the death – the paradise is to be gained by the sin cleaning pain. In the poem of Rustaveli is the woe not the way to free himself from sins and to gain the paradise, but **the way to gain the happiness in this world, is the price for worldly happiness**” (Vasadze 2011: 340. Our highlighting – L. B.).

Thus, the concept of Rustaveli about the relationship of woe and joy matches exactly the point of view of Wilhelm Schmid. The point of view of the poet of the 12th century opposes the conviction of the utilitarians exact in the same way, as the point of view of our modern philosopher does about this.

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