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**PHILOSOPHIZING IN THE NEW MIDDLE AGE, OR,  
A STORY OF A FATHERLESS CHILD**

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This is an essay-review of the book *One with the Father: A Novel of Mysticism, Heresy, and Rebellion in the Middle Ages* written by Richard Evanoff; Resource Publications, Eugene, OR, 2023.

“Ἐγὼ καὶ ὁ πατὴρ ἓν ἐσμεν”  
[I and the Father are one]

Circumstances are such today that no one is left with the opportunities and hopes to inspire the whole Republic of scholars, the less so—the total men-of-letters community, let alone *all* the reading public, by any one uniting general project of social progress, the ideal of “modernity.” There is no one sole and exclusive goal, no single absolute value; there is none of such almighty categories as the Absolute Idea, Communism or the Kingdom of God—there is only, deliberately or involuntarily received, pluralism.

However, it is natural for the human being to now and then step out of the eternal Heraclitean flow or Chinese Tao in search for something unambiguously definite and firm, “*L’isola del giorno prima*” which could be safely taken as—if not everlasting but at least long-lasting—psychological support. Hence comes common sense.

Above it, metaphysical thought, or thirst, has permanently been seeking for the undoubtful stem of being. There had been great many candidates, mythic and philosophical, beginning with One God of Pharaoh Akhenaten and all Abrahamic religions, four elements of Greeks plus metal in China, breath of Brahma, “το ον” of Parmenides, “number” of Pythagoras, ten sephiroth of Torah and Kabbalah, mercury, salt, and sulphuricum of alchemists, atom of materialists and Leibniz’s monad, meridian 180°, and the Higgs boson. Hence come “exact” sciences: logic and mathematics. Although the 20th century has discov-

ered the plurality of logics, the urge-and-search itself remains, and it seems to be not only intellectually, but also biologically relevant, being the legacy of orientation instinct. Absolute truth is still there, if not as a thing at hand, then as a Polar star. And it is still attacked—now by postmodern thought.

Postmodernism was put together by people who owned the word and pen: ironical and abundant, this discourse uses collage, pastiche, rebus, labyrinths of libraries, mirror and echo chamber, “quips and jests and admonitory instances,” playful sincerity and sincere game. Originating in line with French literature critique, postmodernism entered practically all humanities, but its texts are addressed exclusively to the erudite, thoroughly prepared reader. As John Barth’s “Genie” put it on his abrupt emergence in front of Scheherazade and her little sister Dunyazad, “currently, however, the only readers of artful fiction were critics, other writers, and unwilling students.”<sup>1</sup> The roots of postmodernism go to the relativism of the Sophists and the teachings of the first skeptics hostile to the single-mindedness. Postmodern thought is the opposition to realism *par excellence*. It bases on an attractive, sarcastic, artistic paradigm oriented against every single one of the classic postulates and categories, values and criteria, including such as Truth, Reason, Essence, rationality, activity, objectivity, fundamental principles, absolute meanings and heroic social projects, the “big narratives.”

The philosophical novel *One with the Father*—a metafiction, in Author’s parlance—covers the whole range of the large-scale worldview and moral problems; these are eternal philosophical problems, setting questions and sometimes suggesting the answers—different in various historical conditions, still leaving a place for finding convincing arguments to statements which could be taken as “justified true believes.” In the monograph under study, however, the events and actions are placed in the realm of medieval scenery reminding of Umberto Eco’s “*Il nome della rosa*” at first place. It is not uncommon at present time; in fact, great many books, films, and computer games involve the atmosphere of medieval romantics and aesthetics today, and there is a direct relationship of postmodernism with the medieval semantics. The “fantasy” style is much more popular than science fiction was 50–60 years ago; and the trend produced such masterpieces as John Ronald Reuel Tolkien’s legendarium in the last century.

Veraciously, not only the aesthetic frame, but many characteristic features of the original middle ages, such as the revival of all confessions and cults including traditional trends and heresies; literate public reading their daily program from Tarot and horoscope, deep symbolism and mysticism, continuous commentary, interpretation, and hermeneutics as the only authentic method of treating cultural texts; the coarse laughter of fabliau,<sup>2</sup> horror and gloomy reminders

<sup>1</sup> Barth, J. 1972. *Chimera*. Dunyazadiad 1; <https://libcat.ru/knigi/fantastika-i-fjentezi/yumoristicheskaya-fantastika/237731-9-john-barth-chimera.html#text>

<sup>2</sup> A comic, often anonymous tale written by jongleurs in north-east France.

of scriptures are reproduced in today's culture, in the time still to be called postmodernism, which I take for the New Middle Age where Interpretation has run the game.

Objects and phenomena, qualities and relations, events and actions, architecture and gowns are exposed so convincingly in *The Name of the Rose*, you cannot doubt in finding yourself in true 14th century encountering William of Ockham, also known as Wilhelm of Baskerville, and learning not only about the theological dispute on Jesus Christ's poverty proclaimed by the pauper Order of St. Francis and defied by the rich Order of Domini canes, but also about the most important and essential philosophical dilemma of the principal trends of all the medieval Millenium, namely, *realism and nominalism*.

However, the taste of Richard Evanoff's new novel is unlike that of the Umberto Eco's great book. This text is everything but scholastics. You do not believe and you do not have to believe to find yourself in the true Middle Ages; its entourage and atmosphere is roundly the New Middle Age of postmodernism—though “after-postmodernism” would have been preferable for *One with the Father*. This novel, spiritually, rather follows Fyodor Dostoyevsky with his last novel *Brothers Karamazov* and Leo Tolstoy with his concept of the *Kingdom of Absolute* within us,<sup>3</sup> than ballads about knightly romance. Richard Evanoff himself gives this key to his text in the “Annotations” (which the reviewer prefers not to read in full except the first page, not to be imposed while forming her own impression and opinion). With his Slavic legacy, it is only natural that Evanoff is deeply interested in classical Russian literature as he explains it in his blog on the YouTube and in the post-epilogue commentary to the novel (“Annotations,” 385).

Truly, there is no original “purely Russian” philosophy except the great Russian literature of its “Golden Age,” that is, the 19th century and, partly, its “silver age,” namely, the 20-ies of the 20th century.

In *One with the Father* we also come across the presentation of philosophical dilemma of realism and nominalism—in the scene where the central hero, Justin, is passing an exam for degree in the University. It is also substantially complemented with the characteristics of conventionalism—the third philosophical trend, which the examining Professor seems not to know. The discussion between Justin and Professor goes along on many pages (pp. 232–235), and it can effectively be used by teachers in contemporary universities to elucidate the topic. Justin concludes with: “I am skeptical. Ultimately reality cannot be put into words” (p. 236). Later on: “The knowledge I seek cannot be found in books, but only in experience” (p. 238).

There existed a generally accepted notion that this medieval dilemma, as all the thousand-year dispute about universals, was exhausted, even became simply

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<sup>3</sup> Tolstoy, L. n.d. *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*. Garnett, C. (Trans.); <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/43302/43302-h/43302-h.htm>

boring, and in recent times these philosophical approaches were replaced with empiricism and rationalism. However, whether right or wrong, empiricism was viewed in some way as a successor of nominalism, and rationalism—that of realism. Both realism and rationalism are similarly oriented in the “universalistic,” “fundamentalistic” mode. Their basic satisfaction lies in obtaining the deep essential One. This very philosophical orientation Karl Popper attacked in his *Open Society and Its Enemies*,<sup>4</sup> namely, a conscious search for a single origin, or firm doctrine; even if the philosopher recognizes the plurality of substances as Leibniz did, it is still essentialism.

To illustrate this yearning for oneness, a passage from Barth’s *Chimera* suits very well. Shah Zaman, a younger brother of Shahryar, speaks to Dunyazade, Scheherazade’s sister:

“We took a solemn oath to rape and kill a virgin a night, so as never again to be deceived. Tall and short, dark and fair, lean and plump, cold and ardent, bold and timid, clever and stupid, comely and plain—I bedded them all, spoke with them all, possessed them all, but was myself possessed by nothing but despair. Though I took many, with their consent, I wanted none of them. Novelty lost its charm, then even its novelty. Unfamiliarity I came to loathe: the foreign body in the dark, the alien touch and voice, the endless exposition. All I craved was someone with whom to get on with the story of my life, a loving friend; a loving wife; a treasurable wife; a wife, a wife”<sup>5</sup>

A One, a One.

On their part, both nominalism and empiricism are oriented not so much towards the search of the (poor in content and single in number) deep *essence*, but rather towards a voluminous *content*—rich lavishness of the filling of culture and knowledge, that was soundly illustrated by Eco in his *The Name of the Rose*. Their basic (principle of) delight lies in admiring wealth and splendor of the world and of arts. Compare the hero’s amazement at the carved doorway to the church (with a great tympanum and pillars):

“Little bird-feet heads, animals with human hands on their back, hirsute pates from which feet sprout, zebra-striped dragons, quadrupeds with serpentine necks twisted in a thousand inextricable knots, monkeys with stags’ horns, sirens in the form of fowl with membranous wings, armless men with other human bodies emerging from their backs like humps, and figures with tooth-filled mouths on the belly, humans with horses’ heads, and horses with human legs, fish with birds’ wings and birds with fishtails, monsters with single bodies and double heads or single heads and double bodies, cows

<sup>4</sup> Popper, K. R. 1945. *Open Society and Its Enemies*. Routledge.

<sup>5</sup> Barth, J. 1972. *Chimera*. *Dunyazadiad* 2; <https://libcat.ru/knigi/fantastika-i-fjentezi/yumo-risticheskaya-fantastika/237731-9-john-barth-chimera.html#text>

with cocks' tails and butterfly wings, women with heads scaly as a fish's back, two-headed chimeras interlaced with dragonflies with lizard snouts, centaurs, dragons, elephants, manticores stretched out on tree branches, gryphons whose tails turned into an archer in battle array, diabolical creatures with endless necks, sequences of anthropomorphic animals and zoomorphic dwarfs ..."<sup>6</sup> Etc.

Wilhelm of Baskerville tells emphatically to his adept that, accepting that All is One, he could better be amusing the multitude of plenty, the benevolence of Goodness as it is.

However, there is much more to be discussed than this dilemma in the text of *One with the Father*. It exposes the reader to practically all philosophical trends ever existing and to many forms of religion, from naive paganism of eastern and western myths to subtle sophistry of theological disputes. There is wondrous polyphony and no Author's verdict or final assessment—in the same way as Dostoyevsky preferred to close his novels. You are observing the pictures flowing swiftly, in the never-ending course of life if not *being* itself, producing the effect of—not effortless readability but, as the Author himself prefers to put it—most engaging fast-paced narrative.

Indeed; exquisitely written, the amazing novel is readable in one sitting. Oh well, in three. It is a complicated text.

The hero's life-story is a combination of that of Buddha's and a parable of the prodigal son. Justin's cv includes educating from an alchemist who succeeded in teaching the boy the whole cycle of trivium and quadrivium (not alchemy, though), from a Hermit in the woods, from the friendly Pharisee in the monastery; and from a university professor of theology. In the interim there had been soothing conversations with the Abbot in the monastery, then kind of a dispute with a heretic leader of the sect, or rather, a commune (probably the seed of the later *Ordre du Saint-Esprit*, certainly just terminologically). There had also been a seductive mingling with a malicious scoundrel reminding that of Ivan Karamazov's conversation with a devil. Only Justin's devil looks much more impressive than Ivan's petty-bourgeois: fire-haired, dressed up like a blazing dandy, knowing, willing, calling, challenging, scattering brilliant paradoxes like "a liar," "a grain and a heap" ("a hair and a bold head"), even "Achilles and the turtle." Wearing a golden ring on a finger —Justin's wedding-ring it had been once.

The sight of the City fair is really picturesque and drawn spectacularly well: you might even expect Zarathustra's two tightrope walkers, one slim and young, another a slaughterer in red shirt, with black beard. The students, Justin and Roland, entertain their freedom and multiple choices to spend their time away

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<sup>6</sup> Eco, U. 1980. *The Name of the Rose*. Chapter "Sext;" <https://libcat.ru/knigi/detektyv-i-tilleryi/istoricheskij-detektyv/280335-10-umberto-eco-the-name-of-the-rose.html#text>

from the university and behave reprehensibly. The best way is to outwardly conform to what people expect of you, then to privately do whatever you want, Roland's motto is. During their last encounter the latter would declare: "The only thing you must avoid is getting caught, in which case you will suffer public humiliation" (p. 337).

The whole story has the horrendous end of passions and murder of a martyr, a saint actually, with no perspective of teaching "four noble truths" to the faithful congregation, neither of a loving old Father protruding his arms to the cherished but long-lost son. In fact, there had already been no Father when Justin returned home: the revolutionary peasants had killed their cruel lord.

The Author spares us of the abominable depiction of emasculating; he only mentions the blood dripping from underneath the bondage and colouring the martyr's thighs red. Nevertheless, there are dreadful pictures of multiple tortures suggested by still another Lord as sawn in half through the groin; belly slit open and stuffed with rats; eviscerated to watch the entrails being burned; let alone that brave Adrian, leader of the rebels, was really quartered, his torso flayed, and burned, – the drowning ordeal was actually executed with Justin.

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Siddhartha-like boy was raised in a paradise (the word coming from the Hebrew "garden of fruit trees"): inside his father's palace and parks surrounded with vast woods and waters, enjoying eternal nature, completely content and safe; what he perceived in the estate was all that could be known and, therefore, all that actually existed. A far-off cross on the invisible church hiding in the valleys as a distant promise; silent servants; ancient languages; all liberal arts; young guy's military training—and a sudden vision of alchemical gold medalion transmuted from lead; Eve with an apple seducing Adam, and deep infatuation; a vicious evil-thing crawling on his belly right on the spot of dating—turning out just a snake you would not kill for the primordial belief of all living-things' equal rights, opposing the Christian model of the universe shaped in a pyramid with a governor at the top, as in St. Augustine's "City of God," and the subjects (who often ungratefully tend to revolt); a Father explaining the symbol of the total structure (a senior and the serfs, etc.); unhappy creatures with their permanent debt and Mother rejecting eternal life then unexpected marriage ... and a flight.

"Perhaps I should become an outcast like Adam! It would at least allow me to know more than I know now. I do not wish to remain captive here forever" (p. 21).

Justin is not an angel. He lies; he plays a coward; he loses his virginity with a prostitute; he betrays; he is seduced by a wrongdoer to plunge into a den of

vice. Only one deadly sin he does avoid: stealing. But he is fleeing away from the field of battle, leaving his new pals, his love, his father, a devil though he may be, and even killing. Confessing of this crime—a deadly sin—to the priest as a refugee looking for protection, Justin, to his astonishment, hears that killing a man is not always wrong.

With this last statement I am inclined to agree. Though no woman in sober mind and good memory can support war—she still can do if it is a patriotic war and even let her sons to participate in the fight. With Justin, it was like wishing to kill—but not committing it; and, unwillingly, unexpectedly, actually murdering his own friend, who used to train and entertain him in his childhood. This only deadly sin he will always repent.

It is unusual for the novel that characters, even major personages, bare no names. Justin and Constance, Martin, Adrian, Bartholomew, Roland and Penelope—and that is all. By this, the last couple of names sound sarcastic: Orlando Furioso—and a cynical rascal; Odyssey's true wife—and an unholy megaera, first demanding slavish devotion and love and then excitedly cheering castrating and shameful death.

The names of the foremost heroes are self-evident. "Justin" indicates not simply *just* or *justice*, but seeking *justifications* of religious propositions by experience:

"Simple faith does not mean unquestioningly acceding to all the excessively complicated ideas [...] but rather experiencing the divine within ourselves" (p. 367).

"Constance" is the name of a heroin not only loyal but also firm and brave. Constance accuses the bailiff:

"You only think about your accounts. You should be more concerned about the people who work for you!" (p. 97).

Constance courageously opposes the lords and their henchmen.

The same can be mentioned about "Bartholomew"—the name definitely brings to mind the *Massacre de la Saint-Barthélemy*. This "spiritual advisor" and "friend" beats the stubborn apostate nearly accomplishing the grievously famous forty lashes, weeping in crocodile tears.

All the other characters are personified functions: Father; Mother; alchemist; bailiff; priest; Hermit aka Fisher; abbot; prior; preacher; Lord; Inquisitor; executor, a tall man, a man with a scar, a man in a black cloak and hood, old nosy lady and her feisty young daughter, hefty but spry woman; etc. One other character has a name: Charm, the black cat.

Justin's dying Mother whom the alchemist could not save was the first who drew his attention to something else than the palace and parks. Mother is not

Mother Mary. She really reminds of the Sophia-wisdom of Dostoyevsky and Solov'yev, who were well acquainted and worked out similar world-views.

“Ever since you were a little baby, your father has sheltered you from all awareness of the world outside this estate. He has forbidden anyone, even me, to speak to you about what life is like beyond these walls” (p. 29).

The Father always tried to hide visions of old age, illness or death from his son, so that this would not push him to make helping others his mission, thus not becoming the heir to the estate. Justin had never seen an elderly or sick servant, probably, not a single fading flower, and he himself did not know illness. When it all came in a flood, he hardly was able to cope with it, but, unconsciously or deliberately, his travelogue began.

From the philosophical point of view, Justin holds the trend of empiricism.

“You do not need to have faith in a sunrise [...] You just see it. It makes no sense to talk about the ‘truth’ of a sunrise or to have a ‘belief’ about it. You just experience it” (p. 160).

This natural bend was emphatically supported by the Abbot: Truth is not something to be talked about or known, but something “to be experienced, as participants not spectators” (p. 166). Gnoseologically, empiricism shows itself as sensualism which can be both materialistic (John Locke) and idealistic (George Berkeley). Surely not an atheist—you cannot imagine an atheist alive in medieval context, save that Adrian came next to it—but an “apostate,” and a sensualist determined to find and embrace Absolute Truth, should there exist one, and obtain faith in it through his own experience, Justin sets to his doomed journey. One question had been gnawing him all through his travels: why could not he *perceive* God? One feature is inalterable in our hero: his trust to his own perceptions. At times he comes close to solipsism; in Abbot’s wording: “for each of us has our own idea of God and all these ideas are different” (p. 166). Justin neither affirms nor denies the teachings of the Church; they are “simply irrelevant and make no sense.” In pure Tolstoy’s manner, he follows Abbot:

“You cannot understand God through other people’s experiences, but only through your own [...] we should follow the Holy Spirit, which dwells inside us and guides us into all truth” (p. 164).

There are two steps of cognition: first awareness and then judgment. Justin seeks for both.

Initial, and crucial, experience was that of deep social injustice – first rather mild, presented as a story of poverty and lawlessness by Constance (“Your father does not want you to know poverty, sire, not even the sight of it. That is

why you do not really know what it is like to be poor,” p. 23); and the other was atrocious: a scene of peaceful peasant’s delegation slain by Justin’s Father and his garrison.

“For the first time since his birth Justin had seen suffering and death with his own eyes. His body shook with a feeling he had never experienced before and could not understand. The flawless bubble in which his life had been so delicately contained was now suddenly punctured” (p. 39).

Another startling experience was challenging the plain Christian religious worldview during the dialogues with the pantheist in the wilderness; and not only in talking, but in learning how to swim and dive, on the edge of adult age, though yet a young boy. “I feel rejuvenated!” (p. 72). Burning fine bright clothes is also symbolical. Dostoevsky once confessed (with pain) in a private letter (to Apollon Maykov) and later in his *Notebook* that he was not a foolish fanatic as some might presume.

“Yes, their stupid nature did not even dream of the power of *denial*, which I *surpassed* [...] not like a boy I believe in Christ and confess him, but my Hosanna passed through the great furnace of doubts ...”<sup>7</sup>

While in the monastery, Justin came to a conclusion that the exodus from Egypt should be understood also as a moral lesson about liberating the subjugated (p. 153). Studying the Scripture for the first time, Justin doubts its stories (pp. 150–152). The story of God, in the form of Jesus, crucified and then resurrected, didn’t differ from similar stories of ancient Greeks and Egyptians. And who could believe in God punishing even his own people with fire, famine, pestilence, and war; God planting the garden, walking on two feet; *Immaculata concepcion de Maria*; Jesus giving sight to the blind; Jesus rising from the grave.

“How could a just God hand down ordinances that condone slavery and the servitude of women; that require animal sacrifice and burnt offerings; that sanction death by stoning to those who serve other gods?” (p. 151).

But it was only common-sense rationality. Similar rejection and argumentation we find in the diatribes of Tatar enlighteners of the 19th century. Criticizing the threat to liars to be hanged in the afterlife, as the Holy Quran warns, Kayum

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<sup>7</sup> Dostoevsky, F. 1972–1990. *Collected Works* [in Russian]. Vol. XXVII, Nauka, 48; 86; translated by ET. Cf. See also: Stepanyan, K. A. n.d. “The Author’s Biography as the Source of Commentary to F. M. Dostoyevsky’s Novel ‘The Brothers Karamazov’.” *Филологический журнал*, 3, 119–142; DOI: 10.22455/2619-0311-2018-3-119-142

Nasyri, for instance, came in with “of what material the gallows in hell might be? If of iron, it will melt; if wooden, it will burn down.”

Before concluding that the stories in scriptures should be taken not literally, but metaphorically and symbolically, Justin spends months skeptically examining the texts. It takes much time; but then the laws of semiotics elucidate the situation.

“Truth cannot be stated in words, for they are mere emblems which point to something they themselves are not [...] light, that is true, but only as a symbol [...] It is simply a term of convenience people use to designate something that cannot be designated” (pp. 164, 166).

Further on, not without Abbot’s and Man-in-black-attire’s help, Justin’s bewilderment deepens; his argumentation becomes more and more sophisticated, when at last, having gone alive through plague and inquisitor’s quest, through resurrection before actual passing away, he comes to the last Truth: The tree of life is the same as the tree of knowledge.

Walking in an enormous cycle Justin comes back to the Village to Constance and to his estate he had long abandoned. He has already witnessed in the City a practical example of living in a community; it was a happy—and dangerous life, for the peaceful sect was relentlessly persecuted by the Inquisition which had succeed at last in setting the heretic leader, the Preacher, on bonfire.

On his return, living several precious moments in the village by the one he loves, the skeptic becomes a utopian socialist desperately trying to bring to life his new ideal. “Could the peasants not simply withdraw their support from the nobility?” (p. 342).

“Would it not be better for the peasants to meet together and discuss among themselves how to manage affairs in the village, to share their ideas with each other and rationally arrive at solutions that everyone can support, and then to confederate with other like-minded villages and towns for the purpose of mutual cooperation?” (p. 343).

And in the end, having won his fortitude and gaining self-confidence at last, Justin will declare:

“Whatever convictions I have are based on my own experience, which cannot be doubted. I will not be convinced by anything if it is contrary to the truths I have learned not through books or teachings, but in life” (p. 366).

The chief adage penetrating the whole text prosodically is Tolstoy's "*The Kingdom of God Is Within You*." You cannot understand God through other people's experiences, but only through your own.

In fact, Tolstoy had a palpable dislike towards Dostoyevsky; he wrote once in a letter to Maxim Gorky (1902):

"He [Dostoyevsky] would better get acquainted with the teachings of Confucius or the Buddhists, this would calm him down. [...] He felt a lot, but thought poorly [...] He was suspicious, proud, heavy and unhappy. It is strange that so many people read him, I do not understand why! After all, it's hard and useless, because [...] everything was not like that, everything is simpler, clearer"<sup>8</sup> (translated by ET).

Looking desperately for the Absolute within, Justin is strongly supported by the wise Abbot:

"Those who are spiritually impoverished, [...] think of God as a being that exists outside of and above them, whom they then bow down before and worship, praising the Lord because they can find nothing within themselves worth praising" (p. 171).

Religious dogmas are also being weighed up in great number of conversations—Justin puts hundreds of sometimes naïve, other times challenging, questions—to his Mother, both alive and a phantom; to the Hermit, to Bartholomew, to the Preacher and anchorite, to the kind Abbot; for example Question No 180 is again: "Then where is God?" (p. 169).

At last he had been given out to the Inquisitor. The last bears close similarity with Grand Inquisitor of the "story in a story," a "poem" written by Ivan Karamazov.

There are "stories in a story" in the novel: a short one told by a Hermit who failed to cross the ocean and landed in a forest, and a longer one told by Justin's mystagogue, a Man in black attire who first showed him the way to the monastery, then down the mountain of Quest and back to the estate. A piece of bread from the basket; a sip of wine for the as if dead and resurrected Justin. After the communion, the Man told his story reminding of Justin's and different in really chasing and catching and taming the god in his soul until they stood together "without coercion." The best saying of this story, in my opinion, is "[t]he source of all things is like dye in cloth, salt in water. They are neither two, nor even one" (p. 301).

The Grand Inquisitor of the "poem" demonstrates an ambivalent attitude towards people. On the one hand, the inquisitor cares for them and is interested in

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<sup>8</sup> Tolstoy, L. 1919–1923. *Слова М. Горькому в 1902—3*.

their safety. But on the other hand, he—as Dostoyevsky himself (“Nothing seems more seductive in his eyes than freedom of conscience, and nothing proves more painful”<sup>9</sup>)—believes that freedom is burdensome and difficult for an ordinary person.

“No science will ever give them bread so long as they remain free, so long as they refuse to lay that freedom at our feet, and say: ‘Enslave, but feed us!’

... the weak and the lowly are the more dear to us. True, they are vicious and rebellious, but we will force them into obedience, and it is they who will admire us the most. They will [...] feel grateful to those who have consented to lead the masses and bear their burden of freedom by ruling over them—so terrible will that freedom at last appear to men!

... Man has no greater anxiety in life than to find some one to whom he can make over that gift of freedom with which the unfortunate creature is born. But he alone will prove capable of silencing and quieting their consciences, that shall succeed in possessing himself of the freedom of men. [...] to man rest and even death are preferable to a free choice between the knowledge of Good and Evil ...”<sup>10</sup>

Fear is imposed on people, turning them into an obedient herd. It is with the help of “compassion” that the inquisitor rules, in fact exterminating people physically and spiritually. The Inquisitor and Ivan (the author of the poem) divide society into those who are able to cope with freedom, and into those who cannot cope with it. The Grand Inquisitor places most people in the second group; he helps them by taking away freedom, thus easing their lot, giving them happiness and peace of mind in exchange for independence.

According to Dostoevsky, evil is a product of freedom, and the absence of freedom indicates the absence of good. Human desire to cross boundaries and at the same time the inability to exist outside these boundaries is inextricable. It all comes from our irrational nature. Everything consists of contradictions, to resolve which you need to have some kind of support which the Church offers in exchange for obedience. Its plans include providing an anthill in which people will live happily. It is Evanoff’s Inquisitor—not the Lord—who ends the investigation of Justin’s sins with a most familiar

“I hereby wash my hands of you [and turn you over to the lord for him to mete out whatever punishment he thinks is appropriate]” (p. 378).

Perhaps it is worth reminding that no philosopher ever killed another philosopher for the opposite views. Unlike to this is religious debate. Not once does Justin seek refuge by the clergymen; not once he flees; at last he pronounces:

<sup>9</sup> Dostoyevsky, F. *Brothers Karamazov. The Grand Inquisitor’s Monologue*. Blavatsky, H. P. (Trans.); <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/8578/8578-h/8578-h.htm>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

“There is no good luck. I have nothing to repent of. I have nothing to confess, I have no desire to be reconciled to the Church. I have no soul to save. I have no power whatsoever [...] The Church and the authorities have arrogated all power for themselves. Do with me as you wish” (p. 378).

“I have no Kingdom on this Earth, but through, through, through ...” involuntary comes to mind.

Onto-gnoseological questions are discussed in the novel as well. Justin is taught by a friendly and jovial Hermit in the woods, then by a rigorous monk and empathic abbot in the Monastery, then by a vicious bold hypocrite Roland and an anchorite in the City’s Cathedral. Many philosophical trends come in during the story; the dialogue of personified ideas does not—and cannot—come to a concord. Sometimes the text looks like a manual. The reader is exposed to Democritus’ “void,” only, without mentioning the atoms and presuming the “beginning” similar to ancient Egyptian myth: “Then—bang!—there was something” (p. 66); to Heraclites’ flow, or Tao:

“Everything is in a perpetual state of flux, even God. All things flow. Nothing is permanent. Something is always being brought into existence. Then it is destroyed” (p. 67).

To Sophistry of Gorgias Leontine:

“Even if we could know nothing, we wouldn’t be able to describe it, and even if we could describe it, no one would understand what we’re talking about. The best we can say is that whatever did not exist before everything else has no name” (p. 66).

The student of Thrasymachus, or probably of Empedocles, Gorgias Leontine narrated that everything equally exists and does not exist, and therefore everything has the same dignity: 1) being does not exist, 2) if it exists, then it is unknowable, 3) even if it is knowable, it is indescribable and inexplicable.

The main heroine Constance pronounces dictums of hylezoism: “Serpents are not from the devil. [...] God has created the serpents in the same way that he created you and me. They are neither higher nor lower than us!” (p. 21). “I assure you that black cats are not from the devil [...] They have been created by God just the same as you and me.” (p. 377).

The Hermit, too, teaches Justin actual hylezoism and pantheism: “God is nature, and Nature is God (p. 65). “There is no God beyond the world we live in [...]. [U]ltimately everything is one” (p. 66). “Each stone, plant, and animal, including us, has a soul. Every single thing is unique, each with its own special features, yet the pieces all fit together like one magnificent mosaic” (p. 65). “All things are gods. God’s seed is in each of us” (p. 68). “You do not need to search for God. He is already here, inside our own hearts, in every living thing, in the mountains and the deserts, in each of the stars that hang in the sky at night and

each grain of sand that washes onto the beach in the morning” (ibid.). “God and the world make and remake themselves unceasingly. When the world dies, God dies with it” (p. 67).

At times the Hermit sounds as if a Na’avi from the didactic Cameron’s movie “Avatar.” “Do not thank only me, thank the fish, too! We also should apologize to all the plants and animals whose lives we take in exchange for our own” (p. 63).

Now, there is a passage as if directly borrowed by Bartholomew from Plato’s “Euthyphro:” “God has not given us his commandments because they are good. They are good because God has given them to us” (p. 141). And Mother’s phrase “The only serious question in life is why we do not kill ourselves” (p. 294) recalls of Albert Camus’ similar wondering: the only question is how to die.

Mother’s phantom recites Buddhist dictums: “Purge yourself of every desire, even the desire for God, your desire for heaven. Desire is the root of suffering. The reason you are in anguish is because you wish that everything would be other than it actually is” (pp. 294–295). Further on it pronounces the Stoics’ creed: “Apathy may mean that we really do care but know that we must simply accept things as they are [before seeing what it is possible for us to change]” (p. 295).

Inexorably, there is Catholicism taught by Bartholomew and others, treating about the end of times:

“There is nothing we can do [...] It is not something we earn through our own actions, but something that God bestows upon us [...] Power comes not from within us but from outside ourselves, from an almighty God ...” etc. (pp. 137–138).

And when Justin recalls pantheistic statements (for which he attested Hermit as an atheist), namely, “I have heard that God is nature and nature is God, and that we, too, each have a spark of the divine within us,” Bartholomew hisses: “This is an abominable heresy!” (p. 141). Then comes, however, a tint of Protestantism: “It is not we who choose God but God who chooses us. God knows everything, so he also knows in advance who will be saved and who will be damned. It is already predestined” (p. 139). The third branch of Christianity is represented by a warm-hearted Abbot, whose homiletics comes from Platonism which is the general philosophical foundation of Orthodox Christianity [Justin: is Christianity not founded on a book, the Bible?] Abbot: “No, our religion is not based on the Bible, but on faith, hope, and charity” (p. 162). It also reminds of Russian orthodoxy; Russians put it as “faith, hope, and love.”

Sometimes Abbot’s advice would sound like mystics of Zen or hesychasm<sup>11</sup> or Sufi: “You must forget everything you have been taught ... The unsayable

<sup>11</sup> A monastic tradition in the Eastern Christian traditions in which stillness (*hēsychia*) is sought through uninterrupted Jesus prayer.

cannot be said.” Justin: “If God cannot be known, he remains a mystery.” Abbot: “Indeed” (pp. 159, 166).

Answering a serious question with waving a finger, sneezing, even kicking to make the adept cognize the truth, queer as it may seem to be, is Zen, too.

“If you try to say something about God, you must use words, but no words ever invented by humans are able to describe God. You might as well sneeze!” (p. 165).

The Abbot transfers to Justin the image of Plato’s cave: “Shall we go outside and see how differently things look from there? Smell the air; it is fresh and invigorating, not at all like the dank, musty fumes in my cell! Now look at the sun!” (p. 166).

The essential beliefs of *Upanishads* are introduced, too: God is light and God is not light; God is neither light nor not-light; God is neither light nor darkness, and yet both (p. 165). The incomparable *Ishavasya Upanishad* teaches poetically:

9. They who worship Avidya alone fall into blind darkness; and they who worship Vidya alone fall into even greater darkness.

10. One result [something distinct] is predicated of Vidya and another of Avidya [Karma]. We have so heard from wise men who taught us both both Vidya and Avidya.

11. He who simultaneously knows both Vidya and Avidya gets over Death by Avidya and attains immortality by Vidya.

12. They fall into blind darkness who worship the unborn Prakriti. And they fall into even greater darkness who are bent upon the Karya Brahman Hiranyagarbha [Destruction].

13. They say one thing results from the worship of Hiranyagarbha and another from the worship of Prakriti. We have thus heard it stated by wise preceptors who taught us that.

14. Those who worship the unmanifested Prakriti and Hiranyagarbha together, get over death through the worship of Hiranyagarbha and attain immortality through the worship of Prakriti.

Perhaps it is easier to be understood in a more up-to-day wording.  
 Into blind darkness enter those who honor ignorance;  
 As if into even greater darkness—those who enjoyed knowledge.  
 Verily, they say that /this/ is different from knowledge, different from ignorance.

This is what we heard from the wise who explained this to us.  
 The one who knows both together—both knowledge and ignorance,  
 Having crossed death with the help of ignorance, he achieves immortality with the help of knowledge.

Into blind darkness enter those who honor non-manifestation;  
As if into even greater darkness—those who enjoyed the manifestation.

Verily, they say that (this) is different from manifestation, different from non-manifestation.

This is what we heard from the wise who explained this to us.

He who knows both together—both manifestation and annihilation,

Having crossed death through annihilation, he achieves immortality through manifestation.

Also, we meet a curious exclamation “abracadabra!” in the text of the novel; the word coming originally from Persian “*Abraxas*” plus Hebrew “*dābār*,” “word.” *Ἀβραάξ*—the mystic god of Gnostics, whose name signifies a year of 365 days, as exposed in Alexandrian heresy and depicted artistically by Jorge Luis Borges in *False Basilides Justification*. Another interpretation is as follows: “Aramaic ‘*avra keh-dabra*,’ ‘I will create as I speak’, and/or Chalsean ‘*abbada ke dabra*,’ meaning ‘perish as this word’” (Lord Voland de Mort’s killing curse). They also say an American invented the complex noun not so long ago, adding “cadaver” to *Abraxas*. But Borges’ explanation sounds more persuading because gracefully aestheticized.

The text is rich with prolific quotations, citations, allusions, metaphors, parables, proverbs, sendings, messages, symbols, archetypes, and myths borrowed from different branches of Christianity and Buddhism, as well as from Hinduism, Ancient Greece philosophy and mythology, and Shinto. Collected in persuading dialogues, they are all much too well-known: “What is truth?” (Pontius Pilate). All that we can know is that we know nothing (Socrates). There can be no wisdom unless we first have knowledge (Peripatetics+Bartholomew). In *one drop of water* are found all the secrets of all the oceans (zen+Kahlil Gibran). “We need only forgive ourselves and ask for forgiveness from others as we forgive those who sin against us” (“Our Father Thou Art in Heaven ...”). “Vengeance is not mine but the Lord’s.” “Let this cup pass from me.” “What is important is not the means but the end” (Loyola). *Credo quia absurdum* (Tertullian); I came, I saw, I conquered (Julius Caesar); “Once a ladder has been climbed, you may throw it away” (Sextus Empiricus). “If there is nothing to speak about, we must remain silent” (Wittgenstein). Clearly reminding of Hamlet’s last words “In the end we must be silent;” “Without rulers it would be each person for themselves, a mere war of all against all” (Thomas Hobbes). “Each cause has an effect, which then becomes the next cause.” “Beat the swords into plowshares” (sheer Marxism). Etc., etc. You would have called these multiple allusions, clichés —had a roll-call of familiar images from different cultures and traditions not been so closely intervened with the thalweg of the Hero’s development, that they feel like newly-born. Author mentions the term “*strangification*” apt to a process of transferring a certain system of spiritual traditions from its original cultural context to a different context. His

was the goal of interweaving a variety of Eastern, Western, and indigenous ideas into a captive life-story demonstrating the motion of Boethius' wheel of fortune.

The Author of the novel is genuinely admiring Eastern cultures, and there is hardly anything purely "Western," except maybe the landscape, sometimes reminding of the green hills and white cliffs of England, sometimes a Schwarzwald where Nietzsche had wandered—and a couple of names, mainly taken from Latin. The Bible written in Ancient Greek, Aramaic and Hebrew, had always been Eastern enterprise, and the Septuaginta cannot change its Eastern origin. Gnostics Simon Magus, Hermes Trismegistus, Zarathustra and Mani-heus, other spiritual leaders of Gnosticism had come from Asia, Egypt, Persia, Babylon, from elsewhere than West.

Justin once makes the reader understand that his story goes on in the west, pronouncing: "Could Jesus not have found a way to spread his message to the entire world instead of to such a small number of people *in such a faraway land* such a long time ago?" (p. 143). (Italicized by me—E.T.). What is clearly non-eastern in the novel, is its language and manner. Charmingly abrupt beginning is a paragraph containing just one line. Simple syntax and exclusively rich vocabulary attribute elegance to the text; this really is the work of style. Even the titles of chapters offer a verse. Exquisitely coined in perfect periods, both transparently clear as crystal, and at the same time as if exhaling the scent of blossoms, written in smooth ligatures, graceful, round, and slender, the novel let you visit the Mihama-en garden with its leagues of floating pictures none of which is the last one. To visit and comprehend—but not to become part of it for good. This is exactly the inter-cultural and inter-national dialogue of thoughts and impressions; sometimes it reminds of Haruki Murakami's manner, treating of the East in a Western manner.

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This way or other, the novel is truly a multi-facet cultural panorama, in most humanistic and affectionate tune. It does not sound a moralizing catechesis, though; it weaves like a melody. However, moral problems are dominant in *One with the Father*. Virtues and vice are explicated vividly; and all of them have religious lining: liberty, free will, honesty, mercy, justice, dignity, good and evil, loyalty and treachery, chastity and lie. Duty. Friendship. Wrath. Love and hatred.

Certainly one can follow all five commandments of *Pancha-shila* or all ten—of Moses, and still be an evildoer, as an Old nosy lady who spied over Justin and Constance; sometimes it may go vice versa.

Among other very serious topics to discuss the three of these are of the utmost importance: freedom; leadership; and relationship between fate, destiny, and volition.

Dostoyevsky shows how Ivan rejects God, becomes free, arrives at the conclusion "Everything is allowed," and this leads him to madness. People who do not accept Christ are hopeless and doomed.

According to the fair remark of Gorky, *The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor* raises fundamental questions, those of spirit and spirituality. It absorbs problems concerning human nature and essence which are in dramatic contradiction, and the confrontation between good and evil. These themes, intertwined, form the "bottomless depth" of the meanings of the "legend."

Ivan's poem depicts the dubious attitudes to mankind, both loving and despising. People are like a flock of sheep needing a shepherd: gullible, irresponsible, weak, lazy, unable to act on their own. Not that it was entirely wrong; psychological experiments in the 20th century contested to that. As an example: nine of ten nurses in the hospital would inject a deadly dose to a patient, should they be instructed by a senior's phone call. Another example: two thirds of the auditory of "teachers" allowed to "punish lazy students," would use a shocker to tame the stubborn (an experimenter himself) and exercise charges up to 300 volts causing serious pain (Stanley Milgram). Evidently, people would vote for the one who loudly expresses having a plan, and thus knowing the way, and taking responsibility. These two features make a leader.

And this is Adrian. And such is Father. And the Lord of the neighboring estate taking full control over Father's manor.

The Grand Inquisitor is of the opinion that people do not need freedom; on the contrary, they are always ready to give it up and praise those who offer them earthly bread. The entire history of mankind serves as confirmation of this. No matter what a man dreams about, in reality he just needs to be part of the "pack," because in essence he is a slave. Supporting weak, infantile people who are not able to burden themselves with freedom is the Grand Inquisitor's plan, by creating for them an anthill in which people will live happily, experiencing no pangs of conscience, nor pondering on the choice between good and evil.

Russian philosopher Nikolai A. Berdyaev also emphasized that freedom, at times, is a heavy unbearable burden because it is irrational, and its nature is a mixture of both good and evil. It is the thirst for human freedom that explains the existence of evil in the world. The joint with freedom determines responsibility for the evil committed.

Freedom, especially free choice, represents a great responsibility; it causes anxiety and restlessness. This is what turns life into tragedy.

By the way, Japanese, for instance, were very much confused and afraid on seeing a Shropshire sheep for the first time in the 19th century: see Murakami's image of one controlling the contemporaneity by switching the tumblers. (A Shropshire sheep has black skin which is really scary). And, above this mysticism, people can rebel against oppression and so they do. "Why should an earthly government be given authority over us and demand that we obey its masters when we have the power to govern ourselves?" (p. 148).

Taking one for the leader, more or less deliberately, people follow him or her, especially if it is not just an instrumental, but moral authority—and willingly, if the leader promises to fight down the foe.

However, the formula “the King is dead, long live the king” did not appear by chance. A Russian saying “в ухо Якова, в ноги Сидору” (in English: “hit Jacob’s ear, lay at Sidor’s feet”) expresses the same roughly and plainly. But to emphasize the irony, then comes the vice-versa kick: “hit Sidor’s ear, lay at Jacob’s feet” “tram psychics” I call it. The same crowd that grasped each word of a Preacher in the City, would cry “Burn him! Burn him! Burn him!” in a week. The same rebellions, peasants that had won their freedom, would watch their leaders, Adrian and Justin, tortured to death—and only one voice, that of the “feisty young daughter,” would murmur: innocent. “Even if he is guilty, he deserves mercy, not justice” (p. 383). Earlier Justin thought as much himself: “Surely mercy is better than justice” (p. 114). Remember Portia’s monologue: “... in the course of justice none of us should see salvation. We do pray for mercy ...”

According to Dostoevsky, paradoxically, evil is a product of freedom, and the absence of freedom indicates the absence of good. Carl Gustav Jung’s teaching comes to mind: willing for life, *anima*, this colourful motley butterfly, wishes both good and bad that life contains. Justin’s question “It’s not only up to God but also up to us?” recalls Berdyaev’s teaching of three powerful entities—the human being, god and abyss. It depends on a human whether good or evil wins.

Sometimes an evident hero, another times a coward, and once even a spiritual leader, Justin early begins calling himself “a man of the people,” a common, an ordinary person—first during his talk with the Hermit. “I hereby renounce my position and repudiate my entire past. From this day forward I shall devote myself to poverty and live as a man of the people.” (p. 69). Considerate Abbot pushed him similarly: “Jesus [...] referred to himself as the Son of Man, who came not to be served but to serve. We should think of ourselves in the same way” (p. 174). More gravely it sounds before his passing. “I am no great spiritual leader,” Justin said. “I am just an ordinary person” (p. 378).

To emphasize the point: What does it mean to be ordinary? Not at all to be “like Jones.” Etymologically it means not to get out of line, i.e. not to break the order. As the Chinese puts it: the spike that stands higher in the field, would be reaped first. So, “ordinary” means being orderly, *inside the system*. But Justin in *not* “ordinary,” contrary to what he calls himself. Though not blood-thirsty, he becomes a fighter with the system (“The task, then, was not to overthrow our present leaders and install new ones who would purportedly act in our interest, but rather to abolish the entire hierarchical system itself,” p. 261), a free-thinker and, at times, a leader to the people, a rioter. Since the land is owned by whoever uses it, “Surely it would be more effective to just eliminate hierarchy altogether and spread power equally among everyone, would it not? So that no one person may ever oppress another” (p. 342).

Independence can be known and obtained through dropping hard labour and suffering. Nietzsche's "independence *from*"—a camel turning into a lion fighting a dragon, quickly comes to mind. And there is "independence *for*" a victorious lion turning into a "dancing star." The young woman explains what the peasants need independence *for*:

"If everything is shared and each has enough, we have no need for laws to protect our property. Increasing the number of laws simply increases the number of thieves ... We should beat our swords into plowshares, our spears into pruning hooks, and not learn war anymore. The lion will lie down with the lamb and a little child shall lead us!" (p. 315).

Only in the *state* of freedom the person can learn to be free. But the Freedom of a ronin, as of every wandering knight or a "free lance"—say, a university professor—lies squarely in the free choice of a lord to serve. I beg your pardon: a principal. Or a principle, it does not make much difference. Ay, there is the rub: What usually happens is that the leaders then take over and try themselves to rule the people, telling them what to think and do. This is Adrian's point of view: freedom is achieved when the peasants no longer bow down before tyrants but dictate for themselves. "Freedom means that we may choose whatever form of governance we please" (p. 329). "The reason why people need to be told what to think and do is because they don't think and do for themselves" (p. 342). And, indeed, "In times past Christians were oppressed. Now they have become the oppressors" (p. 260).

Justin is kind and open-hearted. Being called naive a dozen times by a dozen of people, and indeed, having been candidly credulous as a youngster, he remains frank and sincere till the end. At times he sounds clearly like Ivan Karamazov who asked: Are children and those who never heard of god also to be damned? But for what? Justin, too, wonders: "Why would Christ's salvation be offered only to those who were fortunate enough to have had the gospel preached to them?" (p. 143). "Should we not have compassion rather than contempt for the harassed and downtrodden?" (p. 229). "Ultimately we must do what is good, not what is right" (p. 114). "No violence is necessary."

His first Priest, who imagined a newly-baptized child a would-be great spiritual leader, was right, though he negated his vision in the end. Wisdom is more important than knowledge and justice, beauty, and even life itself do exist in godly manner. Love is not taking from others but giving ourselves to them. It is the presence in our own hearts, minds, and souls of all these spiritual treasures—already with us, "the same as the sunlight," "whether we be in heaven or hell or any place on earth," "wherever we are"—that make us reconciled. This *is* wisdom: "pure, peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy, impartial, and without hypocrisy," "peace, joy, and love; patience, kindness, and goodness; faithfulness, meekness, and self-control" are the real pleasures—to be pursued.

There is one more crucial question discussed in the novel. Quite young yet, the main hero ponders over two great forces that influence life. Perhaps it was his destiny to become a spirituous leader; but his fate, it seemed, was to become lord of the estate. Did he ever have a choice, Justin wondered. “Is what we do in life determined from the very beginning or are there alternative paths we might follow?” He recalls the game of cards as a primer—“the secret geometry of chance” (Sting): “In the same way, we cannot always choose the circumstances life gives us, but we can choose how we respond to them” (pp. 41–42). Perhaps, indeed, everything is already determined. Probably even the choice itself is not a matter of free will, but of unbending *Fatum*. However, there still exists one more force: that of the human volition of good. We can examine “whether or not the voice leads us to deeds of righteousness and charity, and discern good from evil by looking at the fruits that are produced by our actions” (p. 147). Contemplating upon the problem of three powers, *Fatum*, Fortune, and Volition, the Author toes the line between heady postmodernism and classics; in fact, this was the premier problem of the Renaissance.

Gianni Vattimo has prophesied in his book *The End of Modernity*:<sup>12</sup>

“The construction [...] of a unified *Weltanschauung* will reveal itself to be very difficult, or even impossible; but the continuity of experience which the hermeneutic act of recollection aims to reconstruct cannot be reached without some sort of unification of the information provided by the sciences. A theoretical or cognitive reconstruction is needed: this may be the distorted recollection of the ancient idea of metaphysics as the *proto-philosophia*, the first science” (Vattimo, 1992, 178).

In conclusion I would like to say that this prophesy is being realized. Receding into the past, postmodernism bestows us with hope for the new heroic projects. After the New Middle Ages, a New Renaissance comes, following the duly course of general history; and Richard Evanoff’s marvelous novel “*One with the Father: A Novel of Mysticism, Heresy, and Rebellion in the Middle Ages*” deserves to be called a New Renaissance discourse.

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<sup>12</sup> Vattimo, G. 1992. *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Post-modern Culture*. Wiley.