



Introduction to the issue: *Melancholy*

Going back to Ancient Greek medicine and philosophy, melancholia has been described and diagnosed, but has also served as an object of reflection and creativity. Over the long history of melancholia, the contexts in which it has been perceived and the ways of experiencing it have changed, and the concept itself has acquired various meanings. This polysemy of melancholia, however, is perhaps less a defect of the term, but is rather a reflection of the diversity of the relevant phenomena. On November 24–26, 2022, an international conference entitled “Fugue of Melancholy” was held in Krakow. The organizers wanted at least some of the voices that make up this fugue to sound out. Many different approaches to melancholia were presented — political, literary, musical and, of course, psychological — both in reference to current and to historical topics. In this volume of the *Argument: Biannual Philosophical Journal*, we are including those contributions that touched specifically on the philosophical registers of this concept.

Paweł Dybel’s article *Melancholik jako kanibal i samobójca. Freuda psychoanaliza melancholii* [The melancholic as cannibal and as suicidal. Freud’s psychoanalysis of melancholia] reconstructs Freud’s teaching on melancholia from his early notes up to the canonical text *Mourning and melancholy*. The author shows that Freud presents a completely new approach to melancholia, previously unknown to the tradition. He is less interested in clinical descriptions of melancholia, focussing instead on the genesis of melancholia in the early stages of the psychological development of the ego. According to Freud, melancholia is associated with the oral phase and the crisis in the individual’s primary identification with the object — the mother’s breast. The child wants to devour the object of his desire and, as a result, destroy it. If this crisis is not overcome, regression to the level of primary identification may occur which results in the subject’s self-focus and tendency towards self-destruction. Dybel claims that in Freud’s eyes a melancholic is not a creative personality, experiencing reality more deeply — the author calls all this a “metaphysical fog” shrouding

melancholia — but a pathological egocentric “in whom the most archaic and cruel layers of his self have been stimulated. Desperately trying to save his own love relationship with the Other, he actually wants to save the appearance of this relationship in which only he himself counts”.

Jay Dittburner’s article, *Mourning and melancholia: An analysis of the Mothers of the Plaza De Mayo*, examines a political dimension of melancholy as a refusal of mourning and demand for justice, in relation to the case of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo’s protest against the state-sponsored violence of the Argentinian Junta. This group’s refusal to accept reparations, their refusal to recognize the “disappeared” as dead and their refusal to accept the historical fact of state-sponsored violence led to numerous critiques and analyses of perceived pathological dimensions of collective melancholy. As a refusal to mourn the death of their loved ones, Dittburner suggests that the Mothers’ melancholia ought best to be understood as a form of collective memory, fuelling an ongoing human rights struggle, a means of resisting unjust political narratives and demanding truth by refusing to forgive and forget.

Filip Brzeźniak’s article, *Left-wing melancholia today: Overview of a concept*, explores the epistemological, historiographic and ethical dimensions of the concept of melancholy, beyond the scope of traditional psychological models. While melancholy often crops up in contemporary socio-political left-wing analyses as a negative, pathological or obtrusive element, Brzeźniak offers a more positive conception of melancholy, drawing on the work of Enzo Traverso and others: it is a conscious position taken by the individual or political subject in relation to past and present. Rather than a pathological state of unresolved mourning, melancholy in Brzeźniak’s sense can be understood as an active refusal to accept the oppressive structures of the present and forget the past. Brzeźniak’s careful analysis of the concept in left-wing political philosophy leads to the presentation of a particular conceptual category of melancholy as a transformative and active stance allowing the subject to open up to the world. Rather than suppressing the past, this stance promotes remembrance and hope for the future.

Maciej Kałuża’s contribution, *Political melancholy, bad masters and the golden sadness of the Greeks*, brings Albert Camus’ concept of the absurd into dialogue with Lieven De Cauter’s conception of political melancholy to make explicit the fact that the absurd is not merely an individual and metaphysical concept but is also a reaction to socio-political context. Moving between historical and contemporary issues, Kałuża suggests an understanding of collective melancholy linked to mass trauma, despair and the inability to engage. Melancholy resides thus in the irresolvable tension between hope for the future and disillusionment with a non-responsive world or context. Kałuża examines the role that literature, philosophy and cultural representations play in our collective understanding and ability to engage with issues, especially given the prominence

that existential philosophy gives to concepts like despair and meaninglessness. He also examines claims about the “corrupting” power of intellectual models. Kałuża does argue, however, that Camus’ work offers a much more nuanced understanding of melancholy and the absurd, a collective response to concrete political contexts, and suggests that, rightly interpreted, Camus’ perspective can offer a transformative path to solidarity and reconstruction.

Moritz René Pretzsch’s contribution, *Philosophy and melancholy: Reflections on the role of melancholy in Kierkegaard’s and Heidegger’s philosophical thought*, explores the role that melancholy has played in the development of existential philosophy, and the ways in which these thinkers draw upon Ancient and Medieval philosophy. Pretzsch explores the conceptual frameworks and historical references of the Danish philosopher and his German successor, as well as semantic distinctions used by these thinkers, to provide a nuanced analysis of the ways in which all these notions inform their existentialism. Attention to the multifaceted conceptions of melancholy in the works of these two philosophers leads to the conclusion that there are numerous similarities in their understanding of melancholy, including its ambiguous role as both a source of suffering and despair *and* a condition for transformation and an indication of a deeper meaning and understanding of existence.

Piotr Augustyniak’s article *Melancholia Zarathustra* [Zarathustra’s melancholy] is an interpretation of Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra* in terms of melancholy. The author refers to Freud’s work *Mourning and melancholy* to build an interpretive framework which he then places on the description of Zarathustra’s transformation. Following Freud, Augustyniak identifies a bipolar mechanism in manic-depressive melancholia and shows that this mechanism can also be diagnosed in Zarathustra. Moreover, we can indicate the “object” around the absence of which Zarathustra’s melancholy is based. This object is a man (not an individual, but a man as such). However, Augustyniak indicates that there is more to Zarathustra’s transformation than a psychoanalytic interpretation of his melancholy. The mystery is Zarathustra’s recovery. To describe this phenomenon, Augustyniak develops the concept of “higher melancholia” — a state allowing an individual to feel “dynamic unity” with all things.

In addition to texts focused on melancholy, in the current issue of *Argument* we publish a text by Albert Piette, *The being-cyclist: An essay in existential anthropology*. The author begins by recalling two images: Duchamp’s drawing of a cyclist and Parmenides’ concept of the whole of being as a sphere. Apart from the obvious association with the shape of a circle, the author notices another: the figure of the cyclist in Duchamp’s drawing is inscribed in a circle. This allows the author to introduce the category of “volume of being” to define entities such as a cyclist with a bicycle and the road he travels. The article undertakes existential considerations on the “volume of being”. The author believes we must urgently revise the assumptions underlying the existential

account of human being, an account focussed on constant self-transcendence and abandoning one's own being in the movement of "going beyond". Meanwhile, the image of a cyclist offers a different kind of heuristic: as in the case of cycling where the cyclical nature of movements enclosed in a certain volume results in linear movement, human existence can also be transformed thanks to a certain repetition and coherence. The figure of the cyclist inscribed in a circle, in contrast to the traditional existential paradigm, would become the seed of *neo-existentialism*.

Finally, we publish review articles. In the text *Quantum theory of consciousness*, Ryszard Mirek discusses the article by Roger Penrose and Stuart Hameroff *Consciousness in the Universe: Neuroscience, quantum space-time geometry and orch OR theory* from 2017. Penrose and Hameroff argue that what humans perceive as consciousness is, in fact, the result of quantum gravity effects located within microtubules. Magdalena M. Baran, on the occasion of the publication of the Polish translation of Kenneth N. Waltz's *Man, the state, and war: A theoretical analysis*, discusses this book in the context of later discussions in the philosophy of war. Kamil Rajkowski reports on disputes surrounding the recently published Polish translation of Mark Fisher's book *The weird and the eerie*.

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