Miguel de Unamuno’s Anthropological Theses – From Tragedy to Transcendence

Abstract

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The aim of the text is to provide a preliminary discussion of the assumptions and anthropological theses in Miguel de Unamuno’s philosophy, mainly because of his best-known book from 1912 Del sentimiento trágico de la vida (Tragic Sense of Life). Unamuno’s extensive deliberations can be considered in many contexts: ontological, epistemological, ethical and axiological. However, anthropological theses seem to be dominant in his thoughts. In Unamuno’s anthropological theses, especially in his affirmation of human existence, it is easy to see references to religious thought and theology (Catholic and Protestant). Unamuno influenced the further development of philosophy and his theses can be considered as a presentation of the main philosophical problems of the 20th century: the identity of the individual, the sense of existence, the individualisation of life goals and choices, freedom as a task facing the individual, the impermanence of norms and the search for lasting values, senses and meanings. It is easy to notice that what makes Unamuno’s theses stand out is the anthropocentrism of his theses, i.e. the belief in the original – in an ontological sense – essence of humanity. Unamuno, in his anthropological theses, captures the essence and existence of humanity, but the starting point is always the concrete, individual human being and its existence. In characterising humans, Unamuno describes the human effort and desire for immortality, adopts the assumptions of historical relativism, referring at the same time to the permanent and unchanging sphere of transcendence. He assumes an inherently diverse human being, which is internally contradictory. This internal contradiction results in different anthropologies, but also in a differentiated identity of the individual. The tragic character of the mundane existence relates to the irremovable aporias of the spiritual and the material in humans, as well as reason and will, aspiration and inability. Faith in God is the decisive element in the tragic existence of humans, which is nevertheless affirmed by Unamuno. It is this existence in a mundane form that we wish to preserve through immortality and our way towards transcendence.

Keywords: human being, anthropology, essence, existence, tragic contradictories, transcendence

The aim of the text is to provide a preliminary discussion of the assumptions and anthropological theses in Miguel de Unamuno’s philosophy, mainly on the basis of his
best-known book from 1912 Del sentimiento trágico de la vida (Tragic Sense of Life)\(^1\).

Unamuno’s extensive deliberations may be considered from four viewpoints: ontological, epistemological, ethical and axiological. However, anthropological theses seem to be dominant in his thoughts.

Unamuno’s theses can be compared with the contemporaneous (the turn of the 19\(^{th}\) and 20\(^{th}\) centuries) theses of philosophy of life and its affirmation and with the theses of the early philosophy of existence (Martin Heidegger, José Ortega y Gasset, Jean-Paul Sartre) in order to indicate the originality of Unamuno’s thought and its influence on further developments in the practise of philosophy. Above all, one must emphasise: 1) the difference between his conception of life, subsistence and existence in relation to the contemporaneous findings of the philosophy of life, 2) his entanglement in polemics with positivism, and 3) his return in philosophical decisions to the category of substance.

In Unamuno’s anthropological theses, especially in his affirmation of human existence, it is easy to see references to religious thought and theology (Catholic and Protestant). On the other hand, his affirmation of what is volitional in humanity has its roots in Arthur Schopenhauer’s philosophy, as well as in Nietzsche’s, critical of the Christian tradition. The search for the re-validation of values and norms can also be seen as Unamuno’s response to the normativity crisis in Western culture described by Friedrich Nietzsche\(^2\). However, Unamuno admitted himself primarily a continuator of Søren Kierkegaard’s philosophical intention, which he called “our brother Kierkegaard”\(^3\).

It seems that Unamuno influenced the further development of philosophy in the 20\(^{th}\) century, not so much by referring to the discipline of argumentation and line of reasoning typical of philosophical texts, as by referring to various literary genres and the circulation of knowledge and languages typical of them. His philosophy may be considered to be a presentation of the main philosophical problems of the 20\(^{th}\) century: the identity of the individual, the sense of existence, the individualisation of life goals and choices, freedom as a task facing the individual, the impermanence of norms and the search for lasting values, senses and meanings.

It is easy to notice that what makes Unamuno’s conception stand out is the anthropocentrism of his theses\(^4\), i.e. the belief in the original – in an ontological sense – essence of humanity, which is at the same time the primary object of cognition in the question of the individual subject about oneself and the world. Therefore, the primary and most legitimate cognition, obtained via the internal experience of living and feeling, concerns individuals themselves. It is therefore a reflexive cognition, which, however, goes beyond

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\(^3\) Unamuno, Tragic Sense of Life (Del sentimiento trágico de la vida), 92.

the theses of consciousness, because the self-cognition derived from lived-experiences concerns various mental and psychophysical states, especially emotional states. Self-cognition, therefore, is a primordial recognition by the individual of one’s inner states, but always related to something – to the mundane world, to the Other, and, above all, to God. It may be admitted that such a primarily emotional reference to oneself and to the world by an individual (by an existing subject, and not so much by a cognisant as by a lived-experiencing subject) is a kind of emotional intention, combining the volitional with the cognitive. As may be noticed, Unamuno’s theses about existence and its cognition are supported by primal essentialist theses – theses about the essentiality of humans. Anthropological findings about the contradictory human being (spirituality juxtaposed with corporeality and materiality, will and feelings juxtaposed with reason) are also based on essentialist decisions of metaphysical and psychophysical duality. However, the self-cognition of the individual, which always takes place in relation to something, brings to mind Martin Heidegger’s theses on existential phenomenology, especially his thesis of In-der-Welt-Sein (being-in-the-world) as the primordial mode of existence of Dasein (being there).

One may say that Unamuno, in his anthropological theses, captures the essence and existence of humanity, but the starting point is always the concrete, individual human being and his/her existence. Unamuno is critical of the conceptions of humanity proposed in the history of philosophy and rejects Aristotle’s conception of the human being as a zoon politikon, the conception of homo oeconomicus, homo sapiens, and the conception of humans as social beings. This is because he recognises that an essential attribute of humans is the manner of their existence – existence always implemented individually by subsequent individuals. According to Unamuno, human beings are distinguished from other living beings by reason and consciousness with self-awareness, but above all – within consciousness – by feeling and the will to survive beyond one’s own death. In characterising humans, Unamuno also uses Baruch Spinoza’s concept conatus, which describes the effort that each substance makes in order to achieve temporarily unlimited survival. Unamuno links this concept with the characteristic human, volitional endeavour for immortality. On the other hand, a specific person is defined by the principle of unity and continuity. “The principle of unity refers to space (by having a body) and to unity in action and intentions. The principle of continuity, on the other hand, refers to time, making the current existence of a human being derive from previous states of consciousness.”

According to Unamuno, there are two contradictory aspirations in the human being: being oneself (serse) and being everything (serlotodo). Being oneself relates to a desire to limit oneself but being everything is a desire to remove the boundaries, beyond which

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7 Górski, Hiszpańska refleksja egzystencjalna. Studium filozofii i myśli politycznej Miguela de Unamuno.
it is impossible to be oneself. Unamuno admits that human beings, who are inherently contradictory, fight to harmonise their faculties, i.e., via language and dialogue with each other and with Others.

**Tragic Sense of Life**

In his philosophical conception, Miguel de Unamuno adopts the assumptions of historical relativism, referring at the same time to the permanent and unchanging sphere of transcendence. He therefore admits that anthropological findings are submitted to certain changes, depending on the cultural and economic situation. At the same time, Unamuno recognises that in different historical moments, various elements that make up what is essential in a human being may be realised or updated. This is because he assumes an inherently differentiated human essence, which is internally contradictory. This internal contradiction results in different anthropologies, but also in a differentiated identity of the individual. The tragic character of mundane existence relates to the irremovable aporias of the spiritual and the material in humans, reason and will, aspiration and inability. In his anthropology, Unamuno indicates as his goal the search for identity by an individual – the endeavour to reconcile these contradictory elements. For we would like to make ourselves internally harmonised, reconciled with our own imperfections, and at the same time we would like to take on commitments to perfect transcendence. This quest for harmony plunges us into an internal struggle against our own weaknesses, and harmony turns out to be a distant and unattainable goal.

One may say that Unamuno affirms human life despite its tragedy and contradictions, which concern humans themselves – their essence and their temporal, mundane existence. In Unamuno’s philosophy, the affirmation of life and mundane existence is connected with the sense of its tragic character – the finiteness of mundane existence in a material, corporeal form, as well as in a spiritual and psychological form. At the same time, it is a critical approach, indicating the possibility of negating human existence because of uncertainty about its status – cognitive, rational and religious uncertainty. Unamuno therefore refers to the category of sense or feeling as a kind of internal lived-experience, which would be the basis and legitimacy of the purpose and sense of life. It is what is internally lived and experienced that forms the basis of his anthropological theses. The conception of the human being and its intrinsically contradictory essence is also the starting point for the conception of God proposed by Unamuno – a vision of God created by humans and therefore necessarily referring to human self-cognition, to the essentiality of humanity in the search for the essentiality of God.

The issue of the tragic character of human existence, considered by Unamuno, is connected with what is: 1) ontological (the existence of an imperfect being that is

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a human, which ends in death), 2) epistemological (the impossibility of knowing all the conditions of one’s existence, especially the impossibility of giving an answer by reason and science to the question about spirituality, and thus also about eternal life), 3) ethical (the issue of good and evil intertwined in human life, the status of will and reason in moral choices\textsuperscript{11}, 4) anthropological (human beings and their internally contradictory essence, the will of immortality of the imperfect human, who is faced with the endless task of improving him/herself), 5) axiological (the search for transcendent values and immanent norms of the human world, which would constitute a permanent reference to the identity of the individual).

The interpreters of Unamuno’s philosophy emphasise that he dissociates his philosophy from the tradition of modern philosophy but avoids references to Aristotle. On the other hand, he refers to Plato and the Platonic tradition. In line with the pursuits of philosophy at the end of the 19th century, Unamuno makes the “problem of life”, the problem of “flesh and bone”\textsuperscript{12} humans, the subject-matter of his reflection, not the problem of a philosopher, or cognitive issues. This “problem of life” is considered to be what engages and what is “personal”, what goes beyond the systematic rationale and refers to the entirety of an individual’s lived-experiences. The “philosophical life”, i.e. the life submitted to philosophical reflection, should be “agonising”, because it is supposed to lead to an understanding of life whose basic element is fighting – a struggle against adversity. First and foremost, it would be a struggle against the contradictions inscribed in the essence of humanity, an endless struggle for the harmonisation of what is contradictory.

It should be stressed that according to Unamuno, faith and religion (Christianity) are also supposed to be “agonising”\textsuperscript{13}. “And now the imagination puts forth another possibility – neither more nor less rational than all those which have just been put forward interrogatively – and that is that only those are saved who have longed to be saved, that only those are eternalized who have lived in an agony of hunger for eternity and for eternalization”\textsuperscript{14}. “And men made a god of this Christ who suffered, and through him they discovered the eternal essence of a living, human God – that is, of a God who suffers – it is only the dead, the inhuman, that does not suffer – a God who loves and thirsts for love, for pity, a God who is a person”\textsuperscript{15}. And it is precisely this “problem of life”, the problem of the mundane existence of a particular, concrete human being, that constitutes the object not so much of subjective cognition as of lived-experience – the object of the “tragic sense of life”. “Among men of flesh and bone there have been typical examples of those who possess this tragic sense of life. I recall now Marcus Aurelius, St. Augustine, Pascal, Rousseau, René, Obermann, Thomson, Leopardi, Vigny, Lenau, Kleist, Amiel,

\textsuperscript{12} “The man of flesh and bone”. Unamuno, Tragic Sense of Life (Del sentimiento trágico de la vida), 2.
\textsuperscript{13} Unamuno, Tragic Sense of Life (Del sentimiento trágico de la vida), 131 (“an agonizing and lacerating sacrifice”).
\textsuperscript{14} Unamuno, Tragic Sense of Life (Del sentimiento trágico de la vida), 211.
\textsuperscript{15} Unamuno, Tragic Sense of Life (Del sentimiento trágico de la vida), 173.
Quental, Kierkegaard – men burdened with wisdom rather than with knowledge. And there are, I believe, peoples who possess this tragic sense of life also."\(^{16}\)

According to Unamuno, contemporaneous philosophy, and above all his own, should also be “the science of the tragedy of life, a reflection upon the tragic sense of it. An essay in this philosophy, with its inevitable internal contradictions and antinomies, is what I have attempted in these essays”\(^{17}\). He presented an “essay in this philosophy, with its inevitable internal contradictions and antinomies”\(^{18}\) in his philosophical output. Unamuno highlights: “And this personal and affective starting-point of all philosophy and all religion is the tragic sense of life”\(^{19}\). “Philosophy is a product of the humanity of each philosopher, and each philosopher is a man of flesh and bone who addresses himself to other men of flesh and bone like himself. And, let him do what he will, he philosophizes not with the reason only, but with the will, with the feelings, with the flesh and with the bones, with the whole soul and the whole body. It is the man that philosophizes”\(^{20}\).

Unamuno admits that an individual lived-experience of one’s own existence is the starting point for reflection and rational, abstract generalisation that only appears afterwards. Initially, the consciousness of being before it becomes knowledge and theory would be an aspiration and endeavour of the will, a feeling and a desire. Unamuno sets reason against feelings and at the same time recognises that the aim of reason is ultimately a sceptical attitude – an attitude of doubting one’s own cognitive capacity\(^{21}\) compared to what is emotional and volitional (aspirations of the will). Existence is first and foremost the will to exist, considered to be a certain volitional intention, not as a state. Human individuals experiences their own being as the will to be, but at the same time it is given to us to think about the end of our being\(^{22}\). It would be a certain “metaphysical intuition” which humans sense, feel it in fear\(^{23}\) and which they oppose to the religious hope for immortality\(^{24}\), Christianity, as “a desperate sortie”\(^{25}\).

As already mentioned, the conception of humanity, of our being and existence, proposed by Unamuno, points to primordial contradictions. Moreover, even “logical contradiction is involved in the Universe not being destined to any finality, either human or superhuman”\(^{26}\). Unamuno recognises the human individual as a being aware

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\(^{16}\) Unamuno, Tragic Sense of Life (Del sentimiento trágico de la vida), 16.

\(^{17}\) Unamuno, Tragic Sense of Life (Del sentimiento trágico de la vida), 272.

\(^{18}\) Unamuno, Tragic Sense of Life (Del sentimiento trágico de la vida).

\(^{19}\) Unamuno, Tragic Sense of Life (Del sentimiento trágico de la vida), 32.

\(^{20}\) Unamuno, Tragic Sense of Life (Del sentimiento trágico de la vida), 25.


\(^{22}\) “[T]he ultimate end of each one of us”. Unamuno, Tragic Sense of Life (Del sentimiento trágico de la vida), 81.


\(^{24}\) “And the immortality that we crave is a phenomenal immortality – it is the continuation of this present life”. Unamuno, Tragic Sense of Life (Del sentimiento trágico de la vida), 73.

\(^{25}\) Unamuno, Tragic Sense of Life (Del sentimiento trágico de la vida), 168.

\(^{26}\) Unamuno, Tragic Sense of Life (Del sentimiento trágico de la vida), 196.
of his/her being and existence. He stresses: “any real existence – strictly speaking, there is no body, no soul, no birth, no death, all of which are abstractions and appearances, but only a thinking life, of which we form part and which can neither be born nor die”\(^{27}\). Following Descartes he argues: “I should want some extraordinary help from heaven and need to be more than man”\(^{28}\). He assumes that individuals want to intensify their being, to be more than real carnal human”\(^{29}\). This aspiration is especially expressed in the desire for immortality and eternity. The tragedy of my existence is strictly connected with the awareness of the finiteness of my own being and my inabilities as being, including the inability to fulfil the aspiration of the will that has been given to me.

It may be said that the object of Unamuno’s philosophical reflection is a specific existential lived-experience – the lived-experience of mundane existence presented as a differentiated internal experience (emotional, volitional, religious, also connected with the lived-experience of one’s own carnality). However, it is above all an experience of the tragedy of humanity, that is, of the tension between the obviousness of death, the obviousness of mundane life and the need to extend it to “immortality” – the tragic tension that Unamuno calls a “metaphysical evil”\(^{30}\) and “a fatal disease”\(^{31}\) “More, more, and always more! I want to be myself, and yet without ceasing to be myself to be others as well, to merge myself into the totality of things visible and invisible, to extend myself into the illimitable of space and to prolong myself into the infinite of time. Not to be all and for ever is as if not to be – at least, let me be my whole self, and be so for ever and ever. And to be the whole of myself is to be everybody else. Either all or nothing!”\(^{32}\).

One may point out that Unamuno’s conception is not about being towards death\(^{33}\), but rather “being for immortality”, which gives sense and meaning to mundane life\(^{34}\). It can be said that religion only emerges from this experience together with various religious solutions, which are above all submitted to lived-experience, then rationalisation. In our appeals to science, we cast doubt on immortality, but we also do so in theological reasoning, because by proving the existence of God, we assume the possibility of doubt\(^{35}\). According to Unamuno, despair and love are the affective and emotional response to cognitive scepticism and practical or sceptical reason\(^{36}\). Because of the contradictions between their being and existence, humans are condemned, in a way, to a life full of struggle, not to the search for peace.

\(^{27}\) Unamuno, Tragic Sense of Life (Del sentimiento trágico de la vida), 213.  
\(^{28}\) Unamuno, Tragic Sense of Life (Del sentimiento trágico de la vida), 30.  
\(^{29}\) Unamuno, Tragic Sense of Life (Del sentimiento trágico de la vida).  
\(^{30}\) Unamuno, Tragic Sense of Life (Del sentimiento trágico de la vida), 44.  
\(^{31}\) Unamuno, Tragic Sense of Life (Del sentimiento trágico de la vida), 86.  
\(^{32}\) Unamuno, Tragic Sense of Life (Del sentimiento trágico de la vida), 33.  
\(^{34}\) Unamuno, Tragic Sense of Life (Del sentimiento trágico de la vida), 41, 44–45.  
\(^{35}\) Cf. Candelaria, The Revolt of Unreason. Miguel de Unamuno and Antonio Caso on the Crisis of Modernity, Pascal’s doubt, 147  
\(^{36}\) Cf. Unamuno, Tragic Sense of Life (Del sentimiento trágico de la vida), 67.
Towards Transcendence

Faith in God is the decisive element in the tragic existence of humans, which is nevertheless affirmed by Miguel de Unamuno. It is this existence in a mundane form that we wish to preserve through immortality. The anthropocentric character of Unamuno’s philosophy must be reiterated here, because his conception of being and world always assumes an individual perspective as its starting point – always an individual, concrete human being and its mundane existence. Unamuno considers being – in the case of the human being – as not identical with the material and the physical, nor identical with consciousness conceived abstractly, but it would be the consciousness of a human asking about being. For I myself am the being that is given to me in the most direct way. Consciousness is identified here not with cognitive or rational activities but is considered to be the basis for all mental lived-experiences and knowledge about them (the self-knowledge of the existing, living and experiencing subject). At the same time, Unamuno assumes that the existence of something is existence outside the mind, that is, the existence of a real being, not in the form of a mental representation, a phenomenon.

Unamuno considers the soul to be substantive, but in relation to bodily and material substance. “The unity of consciousness is for scientific psychology – the only rational psychology – simply a phenomenal unity. No one can say what a substantial unity is. And, what is more, no one can say what a substance is. For the notion of substance is a non-phenomenal category. It is a noumenon and belongs properly to the unknowable – that is to say, according to the sense in which it is understood. But in its transcendental sense it is something really unknowable and strictly irrational.”

“The designation “soul” is merely a term used to denote the individual consciousness in its integrity and continuity; and that this soul undergoes change, that in like manner as it is integrated so it is disintegrated, is a thing very evident. For Aristotle it was the substantial form of the body – the entelechy, but not a substance. And more than one modern has called it an epiphenomenon – an absurd term. The appellation phenomenon suffices. Rationalism – and by rationalism I mean the doctrine that abides solely by reason, by objective truth – is necessarily materialist. And let not idealists be scandalized thereby. The truth is – it is necessary to be perfectly explicit in this matter – that what we call materialism means for us nothing else but the doctrine which denies the immortality of the individual soul, the persistence of personal consciousness after death.”

The combination of body and spirit takes place in the human being – in this specific being, in which these two substances meet. It should be stressed, however, that Unamuno defines human corporeality as the determining state of spirit – the state of consciousness, broadly conceived as all psychic phenomena. The state of human sciences from the end of the 19th century – biology, physiology and psychology claiming the right to rational science – probably influenced this approach to the body. Moreover, the use of bodily

37 Cf. Eugeniusz Górski, Hiszpańska refleksja egzystencjalna, 55.
38 Unamuno, Tragic Sense of Life (Del sentimiento trágico de la vida), 73.
39 Unamuno, Tragic Sense of Life (Del sentimiento trágico de la vida), 67–68.
terminology was the best way for Unamuno to express the existence of a concrete, “flesh and bone” human being. However, Unamuno’s anthropology primarily focuses on the conflict and struggle of the two substantial elements in humans.

As mentioned above, Unamuno’s conception of God also has an anthropocentric aspect. This is because humanity “creates” God according to its own desire, its “hunger” for God as a guarantor of immortality. “For to believe in God is, in a certain sense, to create Him, although He first creates us. It is He who in us is continually creating Himself”\(^{40}\). However, it is only the human response to its own creation by God — an incompetent repetition of the gesture of the original making of Creation. God is ontologically bound to humanity and it is a bond of mutual love. “He is making Himself continually both in man and by man. And if each of us, impelled by his love, by his hunger for divinity, creates for himself an image of God according to his own desire, and if according to His desire God creates Himself for each of us, then there is a collective, social, human God, the resultant of all the human imaginations that imagine Him. For God is and reveals Himself in collectivity. And God is the richest and most personal of human conceptions”\(^{41}\). “Not by the way of reason, but only by the way of love and of suffering, do we come to the living God, the human God. Reason rather separates us from Him. We cannot first know Him in order that afterwards we may love Him; we must begin by loving Him, longing for Him, hungering after Him, before knowing Him. The knowledge of God proceeds from the love of God, and this knowledge has little or nothing of the rational in it. For God is indefinable”\(^{42}\).

In this characteristic, one may see the conviction that humans are the chosen beings for salvation, the conviction of being chosen by God by the power of faith in God given to us, confirmed by our subsequent decisions. Unamuno’s eschatological perspective shows here the convictions typical of Catholicism, especially when one compares Unamuno’s theses with those of Søren Kierkegaard\(^{43}\) — the Protestant pastor who repeatedly pointed out that our choice of God is not the same as being chosen by Him for salvation.

According to Unamuno, God is unknowable rationally, objectively and independently of subjective will. We come to God through feelings and will, through the desire for God and His affirmation. God is indefinable, and to define God is to try to limit Him in our minds. The definition of God is His idealisation, the omission of His irrational sources and hidden vital content\(^{44}\). Unamuno thinks that evidence for the existence of God does not refer to God Himself, but only to His mental “idea” — to a logically conceived God and proves only the existence of the idea of God in our mind. “That there is a Supreme

\(^{40}\) Unamuno, Tragic Sense of Life (Del sentimiento trágico de la vida), 131.

\(^{41}\) Unamuno, Tragic Sense of Life (Del sentimiento trágico de la vida), 144.

\(^{42}\) Unamuno, Tragic Sense of Life (Del sentimiento trágico de la vida), 142–143.

\(^{43}\) “Miguel de Unamuno was profoundly influenced by Søren Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous works at a time when Kierkegaard was virtually unknown in Southern Europe”. “Both authors hold a ‘self as achievement’ view in which the authentic self is seen as the result of the choices one makes over a lifetime”. – cf. Jan E. Evans, Unamuno and Kierkegaard: Paths to Selfhood in Fiction, (Lanham & New York & Oxford: Lexington Books, 2005).

\(^{44}\) Cf. Eugeniusz Górski, Hiszpańska refleksja egzystencjalna, 52.
Being, infinite, absolute and eternal, whose existence is unknown to us, and who has created the Universe, is not more conceivable than that the material basis of the Universe itself, its matter, is eternal and infinite and absolute. We do not understand the existence of the world one whit the better by telling ourselves that God created it”\(^{45}\). According to Unamuno, God in His phenomenal form is “immediately felt”\(^{46}\), experienced, especially in moments of spiritual contemplation, which brings us, at last, the feeling of our own desire rather than the feeling of His presence. “The divine, therefore, was not originally something objective, but was rather the subjectivity of consciousness projected externally, the personalization of the world. The concept of divinity arose out of the feeling of divinity, and the feeling of divinity is simply the dim and nascent feeling of personality vented upon the outside world. And strictly speaking it is not possible to speak of outside and inside, objective and subjective, when no such distinction was actually felt; indeed it is precisely from this lack of distinction that the feeling and concept of divinity proceed. The clearer our consciousness of the distinction between the objective and the subjective, the more obscure is the feeling of divinity in us”\(^{47}\). According to Unamuno, faith is the desire for God, the expression of the will and expectation that God exists, but at the same time, it is the feeling of the absence of God and the emptiness connected with it.

The elusiveness of God as the primordial being and guarantor of our mundane existence, and above all the guarantor of permanent immortality, is also the source of the tragedy of human existence\(^{48}\). Unamuno’s God is a personal God, the supreme Person – an unknowable but not inaccessible being, given to us in our inner “feeling”. Moreover, Unamuno assumes (like Kierkegaard) that God mediates in communication relations between people in the mundane world and is the guarantor of human relations\(^{49}\). If God existed as the guarantor of the personal immortality of humanity, then – as Unamuno claims – human existence would have a fully true sense of meaning. Unamuno refers to Pedro Calderón’s work Life Is a Dream (La Vida es Sueño)\(^{50}\) and considers human existence as God’s dream\(^{51}\).

At the same time, he believes that God – given to us and phenomenally conceived – is someone who appears to us as if in a dream. Another of Unamuno’s references to Spanish tradition is the frequent reference to Miguel de Cervantes’ Don Quixote. Unamuno describes Don Quixote’s madness as an attempt to avoid death through immortal fame, an attempt to outlive oneself in the memory of Others\(^{52}\).

What is reality in Unamuno’s opinion and what does this category mean in his philosophy? In this case, we can speak of a certain blurring of the border between “reality”

\(^{45}\) Unamuno, Tragic Sense of Life (Del sentimiento trágico de la vida), 137.
\(^{46}\) Unamuno, Tragic Sense of Life (Del sentimiento trágico de la vida), 143.
\(^{47}\) Unamuno, Tragic Sense of Life (Del sentimiento trágico de la vida), 134.
\(^{48}\) Cf. Eugeniusz Górski, Hiszpańska refleksja egzystencjalna, 53.
\(^{49}\) Cf. Górski, Hiszpańska refleksja egzystencjalna, 54.
\(^{50}\) Unamuno, Tragic Sense of Life (Del sentimiento trágico de la vida), 34, 227–228.
\(^{51}\) Unamuno, Tragic Sense of Life (Del sentimiento trágico de la vida), 170, 182.
\(^{52}\) Unamuno, Tragic Sense of Life (Del sentimiento trágico de la vida), 274–278.
and illusion or fiction. “Even the ‘flesh and blood human’ becomes a fiction – but not an abstraction – for Unamuno. However, fictional characters from novels turn out to be real. Reason is not real either, but it is necessary for humans because it is what makes doubts possible”\textsuperscript{55}. It seems that Unamuno defines reality through the indication of its many aspects, especially antagonistic ones. Thus the properly understood “real living” or “real existence”\textsuperscript{54} pertains to human individuals being themselves, subjects of lived-experiences, that is me as a subjective and experienced being, full of contradictions (for instance, consciousness and corporeality, reason and will). One may say that in Unamuno’s philosophy, reality is aporetic, and reason captures it with the help of paradoxes\textsuperscript{55}. This would be a specific dialectic in which there is no ultimate overcoming or reconciliation of contradictions, as in Hegelianism. However, according to Unamuno, the primordial, and at the same time ultimate, reality is an elusive, permanent, durable and enduring transcendence as eternity and infinity\textsuperscript{56}. Infinite durability cannot be achieved once and for all, but it must constantly reveal the void\textsuperscript{57}, the finiteness of individual and particular beings in the immanent world of the here and now, that is – first and foremost – their mortality.

As mentioned above, Unamuno links the category of tragedy to the contradictions and imperfections of human being, including cognitive equipment. Unamuno admits that humans do not have sufficient cognitive equipment to recognise what is transcendent. We try to use the findings concerning the immanent sphere and mundane life to determine what is transcendent. “God gives transcendent meaning and finality to life; but He gives it relatively to each one of us who believe in Him”\textsuperscript{58}. However, neither experience nor reason answers our question about transcendence – we should refer to the emotional sphere, to lived-experiences and feelings, as well as to imagination. Such internal experiences bring us closer to the truth about transcendence, but they do not guarantee the truthfulness of either knowledge or conviction. What remains is a faith whose cognitive status is not univocal. Unamuno, unlike Kierkegaard, does not set knowledge against faith, but recognises faith as a kind of cognition – an internal insight connected with the emotions and aspirations of will.

It may be said that Unamuno rejects various forms of rationalism – rationalism remains in constant conflict with emotions, but also with will and its aspirations. The basic aspiration of will is “the hunger of immortality”\textsuperscript{59}, the need for immortality, which cannot be removed or limited, because it is given to us by “a constitutional God who reigns

\textsuperscript{53} Górski, Hiszpańska refleksja egzystencjalna, 104.
\textsuperscript{54} Unamuno, Tragic Sense of Life (Del sentimiento trágico de la vida), 31, 213.
\textsuperscript{55} Unamuno, Tragic Sense of Life (Del sentimiento trágico de la vida), 243 (“an immense paradox, or rather a great tragic contradiction”, “an absurdity”).
\textsuperscript{56} Unamuno, Tragic Sense of Life (Del sentimiento trágico de la vida), 154, 176.
\textsuperscript{57} Unamuno, Tragic Sense of Life (Del sentimiento trágico de la vida), “void of personality “, 148; “the vast void of Nothingness”, 154;“the void of the unknown”, 220.
\textsuperscript{58} Unamuno, Tragic Sense of Life (Del sentimiento trágico de la vida), 185.
\textsuperscript{59} Unamuno, Tragic Sense of Life (Del sentimiento trágico de la vida), 32.
but does not govern, and Knowledge is His constitutional charter”\(^{60}\). Unamuno acknowledges the inadequacy of reason in solving the problem of the tragic character of life and in curing “metaphysical evil” and mundane disease. Reason does not so much solve this problem as removes it, without making it an object of its own reflection, leaving it as still and again “lived-experienced”. Unamuno argues: “All knowledge has an ultimate object. Knowledge for the sake of knowledge is, say what you will, nothing but a dismal begging of the question. We learn something either for an immediate practical end, or in order to complete the rest of our knowledge. Even the knowledge that appears to us to be most theoretical – that is to say, of least immediate application to the non-intellectual necessities of life – answers to a necessity which is no less real because it is intellectual, to a reason of economy in thinking, to a principle of unity and continuity of consciousness”\(^{61}\).

However, Unamuno highlights that “[t]he rational, in effect, is simply the relational; reason is limited to relating irrational elements. Mathematics is the only perfect science, inasmuch as it adds, subtracts, multiplies, and divides numbers, but not real and substantial things, inasmuch as it is the most formal of the sciences”\(^{62}\). “Nevertheless we need logic, this terrible power, in order to communicate thoughts and perceptions and even in order to think and perceive, for we think with words, we perceive with forms. To think is to converse with oneself; and speech is social, and social are thought and logic”\(^{63}\).

At the same time, Unamuno criticises religion as an intellectual solution. However, in Unamuno’s conception, faith is a guarantee of the legitimacy of actions to defend the rest of certainty. For Unamuno grants the individual the right to defend his/her own identity – the identity of an imperfect being torn apart by contradictions. According to Unamuno, faith needs “imagination founded on feeling”\(^{64}\) rather than abstract reasoning. However, the mental images of the transcendent refer inevitably to the mundane world and are therefore problematic. In Unamuno’s opinion, these “problems” cannot be avoided – religion is a challenge for humans as imperfect beings, still confronted and confronting a perfect being. The act of faith is important, but it is also a subjective, imaginative creation of what we do not perceive with our senses, what is not given to us in empirical cognition. This creation and lived-experience is a multiple act of creative effort. “But faith, which after all is something compound, comprising a cognitive, logical, or rational element together with an affective, biotic, sentimental, and strictly irrational element, is presented to us under the form of knowledge. And hence the insuperable difficulty of separating it from some dogma or other. Pure faith, free from dogmas, about which I wrote a great deal years ago, is a phantasm. Neither is the difficulty overcome

\(^{60}\) Unamuno, Tragic Sense of Life (Del sentimiento trágico de la vida), 148.
\(^{61}\) Unamuno, Tragic Sense of Life (Del sentimiento trágico de la vida), 14.
\(^{62}\) Unamuno, Tragic Sense of Life (Del sentimiento trágico de la vida), 76–77.
\(^{63}\) Unamuno, Tragic Sense of Life (Del sentimiento trágico de la vida), 77.
\(^{64}\) Unamuno, Tragic Sense of Life (Del sentimiento trágico de la vida), 111.
by inventing the theory of faith in faith itself. Faith needs a matter to work upon. Believing is a form of knowing, even if it be no more than a knowing and even a formulating of our vital longing. In ordinary language the term ‘believing,’ however, is used in a double and even a contradictory sense. It may express, on the one hand, the highest degree of the mind’s conviction of the truth of a thing, and, on the other hand, it may imply merely a weak and hesitating persuasion of its truth” 65.

It is easy to notice that Unamuno criticises rationalism, which denies the personal immortality of humans. Neither reason nor science answers the question of immortality, and they do not even see the aspiration and endeavour of the human will to the immortal. The immortality of the human soul cannot be proven rationally, but its mortality can be proven. The criticism of rationalism in Unamuno’s conception relates to the criticism of a consistently materialistic attitude, typical of positivist postulates 66. It should be stressed that Unamuno combines rationalism with materialism – with scientific and philosophical solutions referring to empirical data. “what we call materialism means for us nothing else but the doctrine which denies the immortality of the individual soul, the persistence of personal consciousness after death” 67. “Every monist system will always seem to us materialist. The immortality of the soul is saved only by the dualist systems – those which teach that human consciousness is something substantially distinct and different from the other manifestations of phenomena. And reason is naturally monist. For it is the function of reason to understand and explain the universe, and in order to understand and explain it, it is in no way necessary for the soul to be an imperishable substance. For the purpose of explaining and understanding our psychic life, for psychology, the hypothesis of the soul is unnecessary” 68.

It is not, therefore, a rationalism combined with an idealistic attitude. Neither rationalism, nor empiricism, nor Baruch Spinoza’s monistic pantheism, nor Immanuel Kant’s agnosticism may satisfy the human desire for eternity. In Miguel de Unamuno’s philosophy, the weakness or impotence of reason in the face of the “problem of life” of mundane existence and the problem of eternal life, causes modification and relativisation of the concept of truth – this is why Unamuno stands for a coherent conception of truth. “What is truth? There are two kinds of truth – the logical or objective, the opposite of which is error, and the moral or subjective, the opposite of which is falsehood. And in a previous essay I have endeavoured to show that error is the fruit of falsehood. Moral truth, the road that leads to intellectual truth, which also is moral, inculcates the study of science, which is over and above all a school of sincerity and humility. Science teaches us, in effect, to submit our reason to the truth and to know and judge of things as they are – that is to say, as they themselves choose to be and not as we would have them be. In a religiously scientific investigation, it is the data of reality themselves, it is the perceptions which

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65 Unamuno, Tragic Sense of Life (Del sentimiento trágico de la vida), 158–159.
66 Cf. Unamuno, Tragic Sense of Life (Del sentimiento trágico de la vida), 7.
67 Unamuno, Tragic Sense of Life (Del sentimiento trágico de la vida), 68.
68 Unamuno, Tragic Sense of Life (Del sentimiento trágico de la vida),
we receive from the outside world, that formulate themselves in our mind as laws – it is not we ourselves who thus formulate them”⁶⁹.

One may say that in Unamuno’s philosophy, elements of specific individualism, personalism, anthropocentrism and even egology, but not egoism, are combined – egology in which the individual is the most real for itself. “And the passion that finds its expression in this rhetoric, the devotees of ethical science call egotism. But this egotism is the only true remedy for egoism, spiritual avarice, the vice of preserving and reserving oneself and of not striving to perennialize oneself by giving oneself”⁷⁰. However, all these elements refer to the sought-after, transcendent basis of evaluation and normativity (social and cultural). It should be stressed that Unamuno considers the mundane existence of the human being in its relations with the Others. Humans go beyond and transcend their dramatic and tragic existence, engaging, involving themselves in the drama of Others, and “each one of us” can and ought “to give himself to others”⁷¹. Unamuno’s conception of “being for Others” relates to the co-experience of the tragedy of their existence. “The feeling of solidarity originates in myself”⁷². The assumption of a contradictory, up to the point of tragedy, essence of humanity allows the consideration of another person – even very different from me – to be similar to me in this internal differentiation. However, there is also a desire in humans to strongly distinguish and contrast other people and the world of things.

Individuals may prove to themselves the existence of a transcendent order – the order of immortality as well – and prove worthy of it. This is why Unamuno’s moral imperative would be “act so that, in your own eyes and in eyes of others, you deserve eternity”. It is a conduct in accordance with the presumed, alleged transcendent order, which the human being realises and creates at the same time in its mundane conduct, doing everything to deserve it. “To believe in God is to long for His existence and, further, it is to act as if He existed; it is to live by this longing and to make it the inner spring of our action”⁷³. Ultimately, the individual in his/her uncertainty is left with a recourse to the transcendent order of eternity and immortality, also uncertain, as well as to his/her own cognitive judgement, unreliable but always made from his/her own point of view.

It should be emphasised that Unamuno has considered the indicated contradictions of the essence and existence of humans in two ways. It may be said that in the ontological order, he considers these contradictions as aporias – ontological, logical and axiological at once, inscribed in the regularities of human being. But how can we explain the human aspiration and effort to remove these aporias, which humans seek to do? In this very aspiration and endeavour, the contradictory aspect of the human essence is expressed, and our cognition allows us to conceive ontological aporias as unresolved.

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⁶⁹ Unamuno, Tragic Sense of Life (Del sentimiento trágico de la vida), 167–168.
⁷⁰ Unamuno, Tragic Sense of Life (Del sentimiento trágico de la vida), 243.
⁷¹ Unamuno, Tragic Sense of Life (Del sentimiento trágico de la vida), 229.
⁷² Unamuno, Tragic Sense of Life (Del sentimiento trágico de la vida), 237.
⁷³ Unamuno, Tragic Sense of Life (Del sentimiento trágico de la vida), 157.
epistemological paradoxes. In this way, we try – unsuccessfully because of cognitive imperfection – to control the contradictions in order to point out one dominant right that would reconcile the contradictions in us and in our existence, one rationale to which we could refer cognitively, theoretically, and in action, practically, while making choices and taking decisions.

**Bibliography**


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