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Metaphor, Symbol and Personification in Presentations of Life and Values

Abstract: Language is the vehicle of our perception, descriptions and explanations of reality. The key to meaning is understanding the logical structure of our language, the truth-conditions of reality and the correct use of linguistic signs. Interpersonal communication that concentrates on the actual and on the logically-possible world represents for us the central use of language. Any approach to the issue of language entails problems about the connections between the mind, the general aspects of reality and the general features or characteristics of different languages. Language interacts with every aspect of human life and society. An essential and prominent part of language is naming things or objects, animals and humans according to their appearance, supposed essence, action and decision. The aim of this article is to scrutinize the role of names, words, symbols and metaphors as artistic and literary devices for expressing human values and their personifications as foundations of human personal and social life. Since the antiquity the views on the use of signs as fundamental means of expression in mental operations and sensations are the central issue of philosophy of language. The main question, how metaphors, symbols and personifications are involved in our life. These means of expression are not merely a matter of language, but a matter of conceptual structure of our perception. Symbols, especially symbolic objects or personifications, help to define the experience of human beings in the natural order of things.

Key words: reality, personal and social life, value, morality, ethics, language, name, word, metaphor, symbol, personification

Povzetek: **Metafora, simbol in personifikacija v prikazih življenja in vrednot**

Jezik je sredstvo našega dojemanja, opisovanja in razlaganja resničnosti. Ključ do pomena so razumevanje logične strukture jezika, pogoji resnice o resničnosti in pravilna raba jezikovnih znamenj. Medosebna komunikacija z osredotočenjem na dejanski in logično možni svet za nas pomeni osrednjo rabo jezika. Vsak pristop k bistvu vprašanja jezika zadeva probleme glede povezav med razumom, splošnimi vidiki resničnosti in splošnimi značilnostmi različnih jezikov. Jezik deluje vzajemno z vsakim vidikom človekovega življenja in družbe. Bistven in prominenten del jezika je imenovanje stvari ali objektov, živali in ljudi po njihovem videzu, domnevnem bistvu, delovanju in odločanju. Namen tega pri-

spevka je presoja vloge imen, besed, simbolov in metafor kot umetnostnih in literarnih sredstev za izražanje človekovih vrednot in njihovih personifikacij kot osnove za človekovo osebno in družbeno življenje. Vse od antike dalje so v filozofiji jezika pogledi o rabi znamenj kot osnovnih sredstev izražanja v mentalnih operacijah in občutkih osrednji predmet razprave. Poglavitno vprašanje je, kako metafore, simboli in personifikacije zadevajo človekovo življenje. Ta izrazna sredstva pa niso samo stvar jezika, temveč konceptualne strukture naše percepcije. Simboli, zlasti simbolni predmeti ali personifikacije, pomagajo opredeliti izkušnjo človeških bitij v naravnem redu stvari.

Ključne besede: resničnost, osebno in družbeno življenje, vrednota, moralnost, etika, jezik, ime, beseda, metafora, simbol, personifikacija

1. Introduction

The issue of values is linked to morality and ethics. The terms morality and ethics are in everyday language sometimes used as synonymous for moral beliefs or practices in general. Various domains of humanities require, however, a clear distinction between the two terms. The term morality concerns human sense of discerning between right and wrong in principle and between good and bad persons or characters in life situations. Morality is both personal and social in nature. Morality seems to speak to us intuitively through conscience and by means of imaginative voice evoking in us emotions that are an essential element in the moral life. The term ethics is a systematic, rational or normative way of searching for answers to moral questions by means of moral judgments, principles and theories. A particularly clear case of the normative realm is law which applies legal norms. In contrast to analytical moral philosophy and to the normative realm of law, literature pays special attention to language and literary devices as imaginative means of aesthetically mediated interaction between character and conduct in life situations.

Comparison of analytical moral philosophy, the normative realms of law and the imaginative way of literary representations of characters leads to a question which mode of discourse is most appropriate for conveying ethical information or evoking ethical reflection. How do we use language to make moral points? Any discussion about the function of words, names and metaphors in relation to things, humans and gods/God in their interrelation touches the issue of naming and analogy. (Lloyd 1992) In the history of philosophy and theology, this issue has been crucial to answering the general question of how words or names relate to the things and persons. Answer to this question requires clarification of the role of metaphor with its extensions in symbol and personification. Many properties, attributes and abstract ideas or concepts were personified and served the organization of an elaborate conceptual system of values. The visualization of abstract concepts in framing ideas is the most important legacy of the art of memory within human history. (Weisberg 2013, 259–266)

Among traditionally recognized figures of speech, metaphor and symbol are the most attractive and controversial part of poetics, rhetoric and stylistics. The concept of metaphor designates figurative use of words as opposed to literal use. The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another. Metaphor is most frequently compared with the figure of speech of simile. There are, however, differences in the use of both figures of speech in certain situations: metaphors are powerful persuasion tools by using one thing to mean another, similes compare two different things in order to create a new meaning. The specialized types of the metaphor are allegory, parable and pun. In contrast to metaphor and simile that represent figures of speech in poetics, rhetoric and stylistics, analogy is more of a logical argument. It is understood as a means of demonstration how two things are alike by pointing out shared characteristics. Metaphors are important as means of style in speech and writing by a type of analogy, as the poetic imagination and as a device for persuading in rhetorical speeches. Words and phrases that suggest the likeness of one entity to another entity relate to objects, events, ideas, activities, and attributes. As cognitive images metaphors are foundational to our conceptual system as a framework implicit in the language as a system and literary forms.

Linguistic and philosophical views on the role of metaphor and symbol in the span from antiquity to the present time indicate various ways of interpretation. Some theorists see in them as a matter of peripheral, some as a matter of central concern of our life. The modern issues are: Why people hold symbols as powerful markers of identity and essential to everyday life? How symbolism is involved in our personal, interpersonal and social lives? How to extend theoretical discussions about major themes in the analysis of symbols to their anthropological, psychological and social aspects? How to bridge ancient or distant cultural traditions and our contemporary world?

2. Classical Definitions of Metaphor and Personification

The role of words in language reaches extensions in the role of metaphor and symbols in the everyday life, art, music, literature, etc. Metaphor, immediate substitute of one idea or object for another is grounded in thinking by means of analogy or comparison. The Roman theoretician of rhetorics Quintilian (35–96) defines metaphor quite clearly in his work *Institutio Oratoria* (8.6.9–13). Here he explains the difference between metaphor (*metaphora*) and simile (*similitudo*): metaphor means comparison of a thing we want to express (*comparatur rei quam volumus exprimere*), whereas by means of simile is expressed the same thing (*pro ipsa re dicitur*). Metaphors fall into four classes: substitution of one living thing for another (*in rebus animalibus aliud pro alio ponitur*), substitution of inanimate things for inanimate of another kind (*inanima pro aliis generis eiusdem sumuntur*), substitution of inanimate things for animate – or vice versa (*pro rebus animalibus inanima, aut contra*). In his work *De schematibus et tropis* Bede (672/73–735)

classifies metaphor according to Quintilian as translation (*translatio*): »Metaphor is a translation among things and words. This is accomplished in four ways: from a living creature to another living creature, from a non-living thing to another non-living thing, from a living creature to a non-living thing, from a non-living thing to a living creature.« (Halm 1863, 611; Paxson 2009, 20)¹

From the period of Renaissance, the most influential theorist about tropes and figures is Erasmus (1466–1536) who wrote the exemplary treatise on rhetorics *De ultraque verborum ac rerum copia*. Erasmus confines his definition of prosopoeia to the »description of persons« and admits that the trope is very similar to prosopographia – »the figure whereby the physical characteristics of a human personage are delineated«. (Erasmus 50–51; Praxson 2009, 23) Erasmus treatise became the most influential study of tropes and figures throughout Europe in the sixteenth century. Another influential theorist of rhetoric and literary criticism from the period of Renaissance is Henry Home, Lord Kames (1696–1782) with his work *Elements of Criticism*. In chapter xx, Kames devotes thirteen pages to a discussion of personification and divides it in two types: »passionate« and »descriptive« personification. Passionate personification is superior because it arises out of genuine passions, whereas descriptive personification is mere rhetorical ornament. (Praxson 2009, 26) From the French tradition of literary theoretics is important Pierre Fontanier (1765–1782) with his work *Les figures du discours*. He includes in his definition of personification all the ontic categories in the span between life and non-life, concrete and abstract, etc.²

From the period of pre-Romantic and Romantic mention may be made of Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834) and John Ruskin (1819–1900), from the twentieth century of Rudolf Wittkower (1901–1971), Ernst Robert Curtius (1886–1956), Erich Auerbach (1892–1957) and Erwin Panofsky (1892–1968). Among the more recent critics is especially influential Morton W. Bloomfield (1913–1987). James J. Paxson scrutinizes his formalization of personification:

»Although Bloomfield is concerned with personification as a mode of character invention, his system is better suited to the description of localized, animate metaphors, or of characterological personification in which little action occurs. /.../ The grammatical system fails to account for the complexities that arise when personification figures are combined with other kinds of fictional characters – historical human beings, mythological beings, and so forth.« (2009, 30–31)

Another important representative of a phenomenological approach to the grammatical aspect of personification is Samuel R. Levin (1917–1990). More in detail deals with the issue of personification Stephen A. Barney in his work *Allegories of History, Allegories of Love*, in which he deals in the entire first chapter with the

¹ The original text reads: »Metafora est rerum verborumque translatio. Haec fit modis quattor: ab animali ad animal, ab inanimale ad inanimale, ab animale ad inanimale, ab inanimale ad animale.«

² See his definition on page 111: »La personification consiste à faire d'un être inanimé, insensible, ou d'un être abstrait et purement idéal, une espèce d'être réel et physique, doué de sentiment et de vie, enfin ce qu'on appelle une personne; et cela, par simple façon de parler, ou par une fiction toute verbale, s'il faut le dire. Elle a lieu par métonymie, par synecdoque, ou par métaphore.« (Praxson 2009, 26–27)

poetic of personification. Paxson evaluates his contribution as follows: »Overall, Barney is one of the few theorists of personification to attend to the translative or transformational 'directions' among personified or dispersonified entities in the medieval, Renaissance, and modern literary works he scrutinizes.« (32)

In contrast to Barney and Boomfield investigated medieval and Renaissance allegorical literature. This explains why they were confronted with many examples of personified abstractions. As their contemporary, Paul de Man (1919–1983) investigated Romantic, early modern, and symbolist poetry, so he was confronted with examples of »personification« as a rhetorical device. In his work *Rhetoric of Romanticism* he defined clearly »antropomorfism« as something like a trope. Finally, mention may be made of Joseph Hillis Miller (1928–) who, in his work *Versions of Pygmalion*, pays great attention to the phenomenon of personification in the analysis of literary works and discovers in them also examples he considers them as »pseudopersonification«.

Metaphor focuses on surface meaning of ideas or objects by providing an example of the point the speaker or writer is trying to make. Metaphors are extensively used as narrative device in literature, rhetoric and discourse. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson write of metaphor: »Metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language, but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature.« (1980, 3) Lakoff and Johnson recognize the importance of orientational metaphors that provide »the basis for an extraordinarily wide variety of ontological metaphors, that is, ways of viewing events, activities, emotions, ideas, etc., as entities and substances« (2003, 25).

Metaphors and symbols can be a single persons or objects. They are culturally specific and primarily deeply personal. The use of artistic and religious symbols and metaphors manifest human tendency to personify nearly everything in the span from concrete objects to abstract concepts and innermost feelings in interpersonal relationships. Personification is a kind of anthropomorphism which consists in the need to attribute human forms and characteristics to higher entities. Psychology of personification includes primarily depicting living beings, as animals, and deities with human form and ascribing human emotions or motives to them. Personification is like the characterization of the person as a whole. Therefore they are an important literary device in literature and art where they are not understood literally but metaphorically. Personification, or characterization of the soul, somehow captures the way we experience ourselves. Representations of ideal characters or their opposites in literature and art effect strongly on our self-conceptions, motivations and behaviour. A most important potential of language, symbols and metaphors, is the possibility of expressing structural meanings of factual information, factual questions, and giving instructions.

3. Archetypes, Conceptual Metaphors and Symbols

Since the antiquity the views on the use of signs as fundamental means of expression in mental operations and sensations are the central issue of philosophy of language. Some philosophers and theologians recognized that the use of signs happens in the framework of social existence as a living discourse on the basis of a communicative prototype of all language. Plato (428/27–348/47 BCE), Philo of Alexandria (15–10 BCE–45–50 CE), Irenaeus (c. 120/140–200/203), Augustine (354–430) and Dionysius the Areopagite (flourished c. 500) are among most prominent defenders of the idea that learning is remembering, bringing to the conscious mind something already present.

Plato explained his view in his work *Meno*, composed in the form of dialogue between Socrates and Meno on the question whether we can know what virtue is. Through a number of possible definitions of virtue Plato tries to solve the problem via the theory of *anamnesis*, the idea that the soul is eternal, knows everything and has to »recollect« from already existing realities data in order to learn concepts. In his work *On the Creation* (23,69), Philo of Alexandria uses in reference to humankind as »the image of God« in the account of creation in Gen 1:26 the term *archétupon*:

»After all the rest, as I have said, Moses tells us that man was created after the image of God and after His likeness. Right well does he say this, for nothing earth-born is more like God than man. Let no one represent the likeness as one to a bodily form; for neither is God in human form, nor is the human body God-like. No, it is in respect of the Mind, the sovereign element of the soul, that the word »image« is used; for after the pattern of a single Mind, even the Mind of the Universe as an archetype (*archétupon*), the mind in each of those who successively came into being was moulded.« (Philo 1981, 55)

Mention may be made also of Irenaeus who expressed this idea in his work *Adversus haereses*: »The creator of the world did not fashion these things directly from himself but copied them from archetypes outside himself.«³ Augustine, on the other hand, explains in his *Confessions* that »sounds are one thing, the principles another. The sounds vary according to whether the terms are Latin or Greek. But numerical principles are neither Greek nor Latin nor any other kind of language.« (Augustine 2008, 190) He asks the question how did matters enter his memory and confesses:

»I do not know how. For when I learnt them, I did not believe what someone else was telling me, but within myself I recognized them and assented to their truth. I entrusted them to my mind as if storing them up to be produced when required. So they were there even before I had learnt them, but were not in my memory. Accordingly, when they were formulated, how and why did I recognize them and say, »Yes, that is true«? The answer must be that they were already in

³ In original: »Mundi fabricator non a semetipso fecit haec, sed de alienis archtypis transtulit.« (Jung 1992, 4)

the memory, but so remote and pushed into the background, as if in most secret caverns, that unless they were dug out by someone drawing attention to them, perhaps I could not have thought of them.« (Augustine 2008, 188–189)

Dionysius the Areopagite uses in his work *The Divine Names* the expression »Archetypal Stone«.⁴ It seems that Philo and Dionysius inspired Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961) who introduced the term »achetype« in his hypothesis of a collective unconscious in human person, which is of an exclusively personal nature. As he explains:

»A more or less superficial layer of the unconscious is undoubtedly personal. I call it the *personal unconscious*. But this personal unconscious rests upon a deeper layer, which does not derive from personal experience and is not a personal acquisition but is inborn. This deeper layer I call the *collective unconscious*. I have chosen the term »collective« because this part of the unconscious is not individual but universal, in contrast to the personal psyche, it has contents and modes of behavior that are more or less the same everywhere and in all individuals. It is, in other words, identical in all men and thus constitutes a common psychic substrate of a suprapersonal nature which is present in every one of us.« (1992, 3–4)

The pervasive human need to symbolize and to invent meanings of one's world became the central concern of the American philosopher of mind and of art, Susanne Katherina Langer (1895–1985), best known for her book *Philosophy in a New Key* (1942). She developed an adequate theory of artistic significance within the framework of a general theory of symbolism. What distinguishes man from animal is according to her the capacity to mediate feeling by conceptions, symbols and language. In use of symbols she saw the central concern of philosophy because it underlies all human knowing and understanding of outer world and inner consciousness in terms of identity, validity, value and virtue. There is a profound difference between using symbols and merely using signs. She states: »Man, unlike all other animals, uses »signs« not only to *indicate* things, but also to *represent* them.« (1979, 30) »Symbols are supposed to have evolved from the advantageous use of *signs*. They are representative signs, that help to retain things for later reference, for comparing, planning, and generally for purposive thinking.« (1979, 37)

Langer proposed a new general principle of seeing a radical distinction or difference between animals and humans: the capacity of the mind to conceive certain »higher« aims, characteristically human needs, the need of symbolization (1979, 38–41). She explains: »The fact that the human brain is constantly carrying on a process of symbolic transformation of the experiential data that come to it causes it to be a veritable fountain of more or less spontaneous ideas.« (43) The process of symbolic transformation of experience is characteristic of reason, rite, and art. Langer recognizes that »ritual is a symbolic transformation of experiences that no other medium can adequately express. Because it springs from a primary human need, it is a spontaneous activity – that is to say, it arises without intention, without adaptation to a conscious purpose; its growth is undesigned, its pat-

⁴ See translation by C. E. Rolt (Dionysius the Areopagite 1920, 62). John Parker (Dionysius the Areopagite, 2014) translated the name by »self-hewn stone«.

tern purely natural, however intricate it may be. It was never ›imposed‹ on people; they acted thus quite of themselves, exactly as bees swarmed and birds built nests, squirrels hoarded food, and cats washed their faces.« (49)

The idea of universality of the mental structures is reflected in reconstructions of actual perceptual experiences and in the function of conceptual metaphors in language in our everyday lives. We are not always aware that we actually perceive and act in accordance with the metaphors that are pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. The idea of conceptual metaphor and mental imagery was first extensively explored by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in their article »Conceptual Metaphor in everyday Language« (1980) and in their monograph work *Metaphors We Live By* (2003). Metaphors are values deeply embedded in in our conceptual system and in culture: »The most fundamental values in a culture will be coherent with the metaphorical structure of the most fundamental concepts in the culture.« (1980, 465) There are good reasons to pay more attention to the question about the grounding of our conceptual system:

»Perhaps the most important thing to stress about grounding is the distinction between an experience and the way we conceptualize it. We are *not* claiming that physical experience is in any way more basic than other kinds of experience, whether emotional, mental, cultural, or whatever. All these experiences may be just as basic as physical experiences.« (477)

Metaphors highlight and make coherent certain aspect of our experience. Lakoff and Johnson state: »In all aspects of life, not just in politics or in love, we define our reality in terms of metaphor, and then proceed to act on the basis of the metaphor.« (485) They note the tendency of contemporary philosophers and linguists who claim that metaphor is a matter of literal language, not thought and natural languages and argue that most of our ordinary conceptual system is metaphorically structured:

»Not only are systems of concepts organized by basic orientational metaphors, but the very concepts themselves are *partially* defined in terms of multiple *physical* and *structural* metaphors. Concepts are not determinable in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions for their application; instead, we grasp them, always in a *partial* fashion, by means of various metaphorical concepts. What this suggests to us is that no account of meaning and truth can be adequate unless it recognizes and deals with the way in which conventional metaphors structure our conceptual system. Of course, this is no modest claim, for, if we are correct, it calls into question the assumption of many that a complete account of literal meaning can be given without reference to metaphor. It also calls into question, we believe, certain traditional assumptions in the Western philosophical and linguistic traditions about the nature of meaning, truth, logic, rationality, and objectivity.« (485–486)

The theory of conceptual metaphor in everyday language has important implications for our understanding of metaphor and its role in language and the mind. Metaphors can shape our perceptions and actions, and in the final analysis, they help us to understand cross-cultural similarities and differences in conceptual sy-

stems. Lakoff/Johnson state: »Metaphor has traditionally been viewed in both fields (linguistics and philosophy) as a matter of peripheral interest. We shared the intuition that it is, instead, a matter of central concern, perhaps the key to giving an adequate account of understanding.« (2003, ix) Symbolic images of gods, demons and heroes in all other cultures rest on intuitive and comprehensive understanding of the relationship between the world of human experience and the realities which are beyond the bounds of concrete things. As Manfred Lurker states:

»All symbolism crystalizes around the poles of existence, around coming into being and passing away, light and darkness, good and evil. The true symbol always point beyond the here and now for it is a signpost to another world. All lower things direct the mind symbolically to something higher, each fragment points to the whole and everything ephemeral is an image of the eternal.« (1988, 9)

4. Imaginative Rationality of Metaphor and Extension of Metaphor in Personified Symbols

The use of metaphors and symbols is based on intuitive capacity to perceive various dimensions of reality analogically. The significant symbols depicting the relationship of God and humans are drawn from the area of family, social relationships and the structure of the society. All weaker or lower types of humans, as children, slaves or servants, indicate the relationship of humans to God and the relationship between gods in polytheistic religions. Intuitive perception of analogical relations in the world influences embodiment of religious symbolism in cultural and political institutions and conventions. But the most striking effect of human intuitive perception of analogical relations is the sense for grasping wholeness, unity and absolute behind all appearances of reality and in the background of all pictures and symbols.

Grasping of wholeness and unity is most successfully achieved in all kinds of literature, in contrast to systematic philosophical discourse. Peter and Renata Singer state: »Long before the rise of systematic philosophical thought, people have been making up stories in order to convey what they think about how we ought to live. Inevitably, in telling stories, and in writing novels, plays, short stories, and poems, the authors and narrators raise moral questions and suggest possible ways of answering them.« (2005, x) Poets and writers seek words, names, metaphors and symbols that enable us to grasp the totality of life situation and to decide what is right and what is wrong in attitudes of characters. Literature awakes the sense of intuition and the insight into the depths of human soul, whereas »philosophical examples in ethics usually lack depth, the characters in them are mere ciphers, and the context is absent or at best briefly sketched«. (Singer 2005, x)

The most persuasive seem to be those metaphors where the physical object is further specified as being a person. Personification of nonhuman entities in terms of human motivations, characteristic, and activities is the most common experience of humans on personal and on collective levels. Lakoff/Johnson state:

»Personification is a general category that covers a very wide range of metaphors, each picking out different aspects of a person or ways of looking at a person. What they all have in common is that they are extensions of ontological metaphors and that they allow us to make sense of phenomena in the world in human terms—terms that we can understand on the basis of our own motivations, goals, actions, and characteristics.« (2003, 34)

Myths provide ways of comprehending objective and subjective experience. The myth of objectivism says that the world is made up of objects and we can know what properties objects have; we understand the objects in our world in terms of categories and concepts. The myth of subjectivism complements the myth of objectivism with intuitive grasp of human senses, with emotions and feelings.⁵ Intuitive search for quality of values involves situations of decision between virtue and vice. Amartya Sen has an important point against the contractarian approach in explication of the concept of justice, as developed by John Rawls, the author of the well-known book *A Theory of Justice*. Sen insists on a comparative approach and recognizes the role of public reason in establishing what can make societies less unjust. This means that it is not possible to speak about justice without considering the fact of injustices. A comparative approach involves inner union of operation of reason, the role of tradition and the force of emotion. Sen explains his conviction:

»I argue against the plausibility of seeing emotions or psychology or instincts as independent sources of valuation, without reasoned appraisal. Impulses and mental attitudes remain important, however, since we have good reasons to take note of them in our assessment of justice and injustice in the world. There is no irreducible conflict here, I argue, between reason and emotion, and there are very good reasons for making room for the relevance of emotions.« (2010, xvii)

A comparative approach in art combines reason and emotion in using symbols cross-culturally. As Mari Womack writes: »Just as some aspects of human life are universal, some symbols have similar associations cross-culturally. People everywhere experience birth, death, love, sexual desire, and the need for food and shelter, and these powerful aspects of human life find expression in compelling symbols.« (2005, 12) Similar associations of symbols concern first of all duality of good and wrong in all possible variations. Duality of good and wrong in works of art leads the observer easily to imagination of personified

⁵ Lakoff and Johnson argue: »Art and poetry transcend rationality and objectivity and put us in touch with the more important reality of our feelings and intuitions. We gain this awareness through imagination rather than reason. The language of the imagination, especially metaphor, is necessary for expressing the unique and most personally significant aspects of our experience. In matters of personal understanding the ordinary agreed-upon meanings that words have will not do. Objectivity can be dangerous, because it misses what is most important and meaningful to individual people. Objectivity can be unfair, since it must ignore the most relevant realms of our experience in favor of the abstract, universal, and impersonal. For the same reason, objectivity can be inhuman. There are no objective and rational means for getting at our feelings, our aesthetic sensibilities, etc. Science is of no use when it comes to the most important things in our lives.« (2003, 188–189)

virtues and vices. Personified virtues and vices became the most suggestive symbols inducing humans to decision both by mental and emotional capacities.

Colum Hourihane has in 2000 edited the most comprehensive list of known personifications of virtues and vices in art. The practice of representing moral qualities in human form can be traced back to the classical period (Shapiro 1993). The earliest depictions of personifications of virtues and vices were dynamic images that showed the actual struggle or battle between the opposing moral values. Hourihane states:

»In contrast to this dynamic representation of the concept, which draws extensively from Battle scenes such as those on the Late Antique sarcophagi, there is a second and more subtle means of depicting these moral values. This is the static image, in which individual concepts are shown as single entities, often depicted in isolation, but sometimes related to larger groups of similarly static personifications. In such depictions it is possible to see single values of virtue or vice, complex groups of either good or evil, or any possible variation of this theme. This group dates to the ninth century but continues throughout the entire medieval period.« (2000, 4)

The catalogue of virtues and vices, edited by Hourihane, includes a total of 227 different personifications, presented alphabetically in three sections: depictions of 109 Virtues, ranging from Abstinence to Wisdom, with special attention to personification of the Cardinal Virtues – Fortitude, Justice, Prudence, and Temperance; a listing of personifications of Virtues which cannot be conclusively identified; the catalogue of 118 vices. In the end of the Catalogue is a list of works of art in which the actual conflict between the Virtues and Vices is the theme. Greater frequency of some of the personifications in certain media – fresco, glass, manuscript, sculpture, textile, etc. – reveals the natural feeling of artists and the force of tradition in valuation of Virtues. There is a complex interrelationship among personifications of Virtues and Vices as single entities or in depictions of conflict of the Virtues and Vices. The way of presentations of characters allows to recognize both similarities and differences of pagan and Christian beliefs. Hourihane states:

»The actual conflict of the Virtues and Vices, as first documented by Prudentius, details the seven battles between these moral values and is one of the most significant works to bridge the period between pagan beliefs and Christian values. It has long been accepted that such battle scenes were derived from parallels in Roman art, but little attention has been given to the physiology of the principal characters.« (7)

5. Conclusion

A way through the leading theoretical ideas in the development of symbolic anthropology shows that metaphorical thought and symbols as a means of communication in many variations are fundamental to our most basic understandings of our experience. Metaphor, symbol and personification are central to the con-

temporary understanding of how we think and how we express our thoughts in language. They are not merely a matter of language, but a matter of conceptual structure of our perception. They manifest the capacity for self-understanding along the capacity for mutual understanding. A large part of self-understanding is the search for appropriate personal metaphors that make sense of our lives. Analogical perception and metaphorical communication opens ways of viewing emotions, ideas, events and activities as self-evident, direct descriptions of mental phenomena. A wide variety of experiences with nonhuman entities in terms of human motivations, characteristics, goals and actions is the source of the wealth of personified objects, concepts and values. It seems that our ordinary rationality is imaginative by its very nature. As George Lakoff and Mark Johnson argue: »Metaphor is one of our most important tools for trying to comprehend partially what cannot be comprehended totally: our feelings, aesthetic experiences, moral practices, and spiritual awareness.« (2003, 193)⁶

Discussions on the nature and the role of language, metaphor and symbol manifest the tension between the dominant rationalist and empiricist traditions in Western culture as a whole and the presentation of reality in the everyday language, art, literature and music by means of intuition. This means a tension between empirical science as a model for disclosing truth and imagination expressed holistically in art and in persuasive public oratory. This tension is possible to overcome by adoption of an »experientialist approach« which discloses imaginative rationality of metaphor that unites reason and imagination. Ordinary rationality is imaginative by its very nature. Consideration of experience helps to see that interpretation of symbols is always approximate and leads us to the question: Are symbols intrinsically or extrinsically bound to human personal and social life?

Symbols seem to be the best means of communication promoting a sense of conformity to values thus reducing conflict which is common to all human groups. Some scholars remain on the level of adjustment of experience among the people who share the same culture, knowledge, values, and assumptions, as well as cross-culturally. But adjustment is gained best in direct contact with the reality of the world. Experience of consistent or universal themes and symbols, as the relationship of humans to the divine in symbolic terms, the relationship between children and their father/mother, between sheep and their shepherd, between weak people and their heroic warriors, etc., opens however an infinite horizon of human

⁶ The Bible provides a more total meaning of names, words, sentences and larger literary structures by the »canonical« context of the entire Bible. See Avsenik Nabergoj 2014, 29: »Semantic analysis of the vocabulary for reality and truth is not done only within the narrow confines of individual texts that are mostly short statements in a limited oral and literary context, but in a broader context of the entire Bible, considering the various literary species and types.« Avsenik Nabergoj 2015, 324: »The key to gaining insight into the main emphases lies in the fact that the biblical literary text has its place in the canon of the Bible. It is therefore understandable that within Jewish and Christian communities literary texts of the Bible were interpreted symbolically and often allegorically.« Christian liturgy, based on the total truth of the Bible, also leads us to a more complete understanding of transcendent reality. See Krajnc 2014, 331: »Signs and symbols, in the context of religion, express and represent transcendent reality, such that they make it possible for men and women to get in touch with it through their senses, vision, hearing, taste and smell.«

experience of multiple levels of meaning in a multidimensional existential and historical context. Symbols, especially symbolic objects or personifications, help to define the experience of human beings in the natural order of things. Nevertheless, interpretation of symbols is always approximate because conceptualization of experiences cannot be reduced to literal description or unidimensional analysis.

Inherent in human being is expectation of security, happiness and love both in immediate temporal and in ultimate conditions. The more humans experience binary opposition of the light and the darkness, of the good and the evil, of the wild and the tame, etc., the more the ideal of reconciliation and peace comes to the fore. The more one believes that souls, supernatural beings, and supernatural forces exist, the more he or she stands before the choice to decide oneself between trust in faith and manipulation of magic of any kind. As Mari Womack states: »The primary purpose of religion is explanation, whereas magic is aimed at manipulation.« (2005, 79) When social crisis is caused by lack of sense of reality and solidarity, symbols of the deepest core of human being cause revolution of mind and heart.⁷

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⁷ Mari Womack states: »Though symbols concretely encode our experience, they are far from static. Because they draw on many levels of experience and are subject to interpretation, symbols can dramatically change both individuals and societies. Consider, for example, the dynamic of religious conversion. An instantaneous burst of insight, a profound encounter with a powerful symbol, can induce individuals to change their way of life or infuse their lives with new meaning.« (129) See Matjaž 2015, 65–78; Petkovšek 2016, 7–24.

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