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## Theognis and the Social Role of Measure.

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**ABSTRACT:** The paper deals with the beginnings of the Greek ethical discourse in elegies of an archaic lyric poet Theognis of Megara. In the introduction author shortly discusses the question of origin and influence of the Theognidea. Then he gradually follows and interprets the occurrences of the expression “μηδὲν ἄγαν” (Nothing in excess), of the words σωφροσύνη (soundness of mind), σώφρων (temperate), μέτρον (measure) and μέτριος (moderate), according to the problem of ἀρετή (excellence). On the basis of symposium description in the Theognidea and its functions, author shows the crucial social dimension of researched capabilities. He also tries to show how Theognis grasps the wisdom as a quality that has to be tried for and cared for. In the end author states that for Theognis the excellences such as wisdom, justice, sound mind and proper measure are *conditio sine qua non* for functioning of all social relations – from erotic relations through symposium to polis itself.

**KEY-WORDS:** Theognis, Solon, temperate, measure, moderate, excellence, justice, wisdom, polis, social behaviour

According to the interpretative tradition Socrates followed two Delphic maxims: “γνῶθι σαυτὸν” (Know thyself) and “μηδὲν ἄγαν”(Nothing in excess). These two maxims were so determinative for discourse of ancient philosophy and ethics (including Hellenic) that the whole ancient ethics could be in a simplified way understood as an effort to their reinterpretation and practical application. The aim of this study is to notice some aspects of beginnings of this discourse in elegies of an archaic lyric poet Theognis of Megara, in particular of the maxim “Nothing in excess”. We will examine this maxim together with soundness of mind, moderation, (right) measure, justice, wisdom and excellence and we will try to find some connections between them.

Basically, we have no information about Theognis' life besides that we find in his elegies. There he often names himself an exile from his homeland, who has lost his influence and property. Theognis came from Megara lying in the Isthmus of Corinth in immediate neighbourhood of Peloponnese. He spent a part of his life in

exile – in Thebes and perhaps in Megara's colony in Sicily called Hyblaeon Megara.<sup>1</sup> The era of Theognis' life (end of the archaic period) was characterized by strong political instability. His hometown Megara was shaken in unstable situation caused probably by conflicts “not between the oligarchs and the people, not between the rich and the poor, but between rival leading oligarchs“(Hammond, 2006, p. 343). Therefore, during several decades in Megara aristocracy was replaced by Theagenes' tyranny, oligarchy, democratising government and again oligarchy (Grant, 2006, pp. 124 – 125). Theognis' poems give evidence of difficult political situation as well. Their author criticises newly emerging oligarchy as well as declining aristocracy, he tries to identify the causes of political disputes and he searches a way to potential stability.<sup>2</sup>

The preserved corpus of Theognis' poems – so called Theognidea is a collection of shorter elegies (together about 1400 verses) written in the form of elegiac distiches which was edited by lyric poets from the end of the Byzantine period. The collection is divided into two books and many of the verses concern a character of a young man Cyrnus. By the end of 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century there was a dispute about authorship of the poems since it is possible to distinguish several poems written by different lyric poets (Solon, Tyrtaeus, Mimnermus, Archilochus) in the collection. Finally, Theognis was not deprived of the authorship of the verses even if the question of authorship character in archaic lyric poetry is still being discussed.<sup>3</sup> The collection seems to make one unit and “there is a striking degree of unity of language, thought and style in the poems“ (Highbarger, 1927, p. 198). According to some authors it represents synthesis of Megarian poetic tradition (Nagy, 1985, pp. 41 – 46; cf. Balot, 2006, pp. 16 – 17).

The precise time of origin of the Theognidea is still being discussed. According to the following threesome of authors, namely, V. Cobb-Stevens, T. J. Figueira and G. Nagy it can be situated to a relatively wide span of years 640 – 479, span exceeding one human life: Verses 29 – 52 seem to portray a political situation in the polis of Megara that is analogous to the one prevailing before the rise to power of the Megarian tyrant Theagenes (roughly 640 – 600 B. C.); verses 891 – 895 appear to bear witness to war in Euboea (second quarter of the 6. century); and verses 773 – 782 refer to the Persian invasion of the Megarid in 479 B. C. (Figueira, Nagy, 1985, p. 1). On the contrary T. Hubbard states quite convincing arguments against identification of above mentioned verses and historical events and he dates the Theognidea to a much shorter period in the end of sixth and beginning of fifth century (Hubbard, 2007, pp. 196 – 198; see also Cairns 2002: 167 – 168).

We can doubt the author and the exact time of origin but the influence of Theognis' poems is indisputable. It is confirmed by the fact that Theognis “is the first author, after Homer, Hesiod and the Homeric Hymns, who has an independent tradition“ (Allen, 1905, p. 386). Among Elegiac and Melic lyric poets of the archaic

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Plato, *Leg.* 630a, critique of his testimony see in Schol. ad loc. (p. 301 Greene) and Harpocration (pp. 126 – 27 Keaney), commentary on those testimonies see in: Douglas, 1999, p. 171.

<sup>2</sup> The main historical sources for information about the conditions in Megara of the seventh and sixth century are: Thucydides, Aristotle, Plutarch and Pausanias. The analysis of this sources can be found in L. A. Okin (1985, pp. 9 – 21), see also Доварып, (1989, pp. 72 – 101).

<sup>3</sup> Survey and evaluation of Theognis' verses, which we find also in other lyric poets, is given by E. L. Highbarger (1929, pp. 341 – 359), more new G. Nagy (1985, pp. 47 – 51). Contemporary, very interesting discussion about the character of authorship in the archaic lyric poetry can be found, in case of Theognis, in the study of Andrew L. Ford (1985) and Thomas Hubbard (2007). In similar Solon's case, in the studies of André P. M. H. Lardinois and Elizabeth Irwin (In: Blok, Lardinois, 2006, pp. 15 – 35, pp. 36 – 78).

period Theognis is the only one whose poems soon transformed to a written form and became a “school book” of young aristocracy education (Bowie, 1993, p. 93; Stiebitz, 1945, p. 18). The verses are not composed in Doric dialect of Theognis' native town Megara but in Ionic typical for elegiac tradition used by elegists coming from various places of Hellada (and also first philosophers) e.g. Archilochus of Paros, Tyrtaeus of Sparta, or Solon of Athens (Figueira, Nagy, 1985, p. 5; Bowie, 1993, p. 94). The language of the Theognidea as well as its incorporated themes have much more wider than only local character and we can call Theognis a panhellenic poet.

The influence of Theognis' elegies does not end with the archaic period but it is present during the whole antiquity. Xenophon wrote about it: “This poet's composition is about nothing else than human excellence and vice (περὶ ἀρετῆς καὶ κακίας ἀνθρώπων), and his poetry is a treatise on people (σύγγραμμα περὶ ἀνθρώπων), just as if a horseman were to write about horsemanship.” (Stobaeus, 4, 29c, 53, 2 – 6).<sup>4</sup> Theognis was quoted by classicistic authors Plato, Aristotle, Theophrastus, and Isocrates. Theognis' theme of “seal” (σφρηγίς) was imitated by Critias. Socratists Antisthenes and already mentioned Xenophon wrote treatises about Theognis. In Hellenism and Roman period almost everybody referred to him: the Stoics, the Epicureans, the Cynics, Plutarch, Horace, Lucian, the Greek Rhetoricians, Athenaeus and Stobaeus (Highbarger, 1927, p. 189). His influence can be found in Church fathers and, probably, also in the Old Testament' *Book of Ecclesiastes* (cf. Ranston, 1918). F. Nietzsche named him a speaker of Hellenic aristocracy and Ch. Darwin cited his poem in his book *The descent of Man*.<sup>5</sup>

Let us go back to the maxims mentioned in the introduction. The first one – “γνώθι σαυτὸν” – Know thyself cannot be found in the Theognidea. However, Theognis' emphasis on education, communication with wise men and appeals for exploration of human nature indicate that the question of self-knowledge was gradually starting to emerge in his times.<sup>6</sup> The second maxim – “μηδὲν ἄγαν” – “Nothing in excess” or “Nothing too much”, or “Proper measure is best“, which is its usual translation, appears in the Theognidea for four times. In the verses 219 – 220 Theognis urges Cynus not to be too distressed (Μηδὲν ἄγαν ἄσχαλλε) when citizens are in turmoil but to go along the middle of the road (μέσην ... ὁδὸν) as himself. In the verses 657 – 658 he advises him not to be troubled very much (Μηδὲν ἄγαν χαλεποῖσιν ἄσῳ) because noble man (ἀνδρὸς ... ἀγαθοῦ) has to be to endure everything.<sup>7</sup> In the verses 401 – 402 he says to him not show too much zeal (Μηδὲν ἄγαν σπεύδειν) because every human action has its own right time (καιρός). And finally, in the verses 335 – 336 he turns to him with the following words: „Don't show too much zeal (Μηδὲν ἄγαν σπεύδειν); the middle course is the best of all (πάντων μέσ' ἄριστα). This way, Cynus, you will have merit (ἀρετήν) and that's hard to come by. “ (v. 335 – 336).

<sup>4</sup> See: (Douglas, 1999, pp. 173 – 175), (Canfora, 2001, p. 91).

<sup>5</sup> It relates to the verses 183 – 192, in which Theognis complains about the fact that when keeping farm animals we care for the quality of breeds and everybody wants to have a good one, but a noble man does not mind marrying the base daughter of a base father if the latter gives him a lot of money: “Wealth has mixed up blood (πλοῦτος ἔμειξε γένος). And so, Polypaides, do not be surprised that the townsmen's stock is becoming enfeebled, since what is noble is mixing with what is base (μίσγεται ἐσθλὰ κακοῖς)“ (v. 190 – 192). The critique of Darwin's interpretation of Theognis see in: Ashley Montagu (1947, pp. 24 – 26). We have dealt with the more detailed interpretation of Theognis' verses in our monograph (Porubjak, 2010, pp. 98 – 137).

<sup>6</sup> See for example v. 27 – 38, 69 – 72, 309 – 312, 119 – 128, 963 – 970.

<sup>7</sup> Similarly the verses 445 – 446, 591 – 594 (cf. Phoc. fr. 12, Critias fr. 7.2, Stobaeus 3, 1, 172, 97).

The first two couplets relate to human emotions – distress, trouble; the second two relate to action – an effort which requires patience and moderation. It is the ability not to be carried away by any excess in feelings as well as in action what enables an individual to come by so hardly achievable *areté*. In the Theognidea we can see clear indication of that discourse which will be typical for classic ancient ethics.

Also the word σωφροσύνη (soundness of mind) will make a part of this classical discourse and it can be found as an important element in thinking of archaic lyric poets. This word can be encountered for four times in the Theognidea (v. 379, 701, 1138, 1326). These occurrences are important due to their seemingly very dissimilar context in which the substantive σωφροσύνη is used. In the first case (v. 379) it is the mind of men (νόος), which can be disposed either to prudent discretion (ἐπὶ σωφροσύνην) or to wanton outrage (πρὸς ὕβριν). In the second case (v. 701) *sófrōsyné* is used as an attribute of Rhadamanthys (mythological judge in the underworld) and Douglas translates it contextually as “good judgement”. In the third case (v. 1138) we find it personified together with Trust (Πίστις) and Graces (Χάριτες) in more extensive elegy where Theognis states that human qualities are gradually disappearing. In the last fourth case (v. 1326) in the prayer to Aphrodite, Theognis begs her to grant him the workings of a sound mind (ἔργματα σωφροσύνης) now when he completed the span of youth.

According to these mentioned occurrences we can infer that Theognis' *sófrōsyné* has strong pro-social function. It is an opposite to *hybris* disturbing social relations and causing the wrath of humans and gods (cf. Hesiod, *Op.* 213 – 218, 238). We find it as an equivalent to the good judgement and in close connection with trust and grace (or good will) which are the source and guarantee of social relations. Finally, we can find it in erotic context as a request for moderation in the love matters. In this case, as well as in the whole Book II of the Theognidea, it, most probably, concerns the relation between lover and the beloved one (ἐραστής – ἐρώμενος). For archaic and classic Greeks this relation, as it is apparent from the most ancient homoerotic studies, had much more socio-political than private dimension and it was related to preparation of a young man for his public life.<sup>8</sup> All these four occurrences of *sófrōsyné* are primary connected with attachment of an individual to the community, with his ability to sustain adequate social relations.

In the Theognidea, besides the substantive σωφροσύνη, we can find in three places also the adjective “σάοφρον” – “temperate, self-controlled, chaste, moderate” (v. 41, 437, 1082a). Firstly, in the context of wisdom – moderate words (μύθοισι σαόφροσιν) of noble fathers (v. 437 – 438), secondly, in political context (verses 1881 – 1082b and 39 – 42 are almost identical). The second quatrain is a part of a longer poem in which Theognis warns against the accession of a tyranny (v. 39 – 52). Here Theognis states that the situation in the community is quiet so far and “townsmen are still of sound mind (ἄστοι μὲν γὰρ ἔθ' οἶδε σαόφρονες)”, but he is worried that “their leaders have changed and fallen into the depths of depravity (εἰς κακότητα πεσεῖν)”. The government is being taken over by base who “ruin the people and give judgements in favour of the unjust (δίκας τ' ἀδίκοισι διδοῦσιν), for the sake of their own profit and power ... From this arise civil strife (στάσις), the spilling of kindred blood, and tyrants”, that are a punishment for civil insolence (ὑβρις) (v. 39 – 52).

<sup>8</sup> See Foucault, pp. 247 – 269; cf. Plato *Symp.* 182d, Xenophon *Symp.* 8,11. See also article by John M. Lewis: *Eros and the Polis in Theognis Book II*, in: Figueira, Nagy, 1985, pp. 197 – 222.

The message of these verses is univocal. If the community does not punish bad behaviour of individuals immediately in the beginning, it does *hybris*. Individuals that do not act pro-socially and take over the power by their illegal activities, provoke internal controversy in the community resulting in an appearance of a tyrant. The emerged bad conditions in the community will touch everybody – including those who were moderate. “Private” moderation is not sufficient; the citizens for their own sake have to take care of the moderation of the whole community.

The above mentioned Theognis' verses solve similar problem as Solon's known fragment 4. There Solon talks about Athens that due to the bad acts of its citizens and their leaders is driven to devastation. According to Solon, the situation will not be better as long as *disnomy* is not replaced with *eunomy* (fr. 4).<sup>9</sup> Comparing both poems – Solon's and Theognis' – we can see one interesting difference. Where Solon applies *eunomy* as medicament for discords in the community, Theognis recommends moderation. He changes more “political” category of law for more “ethic” category of sound mind, shifting the responsibility for the community situation on the citizens in much more extent than Solon.

The problem of sound mind, the mind that does not fall for extremes is closely connected to the question of the right measure often debated in archaic lyric poetry. In the Theognidea we encounter the substantive μέτρον (measure) and the adjective μέτριος (moderate) for ten times. Theognis complains in his typical “moralizing” way that among today's people there is not possible to find somebody who would be entirely good and know measure in everything (v. 615 – 616). Excess (κόρος) has ruined many because it is hard to recognize measure whenever prosperity is at hand (v. 693 – 694). In opposition to many: “the noble know how to observe due measure in all things (οἱ δ' ἀγαθοὶ πάντων μέτρον ἴσασιν ἔχειν)” (v. 614). Simply said, the assumption of the right measure is a good character and the way to its achievement and preservation requires an effort.

However, the greatest number of occurrences of the word measure (five to three just mentioned)<sup>10</sup> is related to the topic of wine drinking. Before we get to them, we have to deal shortly with the role of symposium in ancient culture. In Theognis' time the word συμπόσιον (literally “together-drinking” or “join-drinking”)<sup>11</sup> is relatively new “institution” and we can find first usage of this word in archaic lyric poetry where genre of sympotic poems originated. From the common ritualized amusement and common wine drinking the bonds of friendship arise. These bonds are the basic “structural element of early Greek society, since it refers to the relations of an individual with the members of his group: kin, retainers, friends (including guest-friends)” (Donlan, 1985, p. 224). Dionysian wine also showed the human character and symposium functioned “as an institution where values, political and moral, public and private, were tested” (Bowie, 1997, pp. 1 – 2).<sup>12</sup> As B. Snell suggests: “...the symposium of this period cultivates solidarity and sociability” (Snell, 1960, p. 68) and

<sup>9</sup> See an excellent interpretation of this fragment by F. Blaise in: (Blok, Lardinois, 2006, pp. 114 – 133.)

<sup>10</sup> The last two occurrences of the word μέτρον are not directly related to moderation and they are about completing the measure (or span) of youth (ἡβης μέτρον) (v. 1119, 1326).

<sup>11</sup> Just in that period composite words such as συμπάσχειν (have a fellow-feeling, sympathize, feel sympathy), συνασχαλᾶν (sympathize indignantly with) and συνειδέναι (sharing the knowledge of something with somebody) are occurring together with the word συμπόσιον (Snell, 1960, p. 314 note 22).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Platon, *Leg.* 649d – 50b, Alcaeus, fr. 333, Aeschylus, fr. 393, Theognis, fr. 499 – 502.

it is an important socio-political phenomenon that is closely related to the functioning of *poleis* in the end of the archaic period.

Let us go back to Theognis and his five occurrences of the word measure that are connected with wine drinking and with the symposium institution. Wine drinking is an ideal example of difficultness of keeping the right measure. Theognis praises and admonish wine because it is the good as well as it is evil and who knows the measure of wisdom (μέτρον ἔχων σοφίης) cannot either praise it or fault it (v. 873 – 876). It is the good for those who drink it wisely (ἐπισταμένως; v. 212), and the evil for those who drink it beyond their limit (ὑπὲρ μέτρον), because it can easily dull the mind (v. 497 – 498). Moreover, wine reveals the human character.

„Experts recognize gold and silver by fire, but wine reveals the mind of a man (ἄνδρὸς δ' οἴνος ἔδειξε νόον), even though he is very prudent, if he takes and drinks it beyond his limit (ὑπὲρ μέτρον), so that it puts to shame even one who was formerly wise (σοφόν)”. (v. 499 – 502).<sup>13</sup>

The fact how we are able to control wine drinking examines our ability to know the measure and it reveals our character. Theognis deals with the topic of behaviour during symposium in his extensive elegy consisting of 29 verses (v. 467 – 496). There he urges Simonides not to force anybody on the feast to do what he does not want to. Especially not to force those that have drunk too much to stay and drink more because those that exceed their limit in drinking (ὑπερβάλληι πόσιος μέτρον) are no longer in command of their tongue or their mind. This concerns even those that were wise (σώφρων) when sober. Inappropriate behaviour of the drunken seems disgraceful in the eyes of the sober. Therefore Theognis says about himself that when he has had his limit of honey-sweet wine (ἀντὰρ ἐγὼ – μέτρον γὰρ ἔχω μελιηδέος οἴνου), he will take thought for sleep that brings release from ills. In the end he urges everybody to make good conversation on fest, long avoiding quarrels with one another and speaking openly to one and all alike. In this way a symposium will never lose its grace (χοῦτως συμπόσιον γίνεται οὐκ ἄχαρι).

For Theognis common drinking during symposium stands for behaviour model in the community and he evidently uses identical expressions when describing symposium and public life (cf. Levine, 1985, pp. 180 – 186).<sup>14</sup> Warning against excesses during a symposium is warning against disturbing the order in the community. When the bad men, whose character is intemperate, prevail on the feast then the feast degrades into uncontrolled drinking, mutual quarrels and inappropriate acts that will overpower also those who did not intend to drink too much. But if the moderation prevails then the talk and acts are balanced and the feast is harmonious.

<sup>13</sup> In this connection it is interesting how drunken Alcibiades talks about Socrates in Plato's *Symposium*. Socrates in his interpretation is blessed with really heroic restrained character: „And again at festivities he [Socrates] alone was able to take pleasure in other things, and in drinking as well; for even though he wasn't willing to drink, whenever he was compelled to do so, he outdid everybody; and what is the most amazing thing of all, no human being has ever seen Socrates drunk.“ (*Symp.* 220a). Socrates here stands for an unachievable model of absolute self-control; he is a kind of an ideal prototype of stoic wise man.

<sup>14</sup> The same intention can be found in Solon (fr. 4, 5 – 10) and it is indicated also by Xenophanes' description of symposium in his fragment B 1.

Let us remind the above interpreted verses 39 – 52 where Theognis warns against the appearance of a tyrant as a punishment for *hybris* of citizens, whose leaders begin to act unjustly. The situation in the community is similar to that one at the symposium where intemperate drinker or the group of drinkers influences the others – moderate so far – to quarrel and do inappropriate acts. The peace in the community / at the symposium is conditioned by moderation of citizens / friends that prevents from excesses and injustice and this moderation has to be constantly controlled and sustained.

We are going to point out another parallel between behaviour at the symposium and in the community. As the impending bad situation in the community does not have to be evident at the first sight (cf. v. 39 – 52, or more warning verses 667 – 682), it can be the same with the potentially bad character of the participants of symposium. Therefore, Theognis encourages to maximum carefulness:

“Among one's fellow diners let a man have his wits (πεπνυμένος) about him, let everything seem to escape his notice as if he were not there, and let him contribute jokes, but when he's outside let him be firm (καρτερός), recognizing the temperament which each one has.” (v. 309 – 312)

These quoted verses interestingly show the way how to be attentive during symposium. Theognis used the word πεπνυμένος which is a participle of the verb πέπνυμαι. The most usual meaning of this word is “to be wise”. But the Liddel-Scott-Jones Lexicon in the first place states its older meaning “to be conscious, in full possession of one's faculties“ referring to Homer who used it in his description of faculties of Teiresias “...the blind seer, whose mind (φρένες) abides steadfast. To him even in death Persephone has granted reason (νόον), that he alone should have understanding (πεπνῦσθαι); but the others flit about as shadows.“ (Od. 10, 493 – 495). The community at symposium is the “city on a small scale“ (Donlan, 1985, s. 236), “a microcosm of the larger community“ of polis (Levine, 1985, s. 180). Threat lurking for a man during symposium is a parallel of threats that emerge in political struggle.

Therefore, competent man should surpass others with his awoken alert in the community as well as at the symposium. He should be wise in Odysseus way, he should “adopt the mood of the cunning octopus which seems to resemble the rock to which it clings“ (v. 213 – 216, cf. 1071) because “cleverness (σοφίη) is in truth superior to inflexibility (ἀτροπίης)“ (v. 218). The wine drunk at the symposium reveals the human character that has to be watched carefully. The symposium is “laboratory for investigation of men's intention“ (Donlan, 1985, s. 237). During a feast clever man adapts to other participants but as soon as he is out, knowing the character of the people on the feast, he is (καρτερός) firm. Clever and firm behaviour is a precondition of social and political survival. These qualities are also an assumption of credibility of a real personal and political partner.

To acquire such behaviour is a matter of long education. Theognis' verses are often presented in the form of moral lessons addressed to Cynus. We are going to show what recommendations Theognis gives to Cynus relating the symposium. Let us start with probably the most quoted Theognis' verses 27 – 36, cited by Plato, Xenophon and Aristotle. Here Theognis says that he is going to give Cynus everything what he has learned in his youth from noble men. He teaches him to be sensible and wise (πέπνυσο) and not to gain prestige, success or wealth by shameful or unjust acts. He ends the advices with these words:

„...do not seek the company of base  
men, but always cling to the noble.

Drink and dine with them, sit with them,  
and be pleasing to those whose power is great.  
For from the noble you will learn noble things, but if you  
mingle with the base, you will lose even the sense you  
have.“ (v. 31 – 36)

Does Theognis invite Cyrnus to booze and gormandize in lobbies? Certainly not. Though in the given verses the symposium is not explicitly indicated, the common drinking, dining and the appeal to be pleasing, they all refer to it. As we have mentioned the symposium had social and educational role. Its part was also an appreciation and evaluation of young men's behaviour by elders. Therefore Theognis recommends Cyrnus to join such community which would consist of good, noble men, and to learn how to behave, speak and act in their way, so that they would like him for his good qualities. It is the society of clever men where Cyrnus can find models worth following.

Cyrnus is a young man and his education only starts, therefore it is very important who he will be meeting with. “The base are not always born base from the womb”, points out Theognis in another place. They can be led to evil by establishing friendship with base men from whose they can „learn bad actions, foul speech, and outrageous behaviour“ (v. 305 – 308). In the company of clever men Cyrnus acquires healthy patterns of behaviour, and contrariwise in the bad company he “catches” bad habits. The evil is like a contagious disease that can have mortal consequences too. On the contrary, the good is like health that has to be cared for by healthy way of life.

We can find the emphasis on the contact with the good ones in another Theognis' verses. In one of the poems he says to Cyrnus that when he is invited to the dinner, he should take a seat to that one, who knows every kind of skill (σοφίη), “whenever he says something clever, take note of it so that you may learn and go home with this as profit (κέρδος).“ (v. 563 – 566) Let us recall Theognis' and also Solon's warnings against destructiveness of profit which the base want to gain by breaking the rights of others inducing conflicts in the community leading to its devastation. Instead of this type of profit Theognis offers Cyrnus another one – it is σοφίη – skill, cleverness, wisdom. This unlike injustice does not lead to the destruction of an individual as well as community. On the contrary, wisdom enables Cyrnus to manage well himself and – when his education is over and he joins the political life to which he is being prepared by symposium – also to managing of public matters.

The way to wisdom is certainly not easy. There are not many men who are really wise and noble. Theognis emphasises to Cyrnus that if he knows a noble man he should not regret any effort and follow him and if it is necessary, he should walk to any distance (v. 71 – 72). Even gods do not give anything to a man without effort and hard work, “but in hard work there is glory“ (v. 463 – 464). For Theognis wisdom is one of the highest excellences (v. 1074). And it is the same for wisdom as for other competencies – it has to be tried for them:

“Wear yourself out in the pursuit of excellence, let justice be dear to you, and don't let any gain that is shameful win you over.“ (v. 465 – 466)

The cited couplet shows an interesting symmetry. In the first verse we can find excellence (ἀρετή) and justice (δίκαιος). The second verse is in opposition to the first one. In opposition to the excellence stands the shameful (αἰσχρός), the gain stands opposite to the justice (κέρδος; in this case it is not the gain of wisdom but the gain often criticised by archaic lyric poets that is unjust, ill-gotten). These two opposite



pairs are connected with two opposite mental attitudes. On the side of excellence and justice is the effort and ability to get to like them, on the side of gain and shamefulness is the warning that they can win over us (νικάτω). In this couplet the shamefulness is presented as a threat that can take hold of us when we are passive. On the contrary, the excellence requires our activity – the effort to get to like it and acquire it.

Even if the way to the excellence such as wisdom, justice or moderation requires effort, according to Theognis they have one important advantage over gaining a wealth:

“Many base men are rich and many noble men poor;  
but we'll not take their wealth in exchange  
for virtue (ἀρετή), since this is always secure,  
while wealth belongs now to one man, now to another.“  
(v. 315 – 318)

The disadvantage of hard acquiring of the excellence (virtue) turns into an advantage. Unlike wealth that often depends on the favour of fickle fortune, the excellence is, if we manage to achieve it, much more stable wealth. If Cynus meets good people and learns excellence from them, then nobody will be able to deprive him of it.

The advantage of excellence lies not only in its permanence but the excellence action is also appreciated by the community and Theognis persuades of this fact his listeners in these verses (933 – 938):

Excellence and good looks (ἀρετή καὶ κάλλος) go hand in  
hand with few men.  
Fortunate the one who is allotted both of these.  
All honour him: the young, those of his own  
age, and his elders alike yield their place.  
In his old age he stands out among the townsmen and no  
one seeks to deprive him of respect or his just rights.

The content of these verses is similar to Tyrtaeus' verses in fragment 12, 35 – 43. There Tyrtaeus speaks about reward for warriors who during battles showed furious valour (θούριδος ἀλκῆς), „which is the best human prize (ἄεθλον ... ἄριστον) and the fairest (κάλλιστόν) for a young man to win“ (fr. 12, 13 – 14). Like for Tyrtaeus valour, for Theognis excellence and beauty represent something which achieving is related to a long training and great effort. Both poets also reward those, who have achieved the required quality, with honour, respect and just rights belonging to them also in their oldest age. The poets differs in the fact that according to Tyrtaeus only the heroes – warriors deserve the reward for pro-social behaviour, because only they ensure the safety of the community; while according to Theognis everybody who has achieved the excellence deserves the reward. According to Theognis, the community of a city is not already dependent (only) on war excellence but on the civil excellence that itself comprise wisdom, justice, moderation and other properties which are an important precondition and keeper of good relations in a polis.

Also another Theognis' quatrain is connected with the excellence as a constant value, with active care about it and with the symposium:

“May no other new pursuit (μελέδημα) arise for me in place of excellence and learning (ἀρετῆς σοφίης), but ever holding on to this (ἀλλὰ τόδ' αἰὲν ἔχων) may I enjoy lyre, dance, and song, and may I have noble thoughts (ἔσθλὸν ἔχοιμι νόον) in company with the noble (ἀγαθῶν)“ (v. 789 – 792).

During the first reading it may seem strange to us that Theognis connects the pursuit (μελέδημα – care) of excellence and wisdom with the delights of symposium: lyre, singing, dancing and a good company. The key to the solution of this “puzzle” is the way how Theognis (and other archaic lyric poets) use the image of symposium.

Daniel B. Levine proposes four categories which will emerge upon consideration of the parallels between polis and symposium: 1) Education – symposium as a place of education for the citizen, preparing him to take part in public life; 2) Moderation and Order – a drinking party is an ideal setting for warnings about the dangers of disorder and excess, the lessons from which can be applied to daily life; 3) Cunning – in a symposium, as in a polis, one must beware of one’s fellow men, who will try to deceive him; 4) Utopia – the ideal sympotic setting is described as an embodiment of a Golden Age, where the Kharites still bless men with their presence and the ideal sympotic setting is described as an embodiment of a Golden Age (Levine, 1985, p. 177 – 178). The desire for easy abundance and harmony of the Golden Age in the contrast to the hard work, troubles and disputes which accompany the people of the later, decadent ages (cf. Hesiod; *Op.* 109 –201) is “a standard topos in archaic Greek poetry“ (Levine, 1985, p. 194).

In this article we have met with Levine's first three categories. The key one for the interpretation of lastly quoted Theognis' verses is the fourth category. In many verses Theognis complains about his bad life situation: loss of property and prestige, his poverty, about having been forced to exile, about the bad conditions in the community, about betrayal of his friends, about greediness, disdainfulness and foolishness of people. In the reality of decadent world of “iron age”, where Theognis lives, he is forced to take care about many different and often unpleasant things. In ideal case, in the state of perfection of “Golden Age”, he would have only one, but the most important care – the care for wisdom and excellence. Only this care does not cause any suffering. Quite the contrary, it is a pleasure, like a time spent in the company of good friends, the time – that in the ideal case is never-ending – that does not depress but ennoble.<sup>15</sup>

The ideal for Theognis as well as for Socrates of Socratic tradition is not the passivity but the activity. Man should know the right measure to become moderate and with the help of sound mind he should actively care for excellence and wisdom. For Theognis, in contrast to later mainly Hellenic understanding, this, let us call it “personality dimension”, is not an aim but the means. The excellences such as

<sup>15</sup> This analyzed quatrain continues in Douglas' edition of Theognidea with the following couplet: “harming with hurtful deeds neither foreigner nor citizen, but living righteously.“ (v. 793 – 794). Here Douglas remarks: “Many editors combine the last couplet with 795-96.“ These following verses go like this: „Enjoy yourself. Some of the harsh citizens will speak ill of you, some better.“ (Douglas, 1999, p. 287). It seems to us very meaningful to join these all eight verses to the one unit. Then the first quatrain (v. 789 – 792) would refer, in intention of our interpretation, to an ideal state of “Golden Age”, the second quatrain (v. 793 – 796) would stand in the opposition to the first one and it would point to actual “decadent age”, in which, even if we try to live correctly, our effort will not be appreciated by everyone (cf. v. 24 – 26 and 801 – 804).

wisdom, justice, sound mind and proper measure are *conditio sine qua non* for functioning of all social bonds – from erotic relations, through symposium, to the polis itself. The aim is the return to the harmony of “Golden Age” which is represented by a well managed symposium. The aim is the community of polis consisting of moderate citizens headed by fair leaders.

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