THE SYNCRETISM OF BALTIC FOLKLORE AND CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS VALUES IN THE CONTEXT OF POSTHUMANISM

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Abstract

In this research we reflect about one such serious epistemological problem, or broad megatrend of the mind, is the re-definition of human essence, the necessity of which is reflected in posthumanism. Thus, the central research question is: how, and by what methods, can the mutual influences of Christianity and the tribal cultures of Latvia – whose discourse is largely revealed in folklore (fairy tales and folk songs) – be demonstrated? By employing philosophical reflection, the methods of the Annales School, and discourse analysis, this study examines the possibilities of mutual influence between tribal cultures in the Latvian territory and Christianity, as well as their posthumanist potential. According to our research, it must be concluded that in Latvian fairy tales it is possible to see expressions of the syncretism of Baltic folklore and Christianity. Human in the relevant discourse should be defined as a being who is in dialogical and equal relations with other beings in a multicentric worldview. Therefore, the use of fairy tales and other folklore groups in education, etc. could hypothetically help a person individually and society as a whole to practically redefine a person.

Keywords: folklore, Christianity, otherness, syncretism, posthumanism, eco philosophy.

Introduction

Relevance of the topic. Gidley in "Globally scanning for "Megatrends of the Mind": Potential futures of futures thinking" cited, that "All of the leading holistic thinkers identify the crisis of our time as an epistemological crisis. We are not arguing against technology as such, or against capitalism in itself. We are saying that underneath our political, social, and economic arrangements, the way modern culture defines and understands reality itself is faulty" (Gidley 2010).

One such serious epistemological problem, or broad megatrend of the mind, is the re-definition of human essence, the necessity of which is reflected in posthumanism. Humanism, as an outdated discourse defining human, was questioned as early as the 19th century by poets Wordsworth and Shelley, who sang of the possibility of nature existing without the need for human presence (Aretoulakis, 2018). Philosopher Michel Foucault speaks of the death of the humanist definition of man and, in the context of posthumanism, demands not only to decenter the human in many discourses (evolutionary, ecological, technological), but also to explore these discourses in order to reveal the characteristic humanistic, anthropocentric, normative notions of humanity and the concept of human (Han – Pile 2010). Authoritative collections of articles are published within the framework of the posthumanism megatrend, for example, Rossini et al. (2018) has published a collection of articles "European Posthumanism" (Rossini 2018), another collection of articles "Transhumanism and Posthumanism in Twenty-First Century Narrative" (Baelo-Allué 2023), a website has been created to unite posthumanism researchers – Geneology of Posthumanism, etc. One of the most important branches of posthumanism is eco-philosophy, including ecosophy, the origins of which can be found in Scandinavian philosophy and the pioneer of which is considered to be Arne Ness, who, among others, introduced the concept of deep ecology. Eco-philosophy is also popular in Canada, where a significant work in this mental megatrend is D. Sessions' work Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered (Sessions, 2007).

Rossini (2018), together with his co-authors, defines posthumanism as a discourse that is characterized by the urgency not only of the question of what it means to be human, but also of the relationship between humans and their non-human others, thus exhibiting a tendency to think beyond humanism, anthropo-morphism or anthropocentrism (Aretoulakis, 2018). So, here are two important questions of posthumanism and ecophilosophy – redefining of human and the question of relationship between humans and their non-human others. To achieve this, posthumanists often study the relationship of pre-humanist cultures with nature.

The authors of this study represent a posthumanist view on the need to redefine human nature and believe that research in this direction could help to address the crises described above, as well as provide significant new knowledge and contributions to future research. The question of this study is "How does the discourse of Baltic folklore and Christian religion describe and help to redefine human and non-human relationships?" Thus, the theme of this study is clearly linked to the theme proposed by the Klaipėda conference, "The demands and challenges of contemporary society: present and future insights.

Frequently, when we encounter the phrase "demands and challenges," we implicitly assume, or our everyday, semi-conscious awareness presumes, that there exist some objectively given, almost "from above" prescribed, demands and challenges which merely need to be clearly articulated, after which we may confidently proceed to construct the best possible society of the future. Yet we discern another option: today, when reflecting upon the possibility of shaping an as yet unknown, better future, where nothing is fixed, objective, or preordained, we remain free, in dialogue and profound contemplation, to discover and articulate an entirely new vision of the future of humanity and society.

Critical posthumanism interrogates the very idea of the human and continues philosophically oriented discussions that seek to propose a more democratic model of the future. In discourses where the ideals of the human and of society are debated—where our thinking strives toward truth about humanity, the concepts of the good and of well-being are both necessary and ontologically present (Kūle, 2000). What is at stake here is not the notion of humanity attempting to flee from its own essence, but rather the effort to apprehend that essence in its depth and inexhaustible fullness, developing in accordance with it.

Research problem is crisis in relationships between human and non – human beings, between human and nature and incomplete modern definitions of human.

Subject matter of the research – given the scope of the present study, the research subject was defined as the analysis and reflection on values that reveal the multicentric aspects of the syncretism between Latvian folklore and Christianity.

Research aim. The aim of the study is to identify and describe possibility to define human, relationships between human and non - human beings and values shared by Christianity and Latvian folklore in context of posthumanism and eco philosophy.

Research objective - to examine elements of Latvian folklore, with a particular focus on fairy tales.

Research methods:

Philosophical reflection – Approaching unquestionable truths, the essence of ideas, through questioning, doubting, refutation and amazement;

Discourse analysis;

Qualitative Content Analysis; A method of textual data analysis that reduces a text to a much shorter summary or representation of its meaning. This analysis reveals the meaning, purpose, or impact of any form of communication – fiction, print, radio broadcasts – by examining and evaluating the content, recurring themes, details, allusions, and indirect references.

Tasks of research

1. To show possible linking posthumanism – Philosophy of dialogue – Christian philosophy.
2. To show possible linking dialogicity in Christian philosophy and Baltic folklore.
3. To show possible human definitions and relationships between human and non human beings in Baltic folklore.

1. Linking posthumanism – Philosophy of dialogue - Christian philosophy

It is possible that in popular as well as critical discussions concerning the human of the future and the societal model most appropriate to that human, we have already moved beyond the unproductive "swamp of circular discourse." Evidence of this may be seen in Scandinavian contexts, for example in the engagement of Norwegian universities with eco-philosophy (Mathews, 2023), or in the cultural phenomenon of Nordic Noir cinema (Jóhannsson, 2021), both of which reflect a mentality of human–nature equivalence. In short, one of the most salient elements of critical posthumanism is its critique of

anthropocentrism, including the question of how to articulate a less harmful and more scientifically grounded ontological place of the human within the universe.

Eco-philosophy, in its critique of anthropocentrism, frequently recalls that within the mythological worldview, the human being was never "the measure of all things" nor the center of the world. Rather, mythological cosmologies, when considered in terms of their values, are better characterized by the equivalence of human beings and the elements of the natural world, animals, plants, lakes, fjords. Eco-philosophers propose to describe this perspective as *multicentrism* (Mueller, 2009), which corresponds to this study's focus on otherness and its (independent) intrinsic value.

On other hand Rossini, together with his co-authors, defines posthumanism as a discourse that is characterized by the urgency not only of the question of what it means to be human, but also of the relationship between humans and their non-human others, thus exhibiting a tendency to think beyond humanism, anthropo-morphism or anthropocentrism (Aretoulakis, 2018). Therefore this ideas linked posthumanism and eco philosophy with philosophy of dialogue.

It is sometimes superficially assumed that the origins of anthropocentrism are to be found in Christianity. Yet if this is the case, then only insofar as the rationality of salvation, required of the practicing Christian, demands the realization of the self. In terms of ontology, however, Christianity is in fact much closer to multicentrism than to anthropocentrism.

At the end of the twelfth century and the beginning of the thirteenth, the culture of Christianity entered the territory of present-day Latvia. For approximately seven centuries thereafter, the Curonian, Latgalian, Selonian, and Semigallian tribes, who collectively formed the basis of Latvian culture, were brought into close and continuous contact with it. As has been observed, "In the consciousness of the people, Christianity, authentic, non-violent, and compassionate, has become deeply rooted and has fused with the best elements of the ancient Baltic heritage. This is evidenced by the fact that folklore has been preserved most robustly in those regions where Catholicism, that is, a rather strict form of Christianity, predominated. It is precisely in Southern Courland and Latgale that one finds the most authentic performers of ancient songs. Many of these women were simultaneously the most devoted churchgoers and the most knowledgeable in church hymns. Even today, for example, the Suiti women sing distinctive spiritual songs in their traditional manner, just as their mothers and grandmothers once did" (Zeimuļs-Priževoits, 2011).

On this basis, the driving question of the present study, rooted both in intuition and in historical evidence, was not whether a syncretism of Latvian folklore and Christian values was possible, but rather what the proportion and character of these values might be, and how this could be demonstrated and described in cases where the presence of such values in fairy tales and folk songs is only indirect or implicit.

In the course of the study, it became evident that there exist extensive possibilities for analyzing the syncretism of Latvian folklore and Christianity, possibilities not only for the present inquiry but also for further, broader research. In this sense, the present study may be regarded as programmatic.

The study employs the methods of the *Annales* School and the dialogical approach, grounded in the principles of dialogical philosophy as developed and described by M. Buber, E. Levinas, P. Florensky, and S. Averintsev. These principles resonate with the concept of *mentalités* central to the *Annales* School. It remains uncertain whether P. Florensky was directly influenced by the *Annales* School or vice versa; however, in reflecting on the iconography of the Orthodox Church, Florensky articulates an idea closely related to the concept of mentalities:

"The human being does not think, but his fingers and hands, with the collective mind, with the mind of his own culture, indeed think very much about the determinacy of all that exists" (Florensky, 1993).

In this context, the study concurs with the perspective that:

"The concept of *mentalités*, of *histoire-problème* and *histoire totale*, introduced a new vision regarding the making of history and its subjects and main protagonists. By shifting the axis of analysis from specific events and individual protagonists (wars, kings, aristocrats) to a *longue durée* perspective, the *Annales* School emphasized the collective nature of mentalities. This approach reclaimed vast areas of history, where economy, religion, science, literature, technology, arts, peasants, artisans, servants,

merchants, books, mills, instruments, ships, and trains shaped decisions and practices. The history of science and technology found renewed space within this framework, enlarging their scope and fostering a closer relationship between science, technology, and society, science and technology as part of culture and society, and as the result of human agency. This vision continues to shape today's narratives" (Diogo, 2020).

The *Annales* School's concept is highly relevant to folklore studies, as it emphasizes *mentalité*, or collective consciousness, whose manifestations are deeply grounded in collective experience. Consequently, these manifestations are considered as significant as authoritative philosophical texts or other literary and cultural sources.

The dialogical method is fundamentally grounded in the idea of otherness, whereby the "other" is understood as a self-valuable center of existence that organizes the world around itself in a manner unique to its own being (Florensky, 2002). In dialogical philosophy, these are referred to as subjects, or, in Buber's terminology, as *I–Thou* relationships, in contrast to *I–It* relationships. Value, in this framework, is not determined consumeristically or comparatively within a predefined value system (valuable–valueless). Rather, otherness itself constitutes value: for example, a man is not deemed more valuable than a woman because some preordained comparative value system allows it; instead, man and woman are each unique and intrinsically valuable in their incomparable otherness.

The dialogical method, together with V. Dilthey's concept of *descriptive psychology*, emphasizes the inseparability of psyche and human ideas in the adequate description of historical situations. This represents a subtle philosophical nuance, requiring the researcher of intellectual history to respect the otherness of the subject and to avoid forcing it into the reductionist schemes of modern thought. It also demands that the object of study not be divided, for instance, into ethical, aesthetic, and psychological fragments, since such division would compromise both the integrity of the subject's otherness and the study of otherness in general.

Consequently, any study of folklore or mythological and religious thought that aims to position itself, as an ecophilosophical or critically posthumanist inquiry, must be descriptive, dialogical, and phenomenological. Such a study seeks to translate and reveal the otherness of thought in the era under investigation, as well as the fragile, distinctive characteristics of the subject's unique center of existence. In this way, the dialogical method provides the methodological foundation for the present research, guiding the identification of dialogical and multicentric features within both Christianity and Latvian folklore.

In the doctoral dissertation *"Ideas of Orthodoxy and Hesychasm in Latvia, 1834–1936"* (Vuguls, 2012), the central question was posed: why did Latvian and Estonian parishioners, predominantly Protestants, and for the most part peasants from Vidzeme, begin converting to Orthodoxy from the 1830s onward? And how can it be explained that, under the widely accepted narrative of Russification during the latter half of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, the Orthodox Church nonetheless devoted disproportionate attention specifically to questions concerning the Latvian language?

Employing the *Annales* school's approach to mentalities and Foucault's method of discourse analysis, this phenomenon was interpreted as a manifestation of a particular vision of otherness. Viewed in this way, as a bearer of the discourse or mentality of otherness, the Orthodox Church's involvement renders intelligible and justified the existence of many seemingly "strange" historical facts. It becomes clear why "the Orthodox Church in Latvia recognized the value and necessity of the Latvian language; why instruction at the Riga Theological Seminary was conducted in Latvian and Estonian; why Russian seminarians learned Latvian or Estonian; why a committee for the translation of Orthodox liturgical books was established; why Latvian parishes were founded, with parish schools opened alongside them." This demonstrates that the Orthodox Church was indeed a Christian church, and that the conversion of Latvian peasants to Orthodoxy cannot be explained as merely accidental, ideologically imposed, or economically determined. Rather, it also rested on the deep, long-standing human longing for a high ideal of humanity (Vuguls, 2012).

In the present study, however, we move beyond the mere recognition of such historical facts and seek instead to critically reflect on the stereotypes that continue to persist within the post-Soviet cultural space, namely, the view of Christianity as an ideology violently imposed upon the Latvian nation. To be

sure, the policy of russification has its place in this discussion, and the element of coercion exercised over the course of seven centuries cannot be denied. Yet it is equally undeniable that the Latvian people (as well as Estonians and Lithuanians) responded receptively to Christianity, or at least to its underlying ideas.

These considerations gave rise to the central research question of this study: might we find parallels between the discourses of Latvian folklore and Christianity? Can we demonstrate within Latvian folklore, through concrete examples, the syncretism of its ideas with those of Christianity? Hypothetically, we posited that the fundamental basis of such syncretism lies in the fact that both discourses are grounded in universal human values. Consequently, when critically engaging with the formation of post-humanist "projects," we considered that knowledge of human essence and values relevant to the human condition might be sought not only in modernity and postmodernity, but also in the more distant and recent past—where two seemingly disparate cultures nonetheless managed to enter into dialogue and mutual understanding precisely on the foundation of these universal values.

In everyday thought, it is sometimes mistakenly assumed that human essence is ascribed certain particular qualities in one era or within one philosophical school, while in another era or school it is attributed entirely different qualities, thereby suggesting that humanity and society themselves are fundamentally altered. Humanism often serves as an example: it is commonly claimed that philosophers and the spirit of the age placed at the center an anthropocentric notion of the human being as *the measure of all things*, and so forth. Even if such an idea did indeed dominate during the Renaissance and beyond, it nevertheless represented only a preliminary sketch of true humanity, a transitional stage in the hermeneutical process of understanding the human, one that continues to this day.

Viewed critically, the essence of the human being must remain the same: infinite and indeterminate. What changes across various invariants of thought are the aspects of this essence that are consciously emphasized or foregrounded, while others remain implicit or unarticulated. On this basis, the present study does not presume to offer a final or definitive account, but rather seeks to proceed with intellectual integrity in its inquiry into human essence. To this end, attention is directed toward fairy tales and other sources of Latvian tribal folklore, with the aim of examining whether the values embedded therein can be understood as (a) universal human values, (b) values distinctive to the specifically Latvian mentality, or (c) values unambiguously derived from the Christian discourse.

2. Dialogicality and Multicentrism in the Syncretism of Latvian Folklore and Christianity
2.1. The Essence of Dialogicality and Multicentrism

The *silent nothing* that surrounds us is most likely a phenomenon with psychological and epistemological, rather than ontological, origins. Listening, which constitutes a fundamental prerequisite for dialogue and understanding, marks the beginning of perceiving new linguistic possibilities and derepression (Fromm, 1960).

A central question arises: why has the topic of Latvian folklore been chosen in relation to dialogicality and the discourse of Christian values? And why is eco-philosophy, particularly the concept of multicentrism, relevant beyond the Scandinavian context?

First, the connection lies in the Catholic roots of the region, where Christianity, authentic, non-violent, and compassionate, has become deeply rooted and fused with the best elements of ancient Baltic heritage. Second, this interest may stem from personal formative experiences in childhood, which involved solitary immersion in nature, such as during herding or other activities closely connected with the environment, animals, and practical work, experiences as a forester, or in proximity to livestock farmers (grandmothers), forest workers, and tractor operators. In these contexts, dialogue with nature and things often dominated over dialogue with humans.

The fundamental principle of dialogical philosophy is to shift the researcher's or actor's focus from Subject–Object (S–O) or *I–It* relations, where the researcher observes the world from a position of anthropocentric superiority and the ideal of scientific neutrality, toward Subject–Subject (S–S), Other–Other, or *I–Thou* relations (Buber, 1937). Here, the researcher is no longer merely an observer, but a co-participant in the world.

In this framework, otherness as a discourse of value is not a property of any single philosophical school or historical period. Rather, it flourishes under conditions favorable to democracy and critical thinking. As noted above, the "other" is understood as a self-valuable center of existence, which organizes the world around itself in a manner unique to its being. In Other–Other relations, both participants in the dialogue respect one another's intrinsic value, independently of any external system of values. This understanding aligns closely with the conception of God as an energetic presence fully divine within each particle of the created universe

2.2. Dialogicality in Christianity

Christianity provides a particularly strong context for the flourishing of dialogicality and the recognition of the intrinsic value of otherness. For example, the parable of the Good Samaritan can be interpreted in terms of otherness: in their otherness, every individual is akin to us and thus the closest, deserving our attention and recognition of value regardless of social rank or national affiliation. Similarly, the injunction, "Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you" (Mt. 5:44) emphasizes the essential difference of the dialogue partner and the asymmetry between the parties, which ideally should not preclude the possibility of dialogue and love. Regarding non-human beings, the statement "Look at the birds of the air: they do not sow or reap, they do not gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?" (Mt. 6:26) is subject to varied interpretations. From a Christian perspective, the assertion that humans are "of more value" is better understood rhetorically rather than anthropocentrically, since it is immediately clarified that the "heavenly Father feeds them," indicating that divine care, complete in its essence, extends equally to animals.

As noted, Christian theologians who consider themselves genuine philosophers, in a manner comparable to the *kalama suta*'s rational approach (the parable of the arrow-wounded warrior), emphasize human salvation and awakening. This focus, however, does not preclude the recognition of the otherness of animals or nature within these belief systems.

It is particularly relevant to highlight in Christian theology the idea of God's unique essence, which is intrinsically good, meaning that existence is not neutral, as conceived in modern science (a factor responsible for many limitations and problems). Furthermore, God is energetically present in every particle of existence and, by essence, transcendent, without constraining divine omnipresence and unity. Both modern scientific and Christian conceptions of existence are not aprioristic; yet the Christian conception allows for a more coherent explanation of reality in its unity, without losing the ethical and value-laden components.

P. Florensky, reflecting on the iconography of the Orthodox Church, which constitutes an essential component of Christian philosophy, explains that reversed perspective in icons reveals the collective mentality of Christianity regarding otherness. In Orthodox iconography, the greater the violation of a single viewpoint, the greater the possibility of multiple coexisting perspectives appearing in the icon, thereby rendering it more authentically Christian. Consequently, the icon conditionally presents an alternative worldview, depicting the coexistence of multiple intrinsically valuable centers of existence.

To apprehend dialogicality within Latvian folklore, the study employs a linguistic network emphasizing the following key elements: dialogue; intrinsically valuable centers of existence; the omnipresence of God; the notion that goodness inherently carries values; the intrinsic worth of all human beings; and the emphasis on the moral significance of virtuous action.

2.3. Dialogicality in Latvian Folklore

It is not easy to imagine how people lived in centuries past; however, examples remain of individuals living in rural homesteads in relative solitude, or engaged in work closely connected with nature or material objects. Such experiences reflect a different perception of the world, characterized by listening or observation, in which "conversations", dialogues with nature and its phenomena, may have predominated.

In fairy tales, detailed descriptions of natural phenomena are often minimal; instead, recurring motifs frequently involve a protagonist, often the youngest son, an orphan boy or girl, or another marginal figure, embarking on a journey to seek fortune in the world. In some narratives, the protagonist, in order to obtain food, considers shooting an animal, such as a hare, deer, or bear; yet the animal pleads for its life. Typically, the protagonist shows mercy, and the animal (or multiple animals) becomes a companion. Together, they navigate the world, overcoming obstacles, performing heroic deeds, rescuing a princess or sibling, and defeating dragons or devils. In some tales, the protagonist is killed by trickery, but friends in the form of animals restore them to life. It may be noted that such narratives more frequently feature animal companions than human ones as allies of the "small, marginalized hero" (Lerhis-Puškaitis, 2003).

In certain stories, the protagonist is portrayed as a simpleton, someone who thinks differently, typically morally and benevolently, contrasting with materially and egoistically minded brothers. Even when faced with hunger, the protagonist shares the last piece of bread or a drink with an animal or occasionally a beggar. Sometimes, the hunger is so intense that the protagonist might consider eating a raw small fish, stealing honey from bees, or even consuming ants. By refraining from these impulses, the protagonist gains the friendship of animals, acquires the ability to summon them for aid when needed, and in some cases even transforms into one of these animals. When a king imposes an impossible task on the protagonist, for example, to construct a bridge of wax, the solution is simple: by calling upon bees for assistance at night, the bridge is completed by morning.

In another category of these tales, the simpleton or orphan saves a fish, such as a pike, instead of eating it or leaving it to die, releasing it back into the water at its request. In this case, the small fish promises to fulfill every wish of the orphan (Lerhis-Puškaitis, 2003).

A rarer category of tales features a protagonist who is able, or learns, to understand the languages of animals, birds, and even trees. For example, an orphan is given to the king as a shepherd of sheep: "He had … a very clever mind. Eventually, he learned so much that he understood the language of trees and birds" (Lerhis-Puškaitis, 2003). Through this ability, he assists the king in overcoming multiple difficulties and becomes an advisor to the king.

Examining this extensive corpus of tales, it is evident that the protagonist, either directly or indirectly, engages in dialogue and cooperation with animals, birds, and trees. As noted, the present study is programmatic, offering extensive potential for further research and expansion along multiple lines. Employing the perspective of philosophical wonder, one is prompted to ask: how is it possible to converse and collaborate with animals, birds, and trees?

To address or attempt to explain this question, we return to the previously outlined linguistic network for capturing dialogicality in Latvian folklore:

1. **Dialogue** – Undoubtedly, the protagonist engages in dialogue with nature, capable of listening and discerning the messages of trees and animals. While such features of a mythological worldview are often interpreted through anthropomorphism or as projections of the mythological human soul onto the external world (an analysis beyond the scope of this study), these anthropocentric interpretations view the mythological human as an incomplete version of the contemporary human. Recognizing a fish or an ant as an intrinsically valuable existence, as a particle of being with unique worth deserving attention, constitutes a sign of dialogicality, clearly reflecting *I–Thou* relations.

2. **Intrinsically Valuable Centers of Existence** – Within this dialogical worldview, animals and trees function as self-valuable centers of existence, deserving the right to live and contribute to a better world rather than serving the protagonist's gastronomic needs.

3. **Good Being Carries Values** – In such a worldview, God performs miracles through each intrinsically valuable center of existence, speaking from each otherness, provided He is allowed to speak. In this sense, it reflects a different conception of being: God is present through His energy in all that exists, rendering existence inherently good rather than neutral.

4. **Emphasis on the Significance of Virtuous Action** – In this morally saturated ontology, virtuous action is organic. Tales may end positively not because the protagonist literally becomes immortal or ascends to kingship, but because, by dialogically participating in reality, in true being, which

is more authentic than the egoistic existence of elder brothers or stepmothers, the protagonist metaphorically emerges from Plato's cave and touches transcendence.

5. **Both human being and non – human being is in the same level of value** or both equally valuable.

6. **All Humans Are Valuable** – It is notable that protagonists most often come from lower, impoverished social strata. If elder brothers might have claims to inheritance, the youngest has the least hope. Orphans, whether male or female, clearly represent the most marginalized individuals in society.

In summary, the protagonist represents the so-called "small person," for whom the Beatitudes state:

"He said: 4. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted… 7. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. 8. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. 9. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. 10. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Mt. 5:1–10)

As noted, it is unlikely that the "small person" protagonist literally marries a princess or becomes a king; in a sense, this may even reflect a certain irony of the tale-tellers, had a Latvian philosophical tradition existed at the time.

How, then, does the protagonist "become a king"? By weaving into a dialogical or multicentric worldview, the protagonist achieves psychological depression (Fromm 1960), or the philosophical emergence from Plato's cave, or, in Christian terms, the transformation of Adam (the Old Human) into Christ (the New Human). Any single linguistic element here is inherently reductive and cannot fully capture the gains of the protagonist as a new discoverer.

In brief, the protagonist exemplifies the human being who, by practically engaging in dialogical I–Thou activity, attains a closer approximation to reality, approaching the world and its entities as they are: intrinsically valuable and independent of any externally imposed or artificial system. In doing so, the protagonist not only realizes but, from the perspective of today's non-dialogical viewpoint, transcends the very essence of humanity.

Conclusions

According to the previous reflections, it must be concluded that in Latvian fairy tales it is possible to see expressions of the syncretism of Baltic folklore and Christianity. Human in the relevant discourse should be defined as a being who is in dialogical and equal relations with other beings in a multicentric worldview. Therefore, the use of fairy tales and other folklore groups in education, etc. could hypothetically help a person individually and society as a whole to practically redefine a person. The theoretical framework of the Annales School, particularly the concept of *mentalité,* understood as a "general mode of thought," "collective perception," "imagination," or "worldview", allows researchers to consider folk songs, fairy tales, and legends as legitimate sources for the history of ideas. The dialogical philosophy notion of otherness as a self-sufficient center of being, alongside Dilthey's recommendations from descriptive psychology, provides the ethical foundation for this study, guiding the observation and description of Latvian folklore and Christianity as unified, indivisible, and characterized by otherness. By applying the principles of dialogical philosophy and analyzing the dialogical aspects of Christian thought, this study develops a conceptual linguistic "network" for capturing dialogicality in Latvian folklore, encompassing: dialogue as dialogicality; self-sufficient centers of being; the omnipresence of God; the moral valence of good existence; the inherent worth of all human beings; and the emphasis on virtuous action.

Over approximately eight centuries, Latvian culture and Christianity have inevitably influenced each other, resulting in instances of overlap and syncretism rooted in shared universal moral values, which can be effectively described as a dialogical mentality. The recurrent theme in Latvian fairy tales, wherein humans converse and cooperate with animals, birds, and plants, is examined from a dialogical perspective, illustrating how folklore discourses facilitate equitable interaction among multiple self-sufficient centers of being. Across various philosophical frameworks, this is conceptualized as Subject–Subject, Other–Other, or I–Thou relationships; in eco-philosophy, it corresponds to multicentrism. This

approach undermines artificially constructed value systems, such as anthropocentric or consumerist worldviews, which exaggerate the importance of a single value while diminishing others, and restores a value-rich mode of existence. By incorporating insights from critical posthumanism and eco-philosophy, the study of the syncretic interaction of values in Latvian folklore and Christianity provides meaningful perspectives on the roots of Latvian cultural identity, while also prompting reflection on values that remain relevant for addressing the needs and challenges of contemporary and future societies.

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BALTŲ FOLKLORO IR KRIKŠČIONIŠKŲ RELIGINIŲ VERTYBIŲ SINCRETIZMAS POSTHUMANIZMO KONTEKSTE

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Santrauka

Šiame tyrime aptariame ir apmąstome vieną iš tokių rimtų epistemologinių problemų arba plačių proto megatrendų – žmogaus esmės permąstymą, kurio būtinybė atsispindi posthumanizme. Filosofas Michelis Foucault kalba apie humanistinio žmogaus apibrėžimo mirtį ir posthumanizmo kontekste reikalauja ne tik iškreipti žmogaus sampratą daugelyje diskursų (evoliucinio, ekologinio, technologinio), bet ir ištirti šiuos diskursus, siekiant atskleisti būdingas humanistines, antropocentrines, normatyvines žmonijos ir žmogaus sampratos sampratas.

Šio tyrimo autoriai atstovauja posthumanistiniam požiūriui į poreikį permąstyti žmogaus prigimtį ir tiki, kad tyrimai šia kryptimi galėtų padėti spręsti aukščiau aprašytas krizes, taip pat suteikti reikšmingų naujų žinių ir indėlio į būsimus tyrimus. Šio tyrimo klausimas yra „Kaip baltų folkloro ir krikščionių religijos diskursas apibūdina ir padeda permąstyti žmonių ir ne žmonių santykius?" Taigi, šio tyrimo tema aiškiai susijusi su Klaipėdos konferencijos pasiūlyta tema „Šiuolaikinės visuomenės reikalavimai ir iššūkiai: dabarties ir ateities įžvalgos".

Tyrimo tikslas – nustatyti ir aprašyti žmogaus apibrėžimo galimybes, žmonių ir ne žmonių santykius bei krikščionybės ir Latvijos folkloro vertybes posthumanizmo ir ekofilosofijos kontekste.

Šiame straipsnyje nagrinėjami dialogiškumo ir multicentrizmo principai Latvijos folklore bei krikščionybės kontekste, siekiant atskleisti vertybių sintezę ir žmogaus prigimties supratimą dialogo, etikos ir kultūrinės sąveikos perspektyvoje. Tyrimo pagrindinis klausimas kyla iš poreikio suprasti, kaip tradiciniai pasakojimai ir religijos diskursai gali padėti interpretuoti žmogaus esmę, vertinant kiekvieną būtybę kaip savarankišką vertingą centrą. Be to, tyrimas siekia parodyti, kaip šios vertybės gali būti aktualios šiandien, padedant gilinti ekologinį, etinį ir multicentrinį pasaulio suvokimą.

Straipsnyje pabrėžiama, kad žmogaus prigimties analizė neapsiriboja konkrečiomis epochos ar filosofinėmis mokyklomis. Kritinis posthumanizmas rodo, kad žmogaus esmė yra begalinė ir nenuspėjama, o įvairūs istorijos ir kultūros diskursai išryškina tik tam tikrus šios esmės aspektus. Dialogo filosofija, remiantis M. Buber, E. Levinas, P. Florensky ir kitų darbais, kartu su Annalių mokyklos mentaliteto principais, leidžia suvokti kolektyvinės sąmonės išraišką ir žmogaus bei aplinkos sąveiką multicentrinėje perspektyvoje. Dialogiškumas čia suprantamas kaip tikras Subjekto–Subjekto santykis, kuriame kitoniškumas yra savaime vertingas, o santykiuose nėra vietos hierarchiniams ar antropocentriniams vertinimams.

Latvijos folklore ši koncepcija atsispindi pasakojimų protagonistuose, dažniausiai „mažuose žmonėse", našlaičiuose ar trečiuose sūnuose, kurie sąveikauja su gyvūnais, paukščiais ir medžiais. Tokiuose pasakojimuose gyvūnai ir augalai yra savarankiški egzistencijos centrai, turintys unikalią vertę, nepriklausomai nuo protagonisto poreikių. Protagonistai dažnai parodo gailestingumą, dalijasi maistu, išmoksta gyvūnų ir augalų kalbų, bendradarbiauja su kitomis būtybėmis ir įveikia įvairias kliūtis. Tokia sąveika atspindi dialogo principus, kuriuose abipusė pagarba ir kitoniškumo pripažinimas yra esminiai.

Krikščionybė sustiprina šią pasaulėžiūrą. Evangelijos pavyzdžiai, tokie kaip Gerasis samarietis, moko, kad kiekvienas individas, nepaisant socialinės padėties ar tautybės, turi teisę į moralinį pripažinimą. Dievo visur buvimas ir esybės gerumas sustiprina multicentrinį pasaulio matymą, o etinės normos ir gailestingumas tampa svarbiausiu veiksmų rodikliu. Ortodoksinė ikonografija demonstruoja kolektyvinę mentalitetą, vizualiai atskleidžiant įvairių savarankiškų egzistencijos centrų bendras sąveikas.

Tyrimo rezultatai parodė, kad dialogiškumo ir multicentrizmo principai leidžia giliau suvokti etinius, moralinius ir ekologinius žmogaus sąveikos su pasauliu aspektus. Latvijos folkloro pasakojimuose ir krikščioniškuose mokymuose matyti bendros vertybės: gailestingumas, bendradarbiavimas, pagarba kitoniškumui ir gebėjimas atpažinti kiekvienos būtybės vidinę vertę. „Mažo žmogaus" archetipas atskleidžia, kad tikrasis žmogaus augimas ir transcendencija įvyksta ne per socialinę ar materialią sėkmę, bet per dialoginę sąveiką ir vertingų santykių kūrimą su pasauliu bei kitomis gyvomis būtybėmis.

Apibendrinant, tyrimas rodo, kad Latvijos folklore ir krikščionybės diskurse egzistuoja sąlyčio taškai, kurie pabrėžia multicentrinę realybę, etinės elgsenos svarbą ir dialogo su pasauliu galimybes. Ši analizė sustiprina mūsų supratimą apie žmogaus vertybes, moralinę atsakomybę ir ekologinį sąmoningumą bei demonstruoja, kad tradicinės pasakos gali būti pedagogine priemone holistiniam pasaulio suvokimui ugdyti.

Pagrindinė straipsnio išvada: remiantis ankstesniais apmąstymais, darytina išvada, kad Latvijos pasakose galima įžvelgti baltų folkloro ir krikščionybės sinkretizmo išraiškas. Žmogus atitinkamame diskurse turėtų būti apibrėžiamas kaip būtybė, kuri yra dialoginiuose ir lygiaverčiuose santykiuose su kitomis būtybėmis daugiacentrėje pasaulėžiūroje. Todėl pasakų ir kitų folkloro grupių naudojimas švietime ir kt. galėtų hipotetiškai padėti tiek individualiai žmogui, tiek visai visuomenei praktiškai iš naujo apibrėžti žmogų.

Pagrindiniai žodžiai: dialogiškumas, multicentrizmas, Latvijos folkloras, krikščionybė, etinės vertybės, posthumanizmas, ekofilosofija.