

The Meaning of Life – And the Possibility of Human Illness – Prolegomena –

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Abstract: The study investigates philosophically the issue of human illness and its organic pertinence to the meaning of human life starting from the recognition that the dangerous encounter with the experience of illness is an **unavoidable** – and as such **crucial** – experience of the life of any living being. As for us humans, there is probably no mortal man who has never suffered of some – any! – kind of disease from his birth to the end of his life... Illness is therefore an experience or outright a danger of existence and its possibility, as well as a way of being that nobody has ever been and will ever be ontologically or existentially exempted from. So, it may well be “arbitrary” or “accidental” which disease affects which being or person, when and to what degree, in what way, etc., but it is factually unavoidable that in the course of one’s entire life – from its very beginning to its very end – one would never fall ill in some respect. The paper discusses this issue by the ontological investigation of possibility.

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Ever since the very beginning – that is, at the very origin of things – we must clearly become aware and responsible that the sui generis philosophical nature of any meditation on “such” subjects must be ensured by repeated efforts and invariable attention. In conclusion, it has been out of the question from the very beginning that in the discussion of the issue “thematized”¹ here we should be satisfied with some “analyses” on the margins of the “newest conceptions”, recognitions and debates of all-time medicine, biology, anthropology, or psychology. Or, for that matter, with “meditations” – officially proclaimed “philosophical” – which place these novelties into contexts considered “more general” by the mechanical operation of various termini technici and “methods”

¹ It is important to draw special attention to the fact that the terms “thematization” and “theme” are used in a meaning and horizon considerably outlined and “tried-out” ontologically, existentially, and methodologically, elaborated in several of my previous discussions. In connection with this issue, see primarily the studies in my volume *Kérdő jelezés – (több)csendbeni alkalmazott filozófiai zaj-háborítás a szabad(ság) kérdezés(é)ben* (Question marking – a (multi)silenced applied philosophical breach of noise in free(dom’s) questioning), (Pozsony [Bratislava]: Kalligram, 2004).

taken for some reason as originally philosophical, and bring or drag these novelties to “a more general conceptual validity”.

Compared to such endeavours, the ontological, existential, and historical stakes of the issue – that is, the theme and problems of illness, and especially human illness – are much greater, broader, and more severe. It seems that the dangerous encounter with the greatest variety of bacteria or the experience of illness is an **unavoidable** – and as such **crucial** – experience of the life of any living being. As for us humans, there is probably no mortal man who has never suffered of some – any! – kind of disease from his birth to the end of his life... Illness is therefore an experience or outright a danger of existence and its possibility, as well as a way of being that nobody has ever been and will ever be ontologically or existentially exempted from. So, it may well be “arbitrary” or “accidental” which disease affects which being or person, when and to what degree, in what way, etc., but it is factually unavoidable that in the course of one’s entire life – from its very beginning to its very end – one would fall ill in some respect. We shall see in some more detail in the followings why that is so, and also what is its significance, its meaning, and its possible senses.

However, our most important concern for now is to make one realize that this is mostly essentially about issues at stake related precisely to being, to living-being, and the Dasein, its happening and conducting, as well as its possibilities of being. That is, primarily – and of course ultimately – to our own possibilities of being, and to our possible “ourselvesness”, to its also always possible whole-ness. Directly and deeply.

In connection with this, and also despite this, there is nothing more characteristic nor “natural” than the fact that we humans, we Daseins, relate and refer to illness – not only human, but also plant or animal illness –, to its challenges, afflictions, threats, and dangers in – our own, particular – (existential) modes fixed, centred, outlined, and articulated in a medical, or purportedly medical way. That is, from the perspective of their (the illnesses’) possible observation, study, research, knowledge, and their possible prevention and prophylaxis, as well as their possible alleviation, or directly possible healing.

Under such circumstances, however, the question arises almost spontaneously: what is the “need” or “use” of any kind of philosophical or any other non-medical and not directly therapeutic meditation or investigation? What kind of “surplus” – albeit particular! – could such an endeavour bring to the understanding of illnesses and the state of being ill? And to the understanding of its meanings and significance?

However, such questions can never be “answered” in a philosophically serious way by any other means than an actual, intimated – therefore explicit – exploring, thematizing further-questioning as an – also – explicit, determined, and assumed activity of the act of thinking itself. Therefore in the first place precisely by formulating the question which goes beyond all previous questions: does the medical viewpoint and perspective (alone) – which “rightfully” occupies the central place in this matter – cover indeed the entire horizon, amplitude, and importance of those aspects and relations by which the man, the Dasein – that is, the all-time we-ourselves – faces, relates, and refers to illness, our illnesses and the possibility of

these in their (our!) own being, always in historical timeliness and, of course, as an afflicting challenge? The question seems a rhetorical one of course – and it partly is rhetorical indeed – since obviously there are a series of historically articulated social institutions and organizations, scientific and technical disciplines, and cultural forms which, albeit not at all directly “medical”, are concerned nevertheless with illness and its possibility. Let us only think of all kinds of social policies of nursing and prevention, various pertaining technical researches and developments, sociology, demography, psychology, anthropology, historiography and science history, religions, or the many kinds of literary and other artistic works, etc. And – why not? – philosophy!

All these have suggested and encouraged from the very beginning the recognition and exposition of that philosophically acceptable situation that, with particular reference to man, he is not merely and exclusively “only” “ill” (as usually called in medical language)², and he is not merely and exclusively “only” “healthy” – or more precisely not-ill, or not-yet ill, or right now not ill – but that the human being experiences, reveals, and records for himself illness continuously, actually, and existentially, as a permanent possibility, and relates to it as such. Of course, it experiences it as a particular possibility, and relates to it explicitly as a particular possibility. As a possibility, that is, which pertains in fact to life itself, or more precisely to the essence of life.

As a result, this is exactly the first direction in which our thematizing philosophical further-questioning must turn in connection with illness in general, and human illness in particular. The direction which would lead to our understanding of illness – in its particular amplitude – exactly as a possibility of life, “one” and “particular”. That is to say, exactly and explicitly as the possibility of living being. Therefore – for the time being and as a beginning – as the possibility of living being not only of human life, but of life itself.

However, in order to achieve this, we urgently need some questioning-problematizing, as well as insightful and clarifying preliminary approaches connected precisely to the “notion” of possibility. While, in addition to those said above, we must also be aware of the fact that “possibility” is one of the most interesting and “spectacular”, yet at the same time also troubled-fated, and surely not entirely exploited and employed notions. Unfortunately the history of this term cannot be treated in more details within the frameworks of this paper.

It must be noted nevertheless that the traps of the philosophical and science historical agitations around the “notion” of possibility have somehow been permanently absorbed into its “meanings” prevalent in everyday usage and on this account most straightforward. Therefore in everyday usage – and not only there! – “possibility” is mostly understood to be that what may happen or may occur, but which may just as well be cancelled or fail to happen. In this interpretive scheme therefore “possible” and “possibility” is considered to be that what – with a sort of “logical” indifference – is opposed to that what is “necessary”. And which, as such, always exists, happens, and will happen.

² The Hungarian adjective “beteg”, meaning ill, is also used as a noun in medical language, denoting a patient. (Translator’s note).

At the same time, in this case in an everyday meaning, mutually influential with classical modal logic, “possible” or “possibility” may also refer to that what is not real. That is to say, something which is inferior, obstructed, truncated, and unfulfilled. And, as such, is something imperfect, and handicapped in its own being as compared to that which has already reached “reality” “factually”.



Irina Dumitrașcu, Untitled Nature 23
Photography – Cprint, ø 40cm, 2008
Website: www.bavardestudio.ro

However, in a context possibly considered more special or “rigid”, we often refer to possibility by the term of “probability”. This way, of course, possibility directly becomes the target of the clarifying and “methodical” intentions of calculating. A calculation the “results” of which are mostly rendered directly into numbers, or more precisely into percentages.

However, it is only this or that “particular” disease which has or may have a certain percent of probability or eventuality, while essentially there exists no life without the possibility of illness – and of health alike!

Hopefully it is not difficult to see that none of the above outlined – and in a way dominant – meanings of the notion of “possibility” are able, or indeed suitable for us, to understand the partly organic and intimate, but partly also very special way in which illness as a possibility and the possibility of illness pertains to life itself, and – in a specific way, but – also to human life, to human existence.

Illness, in its very nature as a possibility, pertains precisely to the essence of life. It is not therefore some “unimportant” “eventuality” of life and the living being. On the contrary, the illness as a possibility as well as the possibility of illness is born and outlined within and in relation to that what is explicitly and precisely fundamental, central, and essential for life, for a truly living life. Illness appears and exists therefore for life and the living, let us repeat it, not as something coming “from outside” and as such, completely alien from it, and not exclusively as a – merely “incidental” or “posterior” – threat.

Excursus

Sketchy considerations regarding the problems of Christian medicine and Christian healing

The above consideration is naturally quite in contrast with the original, particular, and general Christian beliefs and “thinking” about illnesses, their sources and nature. Therefore we have to treat this subject tangentially at least, in the form of an excursus.

For Christian faith and thinking human illnesses are primarily the results and consequences of original sin, as well as the “blows” of its original punishment and other, also divine, punishments associated with it, such as “historical” punishments beyond the expulsion from paradise.³ Secondly, however, from a Christian “point of view”, illnesses are the punishments of yet another kind of divine sin of personal concern, and as such, in fact external to man, unappealable, unexplainable, and actually unforeseeable, and, while purportedly determinate, not clearly identifiable. These “blows” are not meant to smite the human race in general, but specifically individual people, and of course, are exclusively designated to make them accept divine punishment.

Consequently, if we give deeper thought to the matter, then it emerges as highly problematic whether the naturally human-medical efforts of healing in confrontation with “illnesses” identified with all sorts of divine punishments can indeed be considered as human activities worthy of divine contentment and respect,

³ The idea of the divine origin of illnesses, and their perception as a divine punishment for the sins of human beings dates back much before Christianity. It was shared for instance by Hebrews and Mesopotamians. However, this was not a hindrance for them to relate to diseases not merely, and not primarily with supplication by prayers and hoping for miracles in the expectation of healing, but in an actively medical way, namely with their empirical observation, interpretation and explanation, and with an attitude aiming at their prevention and healing. See *Radu Iftimovici, Istoria universală a medicinei și farmaciei* (The universal history of medicine and pharmacology) (Bucharest, Editura Academiei Române, 2008), 38–49, 128.

in “correspondence” with divine orders and intentions. Or, on the contrary, they should be considered a threatening insight into ever newer, very much determined sins, connected to, and branching further from, the original sin – that is to say, knowledge.⁴

While, of course, the cases of healing sometimes occurring nevertheless could only be regarded in fact from a consistently Christian viewpoint as miracles of divine grace. It is therefore this grace and only its penitent reception that, from a “Christian point of view”, an ill person, as well as his/her caretaker, can actually strive, urge, and hope for. So it is no wonder, historically speaking, that the medieval, and especially early medieval meaning of *medico* had so much shifted towards the meaning of *curo* – namely an indeed “positive” and *sui generis* Christian attitude and obligation, the nursing and attendance of the weak, the poor, and the sick – that it no longer means in fact “healing” in an (ancient Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Greek, Roman, Hebrew, etc.) medical sense, but rather the caretaking of the sick and the suffering. Obviously, in the midst of a penitent supplication, and in the desperate hope of “healing”⁵ as a miracle-like divine mercy.

The case is probably the same with Jesus, considered the son of God. Because, in a real and explicit medical sense – that is, in the sense of the medical conception, knowledge, and skills of his age, culture, and environment – he was not really a healer, he only made all sorts of miracles connected (also) to illnesses.

Strictly considering the relation of Christianity to illness – which actually seriously and decisively influenced two millennia – we must ultimately make it clear that, since illness, according to Christianity, is considered in its origin, source, nature, and purpose one of the main types of divine punishment for human sins, the liberation from these sins – *recte*, healing itself, or the recovery obtained in its

⁴ And thus medicine and medical doctors were prosecuted during the Christian Middle Ages with special theological and ecclesiastical concern (and also afterwards, in fact to this day), compared even to other sciences and scholars. Because medicine – as a search for knowledge and knowledge – is not only a further insight into the original sin, like any other historically articulated science, but, more than that, – as healing! – it is a direct confrontation with that indefinable, yet “concrete” divine decision and will which punishes that particular person (!) with that particular disease. And as we have mentioned earlier, this was the case not only in medieval times, but also in modernity. What is more, the case is the same today, when medicine and medical praxis are also paid special theological and ecclesiastical attention, together with all the other life sciences, precisely in the name of considerations ambiguously – and indeed misleadingly – termed “ethical”. In reality, however, the situation is that Western science, purportedly, and also actually “devoid of ethics”, is precisely a product of Christianity. Since, if the knowledge of the distinctions between good and evil, true and false, beautiful and ugly is considered and treated exactly as the original sin of mankind, then cognition and systematic knowledge, constitutive and indispensable for human life, can only be cultivated with a “bad consciousness”, and mostly with the ignorance of this “ethics”. Again, this illustrates those deep ruptures which Christianity meant and represented in relation to – *recte*: against and opposed to –, e.g., ancient Greek and Roman traditions, where truth was always tried to be knowingly and continuously thought and kept together with good and beautiful, as the noblest human modes of being.

⁵ For instance, with the help of miraculous and healing images of saints, or holy relics (used even today...).

historically articulated efforts – cannot actually and really be considered a blessed task of human, let's say, medical involvement (that is to say, one articulated in the sense of actual, all-time therapy, carried out with knowledge and skills). Instead, it can only be perceived as a result and consequence of the “workings” of divine grace, achieved by purportedly always exceptional, pious miracles.

Consequently, the expression “Christian medicine” in the sense of healing or therapy is none other in fact than a mere *contradictio in terminis*, an absurdity.⁶ Even the dedicated expert, Emil Schultheisz himself, acknowledges in one of his studies on medieval medicine that although the Church Fathers treated the questions of “medicine”, they did it in a sort of “theoretical-spiritual” way, rather than in the favour, perspective, and purpose of healing, that is, in “practice”. For that matter, Schultheisz treats in his study the issues of the medieval continuation of ancient Greek and Roman medical traditions in such a way that he utterly avoids the discussion of the essential, historical, problematic, explicit breach, the very breakage of ancient Greek and Roman traditions, represented by the official dissemination of the determined and decisive Christian worldview and its influence on knowledge and sciences, but most importantly on medicine, that is, the problems of diseases and their curing. The “theoretical-spiritual” approach primarily meant, for instance, the “examination” of the aspects or directions of ancient – Greek and Roman – medicine by which the official and institutionalized Christian approach to illness could be devised. In this respect, the most important risk was to urgently avoid and officialize any kind of possible similarity between Jesus and, say, an Asclepius. Asclepius, who had urged indeed for healing, and not for miracles and their hopeful-supplicating-caretaking expectation. On the other hand, there was also a need to filter out those significant personalities of the medicine of Antiquity whose “theories”, standing closer to the worldview of Christianity – and moulded into an even more adequate form by the Church – could be turned into compulsory official norms. That is how, at first, the monotheist Galenus and his science became for almost a millennium a hardly questionable paradigm. To this, the also reinterpreted Hippocratic ideas were later added. Consequently, Paracelsus for example was persecuted for opposing the teachings of Galenus, Hippocrates, and Avicenna – whose concepts had also become official in the meantime for the order of medicine as well – even as late as the 16th century.⁷

Words and names however do not only have their all-time “theoretical” scopes and backgrounds, their meanings related to religions and worldviews, their “historical” and “institutional” senses, in which they historically outline, prescribe, change, and secure their meanings and significance, organically or, on the contrary, precisely inorganically related to their origin. However, in order to achieve this, thinking must unravel and surface that particular existential structuredness. Which

⁶ See also Radu Iftimovici, *Istoria medicinei* (The history of medicine), (Bucharest: Editura ALL, 1994), mainly 97–99.

⁷ Cf. Schultheisz Emil, *Az ókori medicina hagyományozódása az egyházatyáknál*. (The tradition of ancient medicine with the Church Fathers) http://mek.oszk.hu/05400/05425/pdf/schultheisz_okorimedicina.pdf, Downloaded: January 27, 2011. On Paracelsus, see: Iftimovici, *Istoria medicinei*, 134–136.

means, first of all, that it must interpret and validate these explicitly and articulately, and with a “direct” insight.

This is the case, and this is a thinker’s task and chance with the word which the Hungarian language uses to denominate the things connected to medicine – orvos, orvoslás. The existential structure and the worldliness of this word is completely different – inerasably so – than that into which the medieval Latin medico was forced. The word orvos interprets illness itself as something “orv”,⁸ that is, a force, process, effect, or action which is hypocrite, insidious, working in a depriving, pilfering way. The expression is considered to be of an ancient – Finno-Ugric or Turkic – origin. The orvos (the doctor) is thus, evidently, the person who, relating explicitly and actually to such things, knows the hidden, insidious, dangerous, depriving-pilfering forces of illnesses. But also the person who is able to conduct forcefully and efficiently equally “orv”, that is, insidious things and actions which will then expectedly avert, alleviate, or outright defeat the insidious and harmful effects of illnesses.

What else could he use for doing so than medicines – orvosság?! These are the equally insidiously efficient antidotes of the insidious effects of illnesses. The doctor – orvos – with his knowledge and almost magic-like procedures knows and uses the hidden powers of the insidious counter-effects of these – medicines – just as insidiously. While on the one hand one may speak about existential structures going back all the way to shamanistic traditions, on the other hand it is equally true that curing in these traditions has always been a conscious, sensitive, and “understanding” fight or struggle, in unseen depths, face-to-face with illnesses. The fighter of which is the doctor himself, who directs this struggle precisely against illness, and for the health to be regained, or directly the life of the ill person.⁹

Therefore the long-lasting ruptures, going back deep into the past, inserted into the existential-historical and ontological structures of man’s relation and reference to illnesses at the point of the official dissemination of Christianity are very clearly visible. For, as we can see, ever since the most ancient, most primitive empirical, shamanistic, or wizardry-type relations – and then through the entire Babylonian, Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Hebrew, Greek and Roman medicine – the essential existential structure of the meanings and interpretations of human relation to illnesses has always focused on the historically available or possible knowledge, avoidance, alleviation, and defeat-healing of illnesses. The possibilities of perfecting, deepening, and extending these are continuously researched and articulated further by all kinds of interpretations of experimental attempts.¹⁰

⁸ Orv means in Hungarian: ‘insidious, hypocrite, treacherous’.

⁹ See: volume 2 of *A magyar nyelv történeti-etimológiai szótára*. (Historical-etymological dictionary of the Hungarian language) (Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1967), and volume 9 of *Erdélyi Magyar Szótörténeti Tár*. (Transylvanian Hungarian etymology collection) (Budapest-Cluj [Kolozsvár], Akadémiai Kiadó-Erdélyi Múzeum-Egyesület, 1997).

¹⁰ This original, pre-Christian existentially structured nature of man’s relation and reference to illnesses, lasting and continuously deepening and branching (“specializing”) for millennia, as we have seen, is witnessed as well by the words expressing it in various languages. It suffices to mention, for example, the abundance of words that Ancient Greek used to express

Beyond a possible consternation, there is nothing to “wonder” that, let’s say, a “Christian doctor” living in the 7th or 8th century CE knew much less about the human body and its illnesses than his Egyptian “colleague” active 2500 years before. Not to mention “contemporary” Arabic medicine, or doctors and scientists not necessarily of Arabic origin, who turned with a real, researching and caring, and at the same time profound and evolutionary interest and respect to the “results” and spirit of the traditional medical knowledge of the East (north India and the Middle East) and Northern Africa (Hebrew, Egyptian, etc.), as also of Greece and the Roman Empire. What is more, he turned not only to the results of these traditions, but also to those of Nestorianism,¹¹ originally a branch of Byzantine Christianity, but later considered a heresy and persecuted as such, in the fields of medical education, as well as the establishment and organization of hospitals.¹²

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things connected to healing: iater, iatros = doctor; iateira = the healer; iaterion = medicine; iatikos = what is suitable for healing; iatoria = the science of healing; iatrike = healing, curing; and then there is the iatreumata, the preventive substance. Clearly, the medical act is articulated in each of these terms in the sense of both prevention and actual healing or curing. This activity is usually conducted for a fee in the iatreon, that is, in the doctor’s rented or private home, equipped for the purpose. See Anatole Bailly, *Dictionnaire Grec – Français*, ed. E. Egger (Paris, Hachette, 2000). The case is the same with classical Latin, where *medico* equally meant treatment and curing, while *medicina* referred directly to the medical act, continuously extending and specializing (e.g. aural diseases, dentistry). See Félix Gaffiot, *Dictionnaire Latin – Français*, revised edition, ed. Pierre Flobert (Paris, Hachette, 2000). On the medical knowledge of the Romans and its organic and evolutionary relationship with Greek medical science, see: Iftimovici Radu: *Istoria medicinei*, 67–76.

¹¹ Nestorius was first the patriarch of Byzantium (Constantinople), and as such he established and proclaimed the doctrine of the double nature of Christ – human and divine at the same time. According to this view, Jesus had a twofold nature, he was man (by Mary) and God (by the Holy Spirit). One result of this teaching was that due to it, the body gained a new role, a new value in Christianity, together with its problems, illnesses, etc. This obviously meant a raising concern about medicine and its importance. Although Nestorius’ teachings soon gained him many followers, he was officially condemned as a heretic in his Christological views, he was deposed from his see, and both he and his followers were persecuted as heretics. His followers had to flee therefore ever farther, first to Edessa, then all the way to the Persian city of Gundeshapur. Already in Edessa, they established a school specifically for medical instruction, and also founded a hospital. Later, during the repeated condemnation and persecution of the sect by Cyril, Bishop of Alexandria, they moved these to Persia. This is where the conquering Arabs met them and their institutions, which gained their interest and respect. See Iftimovici Radu: *Istoria universală a medicinei și farmaciei*, 128–129., and <http://www.terebess.hu/keletkultinfo/lexikon/nesztor.html> (downloaded 7 July 2010).

¹² See Iftimovici Radu: *Istoria medicinei*, 97-99, Idem: *Istoria universală a medicinei și farmaciei*, 128-140., Dr. Magyar László András, *Az arab orvostudomány* <http://www.terebess.hu/keletkultinfo/mlaszloa.html> (downloaded 4 July 2010), and *Az arab kultúra terjedése* <http://sagv.gyakg.u-szeged.hu/tanar/farkzolt/ISZLAM/arab.htm> (downloaded 21 June 2010).

However, let us repeat, illness never only appears and exists for life and the living being as a merely “posterior” or “incidental” threat, as something utterly alien to it, something which only comes “from outside”. So something like the “possibility of illness” – understanding it essentially – hardly has anything to do with its reality-to-be! On the contrary, life itself, in its living and, let us emphasize again, in its own and essential motion, “reality”, and occurrence, not only “contains” or “owns” the possibility of illness, but also secures it essentially for itself in its own being primarily and precisely as a possibility!

But nothing proves or supports better this basic statement than that, in the first place, the living beings in their creation and development “come” to life or are born with certain systems of self-defence against illnesses.¹³ The mere existence of such original systems of self-defence – not to mention their extraordinary variation and permanent mobility¹⁴ – clearly shows from the very beginning that life itself, the living being itself projects and outlines illnesses for itself precisely and foremost as a possibility, exactly as a possibility pertaining to itself directly as a danger and threat. That is to say, as a dangerous and threatening possibility, pertaining and keeping towards itself, which is outlined in its ongoing life/living, inside and in the midst of this life.

Beyond this, however, illness – precisely as a possibility – pertains to the essence and essential complexity of life also in that fundamental, constitutive sense that the illnesses in their significant majority are also caused by other, also living beings! Several bacteria, parasites, certain fungi, or in a particular sense even viruses are all living beings, that is, organic parts of the huge and variable, lively cycles of life. Beyond doubt, there are also living beings “inside of life” – that is, coming to being while pertaining organically and essentially to ongoing life – the life of which lies and happens essentially and explicitly in the fact that they harm or make ill other living beings.¹⁵

However, beyond all this, the pertinence of illness to the essence of life and the living as a possibility is also demonstrated and supported by the fact, called “genetic” nowadays, that the single living beings, besides their systems of defence – or rather in addition to them – are born, often on the level of populations, with mostly hereditary and transmittable inclinations for certain diseases. Therefore in this respect life “possesses” or “disposes of” the possibility of illness and illnesses in a truly essential way, as the inclinations that refer to them.

It must be emphasized nevertheless that the norm, the “normality” of life and the living is “health”. “Health”, which by no means is some kind of ideal state, devoid of any kind of disorders, but on the contrary, an equally essential possibility of the living being, its mobility and ability to prove, keep, develop, and reproduce itself while growing, in the midst of its struggling, life-historical and adaptive-challenging relations of information, matter, and energy. In the challenge, fight, or

¹³ Let us only think of the immune system, but all the other extremely varied defence mechanisms can and must also be accounted for.

¹⁴ Including also the diseases – currently called “auto-immune” – connected to this mobility and its complexity.

¹⁵ My special thanks to Cecília Lippai for drawing my attention to this aspect of things!

struggle which the living being conducts in its relationship with other living beings. Not to mention the circumstance that “health” itself, continuously and unavoidably, outlines and emerges precisely in its struggle with the threatening possibilities of illnesses.

This is of course only an additional reason to stress again – better outlined and articulated – that the normative nature of health by no means invalidates the fact that illness also pertains to the essential complexity, the essential possibilities of life, and as such, always concerns life itself in some kind of essential respect. First and foremost, and most directly, it concerns of course “health”, as outlined above.

Now, this only signals again – especially in the more general connections and horizons of life and the living – how unstable and void are the so-called “differentiations”, strictly formal and consisting merely of conceptual “definitions”, between “illness” and “health”. Which take these mostly as “states” and “situations” taken in their so-to-say “actualized pureness”, and not for what they really are. That is to say, they do not understand and treat them as essential and constitutive, as well as decisive and fundamental possibilities of life, the living life. For it is clear that the life of viruses, for instance, that is, their health and “virulence” means exactly illness – and none other!, or “causes” exactly illness – and none other! – for all kinds of living beings infected with these. The case is similar also with the life of the beings we call “parasites”. And so forth!

Illness proves to be thus, again and again, the possibility of a living being which must be thought of as something which takes part in a most essential and decisive way and respect in the actual and explicit formation and articulation of the way life and the living exists, happens, and articulates in its own abilities and temporality.

The possibilities of life, the possibilities pertaining to the living beings are themselves, evidently, also living possibilities! Such possibilities are these that their examination and understanding sends us, or forces us directly – and in an outstanding way – to the explicit rethinking of possibility as possibility.

There is not enough space to treat this issue in more details in this study, revealing several of its historical aspects as well. It must be stated nevertheless that Aristotle for instance in his time treated “possibility” exactly through the power of the word *dynamis*, in depths rarely reached ever since.

By *dynamis*, Aristotle meant exactly the force or ability of something to influence or change something else, or be changed itself. Therefore Aristotle conceived of *dynamis*, of possibility exactly as the principle of motion and change – *arche kineseos*.¹⁶

¹⁶ See: Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, translated by Hugh Tredennick (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann Ltd. 1933, 1989), 1019 b. <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0052>. However, it must also be noted that the majority of translations are inscribed into an interpretive tradition of Aristotle which – since being completely technicalized – can no longer open up authentically to the original liveliness and elementary force of Aristotelian meditations. Therefore I permanently felt the need of using the edition of the *Metaphysics* in the second volume of Immanuel Bekker’s *Aristoteles Graece* from 1831; see: *Aristoteles Graece*, Ex recensione

Such an interpretation, with respect to a better understanding and outline of the dynamis, possibility of illness, is worth a more thorough analysis.

Dynamis, energeia, entelecheia, and steresis (Aristotle)

When speaking about illness philosophically and primarily as a possibility,¹⁷ or thinking about illness precisely in the horizon of possibilities, it is of course not insignificant what exactly we understand of it as a possibility. As evidently also what we understand within it – again, exactly as a possibility.

Illness is not just any kind of “possibility”, and even less something which “occurs” or “happens” at times around us, but precisely the possibility of something which involves us so that it threatens us essentially – perhaps in our very existence and being – and which, thus, presents an explicit danger to us. It is a possibility, therefore, which does not approach us merely from the outside, as an incidental “occurrence”, which only “concerns” us in this respect, that is, in a way only externally related to, and responsible for, the “matters of the world”, but it always pertains to our inner self.

However, “threat” and “danger” are themselves modes or types of possibility. Therefore, notwithstanding their conciseness and harshness, they are never mere “given realities”, happening or occurring somewhere around or inside us. Instead, our most authentic and appropriate, ontological, existential, and historical approach and attitude, and as such, permanently re-articulated way of relating or referring to them – that is, a mode of being-like relation essentially open to the horizon of the possibilities of (our) existence – is primarily and precisely that we reveal and perceive threats and dangers exactly as possibilities, moreover, as possibilities identified as explicitly dangerous and threatening.¹⁸

In order to achieve this, there is an additional need to at least understand, truly, the “possibility” itself, with its weight and manifold force fields and horizons. Therefore, with reference precisely to the dangerous and threatening possibilities, and for an inquisitive thinking aiming at understanding, it emerges as a requirement, albeit trying and challenging, to thoroughly examine the possibility “as such” with

Immanuelis Bekkeri, *Edidit Academia Regia Borussica, Volumen Alterum, Berolini, apud Georgium Reimerum, 1831, Ex Officina Academica.*

¹⁷ While being aware that the customary English translation of dynamis in Aristotelian terminology is potentiality, the author and translator of the article agree in using the term possibility and its derivations in order to be consistent with the overall terminology of this, and the author’s other writings on this subject.

¹⁸ We try to follow the signs of volcanic activity in as much detail and accuracy as possible, to keep hurricanes under spatial observation, and forecast their intensity and expected route, to monitor tsunamis forming after earthquakes and predict their directions at least as a warning for the people involved, etc. – just to mention some examples. And also on the basis of the existential-ontological structure of this particular way of relation or reference – for instance, with regard to the dangerous and threatening possibilities of inundations – we humans build dams by rivers or lakes, etc. And so on.

regard exactly to its weight – and not, as is customary, to its “weightlessness” and “insignificance”.

An attempted co-thinking and dialogue with Aristotle may be extremely helpful in this respect. An attempt, that is, which is not meant to be some kind of “exegesis of Aristotle”, but much rather, or much simpler: the thoughtful encounter of questions and questionings “in our times”. That is, in our own lives, in our living present, and its definite inquiries pointing to the future.

Aristotle, as signalled earlier, discusses the possibility precisely in the horizon of the force field of the name and word of *dynamis*. The name itself, Aristotle’s ancient Greek word, derives from *dynamai*, the meaning of which – notably – is precisely “force”, “the possession of force”, ability, the endowment with abilities, intent and “readiness” for action, for disposition. That what possesses force as well as richness and plurality in every kind of possibility, may become and indeed becomes great and significant on this account, possessing, and disposing of, this power.¹⁹

The ancient Greek word *dynamis* equally refers thus to physical, as well as moral-authoritative-community force and power, in the sense of something which is able to make something move, and which can continuously influence and change things, states, processes, and circumstances by these abilities. Moreover, without which all sorts of such changes, influences, occurrences, and formations, in other words all kinds of motions and changes are actually unthinkable. Since in the absence of the *dynamis*, the Wherefrom?, Why?, How?, and Whereto? of motion, change, influence, formation, birth, and articulation would simply have no content.²⁰

It is clear therefore that in this fundamental sense the *dynamis* belongs, connects, and sends back at all times in fact to none other than the *ousia*, the essence, as the forces, abilities, powers, meanings, significances, possibilities, validities, as well as deficiencies, weaknesses, and vulnerabilities of the *ousia*. In their – evidently indefinite, yet by far not meaningless – complexity, and in their all-time fullness structurally articulated (primary, secondary *ousia*, etc.) by the *ousia*.

First and foremost, therefore, these articulated, yet at the same time “indefinite” “*dynamisms*” of possibility and possibilities, very plastic in their horizons, make the *ousia*, the essence particularly “wealthy”,²¹ rich (or perhaps

¹⁹ This is how the term *dynasty*, referring to rulers and ruling families, derives from *dynamai*, as also the term *dynamics*, “the study of motion”, as a basic branch of classical physics.

²⁰ This is in fact what the Romans later translated as *possibilitas* and *potentialitas*, becoming in time increasingly devoid of content as a *terminus technicus*. Both the term *possibilitas* (*posse*) and *potentia* – as well as the medieval *potentialis* – are linked indeed with force, or the necessary and indispensable active precondition for the ability to achieve or perform something, or rather its “long-standing” possession. See Albert Dauzat, Jean Dubois, and Henry Mitterand, *Nouveau Dictionnaire Étymologique et Historique* (Paris, Librairie Larousse, 1964).

²¹ The **name** of the *ousia* – because one must not think of it as a “term”, let alone as some *terminus technicus*! – originally meant “fortune, wealth”, and as such, “value”. Of course, we mostly ignore or forget to explicitly think into the fact that this original meaning of the *ousia* is preserved at Aristotle, moreover it becomes more profound and elaborated in terms of its conceptual details. See on this also the Excursus on Aristotle of my study, *A jövő avagy*

poor), efficient or on the contrary, inefficient, or maybe even valuable, while also “representing” it. Since it is only through the dynamis, through possibility, that the entire horizon of everything essential can be articulated and outlined in its complete, expanding-narrowing wealth, meaning, or the entire possible mobility of its contradictory colourfulness and richness.

Therefore it is precisely the dynamis, the possibility which penetrates and touches upon the ousia, the essence, in its entirety, with all its sides and drawbacks or deficiencies. And also that which constitutes the essence in its own all-time way. That is to say, the force of the dynamis follows, represents, and exposes the ousia, the essence in its own articulate nature, in ways actually defined in its joints, but by all means in a horizon-like manner, while on the other hand it also makes it truly valid. More precisely: it pushes the ousia to the directions of its own validity. It is therefore not just immaterial – and especially not “unessential” – which possibilities one sees, nor what one is able to see or look upon with help of the possibilities.

All the more so because, as signalled earlier, the possibility, the dynamis with Aristotle is precisely the principle of motion, of change (*arche kineseos*). And this basically means that, in reality and factually, every motion and change is nothing else in fact than the actualization of possibilities. That is to say, none other than the actual operation or validation of the forces and aptitudes – including passivity, the ability of reception – of the dynamis.²² And I do not only mean here the nature, the physis, and the motional events of the physis – namely, the motions and changes of nature, originating and growing by and from itself, and its instances – but also the creations, the human artefacts, arts, sciences, etc. One of Aristotle’s examples is exactly about the fact that the constructible is “actualized” in the course of the actuality (*energeia*) of the very process of construction.²³ Similarly, the knowable is always actualized through the processes of the acquirement of knowledge, that is, in the efforts of cognition (*energeia*). So that any kind of motion at all or any kind of change occurs only if that what happens then is nothing else in fact than dynamis, the actualization of the possibility, that is, *energeia*, in other words, force, explicitly operational and working force.²⁴

Let me add to all this Aristotle’s refinement of grand import that the dynamis and *energeia* comprise a greater or broader scope than that to which motion is explicitly and directly restricted to.²⁵ Because, for example, passivity and enduring are in fact abilities, dynamis. An ability or possibility to receive or accept the effect of another thing or force. Such as for instance the dynamis of plasticity, namely that something can be shaped in a determined way. Again, with the additional, and also significant refinement emphasized by Aristotle that passivity means not some “lower degree” of possibility, but dynamis as passivity must also be understood in its

kérdezően lakozik az ember... (The Future, Or Questioningly Dwells the Mortal Man...) in the volume: István Király V., *Halandóan lakozik szabadságában az ember...* (Mortally dwells man in his freedom...) (Pozsony [Bratislava]: Kalligram, 2007), 209–239.

²² See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1046a; 1077b.

²³ *Ibid.*, 1046b.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 1046a.

primary meaning, as the principle of motion.²⁶ That is, as the ousia's own power and ability, forming or framing its own richness, articulated colourfulness and value, and pertaining to its own meaningfulness. Passivity is thus in fact the power of reception and acceptance for the continuous enrichment and articulation of being and the beings!

So – as a summary and further questioning – the dynamis, the possibility means precisely the motion ability of the ousia, the essence, lying in its forces, in their powers, limits, flexibility and plasticity, as well as the articulate horizons of these abilities. Which are, nevertheless, still undetermined.

The “undetermined” however only exists as a possibility, not as something real, not as *energeia*.²⁷ Nonetheless, indeterminacy “disappears”, ceases by the *energeia*. For example, according to its ousia and dynamis – and of course undetermined –, a rose can be, say, red or yellow, but in the case of a yellow rose this indeterminacy has practically ceased. However, this example given by Aristotle actually only shows that the dynamis is precisely a horizon of being, articulated and at the same time “free”, nuanced and as such, “undetermined”. A rose, by its ousia and dynamis, undetermined, can be, let's say, red or yellow. But despite the mere fact that a rose – in a determined way, that is, by its *energeia* – is yellow, red roses can still exist and grow with respect to the species of roses. This example reveals therefore that, in its entire and evidently articulated amplitude and the horizons of its forces, the dynamis, the possibility is projected upon the ousia, the essence, while at the same time, reflexively, also refers back to it. That is to say, the dynamis projects back both to secondary species and genera, and – just as importantly – to the primary ousia, the still undetermined self-identical individuals as well.²⁸

Although the dynamis, the possibility, by its original and always intertwined relation to the ousia, is indeterminacy, it will never become still something devoid of content and even less something “forceless”. For, as we have seen, the very name of dynamis means “force”, or rather inherently derives from force. Therefore the situation is rather the opposite! Namely, that it is the dynamis, the possibility by which the force of indeterminacy, its contradictory liveliness, its highly enriching nature and tension, and also openness, making the beings and being ever more diverse or sketchy, colourful or on the contrary, paler, breaks in and is established as a constitutive factor. Since, let me repeat, this is not at all about some kind of empty and indifferent “indeterminacy”, devoid of content, outlines, and articulations, but, as revealed, the dynamis, the possibility is implicitly connected to the essence, the ousia – and by this, evidently, to physis. (A rose can be like this or like that, but it

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid, 1047a; 1047b.

²⁸ More detailed analyses on the category structure of the Aristotelian category of ousia, and its use in the present discussion can be found in the following studies: István Király V., “‘Alkalmazott filozófia’ és a kategoriális elemzés” (‘Applied philosophy’ and category analysis), in István Király V., *Filozófia és Itt-Lét* (Philosophy and Being-Here) (Cluj [Kolozsvár]: Erdélyi Híradó, 1999), 29–56; and István Király V., *Fenomenologia existențială a secretului – Încercare de filosofie aplicată* (The existential phenomenology of the secret – an attempt for applied philosophy) (Pitești: Paralela 45, 2001), 40–75.

can definitely not produce milk, or be milked, etc.) The actus, actualitas, energeia – that is, the operative force – always brings to determinedness, while at the same time also freezes, stiffens, and “narrows” the dynamis, the possibilities.

This way the relationship of dynamis and energeia is in fact always problematic – and cannot be otherwise – since the dynamis conceals or keeps in privation (steresis) at all times further possibilities of energeia, while the ever newer energeia, the ever newer actualization offers and claims an ever newer being-like glance on the dynamis, its essential richness and colourfulness. (E.g. on the natural appearance and formation, or breeding of new kinds of roses of various colours, flowers, etc.)²⁹

Possibility therefore, although not exclusively, by its original connections to the ousia, primarily pertains still to the general, the species and the genus. That is why Aristotle speaks in Book XIII of Metaphysics (at the very end of chapter 10) about the science of the general and only the general as something “only” possible, that is, as a kind of knowledge “only” according to the dynamis, the possibility. As opposed to a knowing science and knowledge, which – besides the general, the universal – also has knowledge about the concrete, or concreteness.³⁰ Therefore the case is not at all that the possibility, the dynamis would not impregnate meanwhile the primary ousia. (Probably this is why Heidegger translated dynamai as “forthcoming ability”.³¹ He interprets it therefore not as a mere, empty, hovering, and nowhere belonging indeterminacy, as if anything could become, or turn into, everything).

Consequently, the dynamis, the possibility is exactly the dynamics and tension of the ousia, the essence, consisting in the forces of its motional and articulated richness, or rather exactly the essence’s motional and undetermined exposure to being.

Notwithstanding those previously said, Aristotle also claims that, compared to dynamis, the energeia, the actus, the actualitas are prior (proteron) to it, precede it, and are explicitly primary to it. However, one may understand absolutely nothing from it if one only handles this thing as a mere conceptual, “state”, or temporal, etc. “hierarchy”. Because the energeia, as discussed above, is precisely the force in operation, in actual work. That is, the actus, the actualization. Or rather, the explicit actuality, that is, being in operation, in actus. It is important to see, however, that the

²⁹ In this lies the important difference between dynamis and energeia. That is to say, something or some kind of relation may exist even if it is not in energeia, or on the contrary, something which is in actus, in energeia at a given time, can be cancelled, or – to formulate it more accurately and understandably with regard to the dynamis – can be withdrawn into its own possibility or possibilities. Of course, this only shows that it is in fact the dynamis, the possibility which – as a principle or motion and change – constitutes and bears the actual constancy or endurance of something, and the inherent preservation of this constancy and endurance. Obviously, let me repeat, together with, and directly through, its (inherent) openness, and its articulated, as well as opening- and sending-apart horizons.

³⁰ See Aristotle, Metaphysics, 1087a.

³¹ Martin Heidegger, *A φύσις lényegéről és fogalmáról. Arisztotelész: Fizika B, 1.* (On the essence and concept of φύσις, Aristotle: Physics, B 1), in Martin Heidegger, *Útjelzők* (Road signs) (Budapest: Osiris, 2003), 225–282.

energeia cannot be any other force of another nature or essence, than that what has already been somehow as dynamis. For where could all these actually operational forces originate from, come from, or be born from?³²

Therefore this has been revealed now that the possibility is always something which, in its relationship with, and organic pertinence to, the ousia, or rather directly through it, refers to the other categories as well. While it is also revealed that “within” these categories – and referring to “time”, the question of When? (pote) – the dynamis refers most directly to the future. Although that what is possible, does not yet exist as energeia, or as an operating force, but somehow it may still come, that is, it may still emerge. Moreover, that what is not yet, or is not yet “here” may come or emerge only this way, on the basis of, starting from, and connected to the dynamis – meaning that only thus it may become actus, energeia, actuality in the present-being of the future and of that what will come.

In this respect, therefore, the dynamis, the possibility is something which is not yet in operation, not yet in energeia, but which may still not “be” just “anything”, or cannot “just exist”, “no matter how”. However, one can only gain primary-essential knowledge in its own factual validity about the preliminary nature of the dynamis and its partly preventing, partly anticipating, forceful character, mostly, but not exclusively, precisely by the energeia, the presence and present effect of the actus (that is, in actualitas, in actu), in a so-to-say “subsequent” way; or can only be ascertained about it with a view to the future, not lacking thorough articulation. This is how energeia is “prior” and “earlier” as compared to dynamis, possibility.³³ That is to say, also conceptually, in accordance with the arche, the principle, the original principle of motion and change, keeping together the dynamis and energeia, and also in accordance with being.

Since it is exactly because the energeia – that is, the operation of the force which means actualization itself – is possible as dynamis, that the existence of possibility, dynamis is proved – in its precedence-like, fundamental, anticipatory, lively and pulsating, multidirectional, and undetermined meaning and power (that is, as a principle of motion and change). The dynamis, the inner and actual tension of which – in the tenseness of its “ambitions”, just like in the power of passivity lying in reception – is of course nothing else than energeia, operation, coming to actus and being actus itself.

Therefore the energeia is not merely the “surfacing” of some latent and inner tensions, previously undetermined and inarticulate, neither the simple “realization” of something previously un-real, but – connected to the dynamis and in its connections to the articulated force of the ousia and the forces of the other

³² Even if the dynamis and its forces are assisted and swung to actuality by the forces already in operation, in energeia, in actus, as well as by the “circumstances” articulated by them. For example, an infant with the dynamis, the possibilities of its coming-to-humanness can only be conceived, born onto this world, and grow up as a human being on account of already existing people, being in energeia. This is also why the energeia is earlier, prior, and primary (proteron) to actualitas, to dynamis, possibility. See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1049b, 1050a, 1050b.

³³ *Ibid.*

categories – the reorganization of the existential occurrence itself, the occurrence of being and the beings, in which the being as one particular being receives its outlines. (For example, in the mutual influence between the beings, or the connection of their coexistence, etc.) This is what draws the being, with a view to the uniqueness of its “concreteness”, into the questioning being-determinations (dynamis) of all categories on the one hand, while exposing it, on the other hand, as explicit coming-to-being and explicit being-in-being amongst the other beings. That is, as a coming to and towards being. As a “growth” (phyein) (being born) from being to being. That is to say, as an explicit growth to exposedness, to newer and newer instances of exposedness. An exposure to the multifaceted and multi-edged, challenging and trying exposednesses of coming-to-being, being born, and giving birth. To the mobile exposedness of being and living, in which, of course, ever newer dynamis (possibilities), previously concealed and unforeseeable, or unmoved and unoutlined in the forces of their tensions, may emerge, outline, and then disappear or submerge. Even if only in their opaque contours, or as a mere halo, a shadow, a stain.

The *energeia*, the actualitas therefore always refers back to dynamis, to its outlines and forcefields meaningful even in their indeterminacy (“vectors”), as well as the articulated horizons of dynamis. It refers back to those ultimately essential (*ousia*), “tendential” forces, which are made visible by the *energeia*, but which, at the same time, are also revealed in their newer and newer possibilities or impossibilities. And which are, in addition, revealed again out of the dynamis’ own, original forces, equally pertaining to the *ousia*, the essence, and through this, evidently, to the *physis*, as well as to man, being indissolubly connected to it, moreover growing out (phyein) from it and growing further in it as a new and particular dimension of being, and to human artefacts, their creation, their making, etc. And, also, connected to the motional-questionable, tensioned meanings and directions, intertwined within and by means of the categories, of these forces and together with the delineations bound by them.

Therefore it is only in this sense, elaborated with respect to their articulations, that the *energeia*, the actualitas, the being in actus is primary or prior to the dynamis, the possibility. That is to say, not in the sense of “reality”, which suggests such absurdities – miles away from Aristotle of course³⁴ – that the

³⁴ In Chapter 3 of Book IX of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle explicitly contests those – for instance, the Megarians – who claim, by absurd, that the dynamis only “exists”, only “is” when it is already in *energeia*, that is, in actus, actualitas, in operation, “reality”, or “achievement”. Since that would mean – says Aristotle, not without some irony – that this way a builder, for example, would no longer be a builder when not building. Or that in such a case a man with his eyes closed and looking at nothing could be considered blind in fact. It would be a miracle then if the “former” builder, after a period off work between two commissions, suddenly begins again to build, to “be” a professional builder; or if the person with the eyes closed opens his eyes and sees “again”, and even recognizes the world around him. (See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1046b, 1047a.) Because the essence of a builder as a builder is that his dynamis – that is, by his essential possibilities re-delineated on account of the experiences inherently gained in the *energeias* of building, articulated and trained in this respect – can or is able to build, even if he does not build at the moment but, say, is having a break. This dynamis, this possibility-ability of the builder pertains to his essence, his *ousia*,

possibility allegedly has no “reality”, or that the connection of “reality” and “possibility” is merely some kind of incidence. Since thus “reality” has been degraded to the level that it is a miracle that it “exists” at least. And also that it came to be, and will last somehow. Every motion or state, occurrence, change, or creation is nothing else in fact than miracles which are considered, in a misleading way, an all-decisive “harsh” “reality”, as compared to the fluid, plastic, shapeless, inarticulate, ethereal, unbalanced, incomplete, immature, existentially dubious, vestigial, pale, obscure, uncertain “mere possibility”, or “incidence”, degraded by indeterminacy.

Therefore, on the contrary, I am repeatedly speaking about the dynamis, the possibility, just like the *energeia*, the actualitas which, although primarily connected to the *ousia*, precisely on this account are not “restricted” merely to the *ousia*, the essence. Instead, by the essence, and primarily by its own, mobile and motional tensions, constituted primarily by the forces of the dynamis – in the *energeia* – in the actus, the *ousia* is linked and related to the dynamis, again motional and questionable, of all the other categories (quality, quantity, time, relation, effect, endurance, etc.) Because the forces of the dynamis can only encompass horizon-like the articulate entirety of the *ousia*, enabled only by the dynamis if, and by, exposing the essence in the forces of its *sui generis* tendencies, and the tensioned horizons of these forces. In such a way that at the same time – in undetermined, yet never inarticulate ways – it always connects them to those dynamises which in their turn articulate the other categories, quality, quantity, place, the Where?, the When?, the relations, etc. as well. It is only in this way that the categories can “simultaneously” be the categories of being “itself”, the questioning-guiding-defining fundamental words or categories of the man and his language, coming to being from being in a new way, as a dimension of meaning.

Therefore, as a principle of motion and change, the dynamis, although it is primarily related to the *ousia*, actually penetrates horizon-like all categories. While constituting them as well in its own way. Since in motion the quality, quantity, relations, etc. of beings can also change, and usually they do change indeed. The quality of beings can degrade, the healthy can fall ill, the large can become small, the “here” can become “there”, the earlier can become later. The relations of beings can also change,³⁵ of course in the ways outlined (*peras*) in the *energeia*, in the actus and starting from these, then turning back again to the dynamis, the possibilities stretching forward. Again, it is not merely about the matters of the *physis*, that is, the beings becoming and growing by themselves, and thus motional and changing, but equally about artefacts, human works. Aristotle mentions again the example of construction, as also those of learning or healing, while emphasizing again³⁶ that there is motion and any kind of change only if that what happens on such occasions

his fortune and its stability-endurance is such a way that it does not disappear, does not vanish when it is not in *energeia*, in actus, in *realitas*. That is why such a person does not have to learn the art of building anew when continuing his work after a time off. And the situation is the same with the man opening his eyes and looking around with them again.

³⁵ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1021a.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

it nothing else in fact than *energeia*, that is, the coming to actus in determined and articulated ways of various kinds of dynamis, as well as their preservation.

Therefore the dynamis is the essential continuity and endurance basis and at the same time “mechanism” of the *energeia*,³⁷ just as it is a basis and “mechanism” of its further opening – or, on the contrary, its withering or narrowing.

As it has already occurred in several of our previous analyses, for Aristotle – and Aristotle alone – categories are actually questions. Moreover, they are fundamental questions or question-foundations, which open up, and at the same time inherently determine, the living being and the various regions of being with an eye to their What?-ness, How?-ness, How much?-ness, When?-ness, Where?-ness, the What?-ness and How?-ness of their Relations and Relativities, etc. – that is to say, to (their) being –, in articulated ways and from or towards (always further unfolding) directions constituted by these.³⁸ So the categories – guided by the *ousia* – always question in the directions, existentially and ontologically equally relevant, of possibilities of being, connected in fact to the dynamisms and tensions of the *physis*. The questions of categories are therefore not dialectic questions,³⁹ but of the kind which ground, guide, and make possible dialectic questions, and furthermore the dialogue itself as well, probably impossible without them.

The categories, categorial questions therefore precede, base, and interweave or – in fact – also guide dialectic questioning, and consequently the dialogue itself as well.⁴⁰ For dialogue exists only if, and only where the “partners” meet in the matters and stakes of the search of possible truth connected to some questionable issue, undertaking their own questions as duties pertaining to, but evidently also pointing beyond, themselves. Consequently, every questioning refers directly to that what is just in operation – that is, the *energeia*, the actus, the actualitas –, but does it and can only do it in such a way that meanwhile it brings the *energeia* (actualitas) in question necessarily into the horizon of the dynamis. If not otherwise, then at least with respect to the possible truth connected to the problematic matter. And with it, with respect to everything else that such a truth, situated in dialogue, reveals or explicitly represents as newer and newer possibilities of being in connection with the matter in question.

Therefore, while it is true – as Aristotle clearly states – that the *energeia*, the actualitas are “better and nobler” than even the most respectful dynamis,⁴¹ still one can understand practically nothing of it unless one connects it with the fundamental Aristotelian idea that motion and change can only occur if that what happens on such occasions is nothing else in fact than *energeia*, that is, actualization. Naturally,

³⁷ It may suffice to refer again to the example of the builder who, by his dynamis, continuously remains (being) a builder even when actually (*energeia*) he does no construction work. (See also: Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1047a).

³⁸ See my previously cited studies on Aristotle.

³⁹ See mainly the already cited study on the future, *A jövő avagy kérdezően lakozik az ember...*, in the volume *Halandóan lakozik szabadságában az ember...*

⁴⁰ This is what the *Topics* and most Aristotelian writings and paragraphs against the sophists and sophisms are about.

⁴¹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1051a.

an *energeia* connected to the *dynamis*, the possibility, that is to say, the being in operation, in actus of the forces of possibilities, which again does not lack a further reference to *dynamis*.

This is not to say that, due to the *energeia*, we have already exceeded and left behind the horizons of the *dynamis*. It is more likely that the *energeia*, that is, the force of being in operation, is “better and nobler” than even the most respectful *dynamis* because the possibility – primarily with respect to the *ousia* – simultaneously comprises and includes antagonisms, antagonistic states and things. For example, what can be called healthy, can equally be called ill. Because for the living being, with respect to its *ousia* and with reference to the *dynamis*: the *dynamis* of health and illness – as a possibility – undeterminedly pertains to the same thing.⁴²

However, what “disappears” or ceases in the *energeia*, the actual operation, are not the *dynamis*, the possibilities themselves, but “only” the simultaneity of their antagonistic nature. This way the sick person – for whom the *dynamis*, the *energeia*, the actualitas of illness has turned into motional operation – is no longer healthy. By this, however – with regard to its *ousia* – he has not lost the *dynamis* or possibility of his health. On the contrary, health and its preservation or restoration emerges as a problematic possibility, that is, as a *dynamis* for man – and for the *physis*, life, the *zoe* and the *bios* – precisely because there are illnesses and there are actually sick and suffering people.

It is a kind of *dynamis* in which illness itself appears as a *dynamis*, namely as a possibility threatening health and life, its possible ways, with deficiencies – and as such, dangerous –, a *dynamis* appearing in the essential constancy of the antagonistic simultaneity of its own essential possibility. Otherwise no nature, no *physis* could possibly exist, nor – connected to it, but pointing far beyond – any kind of healing or curing by medical treatment. That is to say, no natural immune- and protection systems, nor all-time medical science could possibly exist at all.

So although of all the antagonistic *dynamis*, the simultaneous antagonistic possibilities, the *energeia*, the actualitas of illness is “worse” than as if it had “only” remained *dynamis*, it does not become “nobler” on this account, and as such, less concise, less essential, or less taken into account. As if the illness would only be *dynamis*, and would never “exist” as *energeia*.⁴³

The *energeia* of illness defiantly refers precisely to the essence, its articulate and outlined *dynamis*es connected for example to various illnesses. Which “necessitate”, on the one hand, an explicit and insightful definition, and on the other

⁴² Nothing proves it more convincingly that the *dynamis* with its constitutive antagonism is connected indeed directly to the *ousia*, or that it directly and primarily pertains to it, as apparent in Aristotle’s fundamental specification in the *Categories*: “The most distinctive mark of substance appears to be that, while remaining numerically one and the same, it is capable of admitting contrary qualities. From among things other than substance, we should find ourselves unable to bring forward any which possessed this mark.” Aristotle, *Categories* (trans. E. M. Edgehill), section 1, part 5, paragraph <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/categories.1.1.html> (accessed 18.07.2011)

⁴³ Otherwise Aristotle repeatedly considers it meaningless and void to speak about a *dynamis* which somehow never turns operational, in *energeia*, in actualitas.

hand – together with the previous – an equally explicit and articulated attitude or approach, or more precisely, healing. That is to say, they require such an insightful definition and such an explicit and factual attitude which are themselves possibilities, possibilities of being, modes of being, dynamises and energeias connected to being itself, the living beings, and the (problematic-questionable) possibilities and actuses of existence/being.⁴⁴

Therefore the fact that the dynamis is the principle of motion and change means in fact that the forces, motions, and changes in operation for their further opening or narrowing articulation will also be taken over by the dynamis, into the directions of the entelecheia-like diversification or stiffening and narrowing of further energeia, further actualitas.

Entelecheia is one of the most brilliant ideas and terms of Aristotle. Possibly he himself coined it to envision and name the motion and change of things, processes, and the essence, the essential purpose – that is, telos understood not merely as a “goal” – of joint human activities as their essential fulfilment, enforced first by the manifold, antagonistically undeterminable tensions of the dynamis, then by the already operational forces of the energeia. When – in the motion of the tensioned and interwoven forces of the dynamis and the energeia – the living being reaches its purpose, and thus its all-time fulfilment.⁴⁵ This is why Heidegger interprets entelecheia as “having-itself-in-the-end”.⁴⁶

The purpose itself – that is, the destiny of the living being in which it possesses itself in its own end as entelecheia – does not come from the living being or its relations of being, or outside of its world. Much rather, the entelecheia is a particular and perhaps also outstanding energeia. Such an energeia, such an operation which is actually the motion and movedness of the essential (ousia) and (other) categorial forces of artefact-like beings growing by themselves, which occurs in, and is conducted by these forces, and through which the living beings always reach their particular and actual bearing and appearance, eidos. Or, through which the living beings, in their own particular being-in-the-world and worldliness, in the directions and meanings of their own essential, outlined, articulated, and actual endowments, possibilities, and abilities, reach their all-time particular senses of being and into the possession (ousia) of their purposes of being, standing-in-the(ir)-end, operating and effective as such.

That is to say, the living beings only become what and how they actually are by the entelecheia. And only by the entelecheia do the living beings situate

⁴⁴ Aristotle writes in the *Metaphysics* in this sense that actually even geometrical theorems are discovered as and by the actualizations, energeia of possibilities, dynamis, at least as concerns the researcher’s and thinker’s efforts or talents and abilities needed for their discovery. For the actual efforts of thinking and cognition itself are explicitly energeia, that is, an actualization of the abilities, talents, dynamis – that is to say, possibilities – of thinking which always reveals and outlines in its operation the dynamis, the possibilities of the newer and newer mental – in this case geometric – approaches. See: Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1061b.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 1047a, 1050b.

⁴⁶ In: Heidegger, *A φύσις lényegéről és fogalmáról*.

themselves to their constitutive and further constituted place and calling in nature, in the physis, the human beings, human works, and human world, growing out of it as a new and particular dimension of being and thus acquiring their own forces – their own dynamis, energeia, and entelecheia.

Entelecheia is therefore not finiteness – says Heidegger as well⁴⁷ – and even less exhaustedness. Not the exhaustedness, the running-out of possibilities, dynamis, or energeia, but rather the eidos. That is, appearance, and as such, the living beings' exposedness and display in their own limits (peras), in their apparent outlines, lasting “from inside” and enduring on the outside. This rather means then that the possibility only actually becomes visible precisely as a possibility in the entelecheia, in having-itself-in-the-end, with its own orientation and necessity for operation.

On the one hand, this happens as something which has been grasped and taken up by the energeia from the direction of the end, of standing-in-the-end. On the other hand, however, in the visibility (eidos) of the entelecheia standing-in-the-end, emerge the possibilities either lurking before in the rich motional and colourfulness of the essentiality of the dynamis, or newly formed, which can be revealed not only as mere possibilities – articulated by the ousia but undetermined – of the entelecheia through the energeia, but as explicitly newer possibilities in the exposedness of having-itself-in-the-end, and its reflexivity. Moreover, they can be revealed with a view to their newer possible appearances, outlining them in their newer and newer possible having-themselves-in-the-end.⁴⁸

Consequently the human being's purpose – growing out of and in the physis as a new and particular dimension, and growing and raising in itself and by itself – is exactly to question, search, validate and shape in the actus and actualitas of the energeia and entelecheia, primarily with respect to the dynamis, its possible, although essentially bound and unavoidably world-like, “dynamic”, problematic, historical modes and relations of being. The human being's purpose is, therefore, that he, even in necessities and lawful issues – historically understanding,

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ At this point one can rethink Heidegger's table-example. According to this example, the making of the table always happens from the point of view of its eidos, its appearance. The tree appropriate, adequate as to its dynamis is chosen with respect to this. However, the pre-determined and conditioned eidos of the table also defines the energeia, the force skilfully – that is, paradigmatically and through techné and praxis – operative in manufacturing, by the effect of which the table itself, with an appearance corresponding to the previously outlined eidos, and as such, having itself in entelecheia, made of the right kind of wood, is produced, or comes to being. However – going beyond the direct scope of the Heideggerian example – it is precisely then, while having been made, standing-in-its-end (entelecheia), that we can contemplate anew that particular table, that particular artefact with respect to its other possibilities. With respect to the fact, for instance, that there can be other kinds of tables, made of different material (stone, bronze, wrought iron, or plastic), having different shape – more or fewer legs, higher or lower, round, hexagonal or octagonal, etc., which are equally possible, “necessary”, “useful” and also showy. It is precisely in the entelecheia, the standing-in-the-end and completeness, that several, originally indeterminate dynamises, newer possibilities, become visible as something explicitly and eidetically articulately possible and also explicitly undertakable for the energeia as a challenge and a duty. See Ibid.

misunderstanding, or even violating them –, is therefore to see and find the newer horizons of the dynamis together with, and precisely within the givenness itself, bringing them directly to being-validity in his own historical directions and “interests”. Implying also the fact that we human beings, in our relation to certain possibilities – for instance, the threats of diseases –, attempt to assume them (e.g. by the appropriate vaccines) or strive to possibly heal them by our knowledge.

The basis of this ambition is the recognition that illness itself is a dynamis most inherently pertaining to the essence (ousia) of life and the living being, also in the direct sense that – as discussed above – the cause of several illnesses is also a living being. Such are the bacilli, the parasites, and in a certain respect the viruses as well. Considering the specific, while at the same time fundamental characteristics of the illness’ essential life-pertinence, or on the contrary, of life’s essential relations to illness, the question of health and illness should be asked also about these living beings.

As for these questions, it should be repeatedly acknowledged that the possible health of living bacteria lies exactly in the fact that they can outright attack and ultimately undermine the health of some other living being, or they can make it ill. And these bacteria are ill or impaired in their possibilities when they are fully or partially incapable of causing illness. Meanwhile, the living being attacked defends itself some way and to some extent, according to its nature and essence, by its own particular possibilities. It is in this motionality or struggle – which is, on the one hand, an essential war, *polemos*, in and according to the *physis*, while on the other hand it is articulated by the mutual privation, *steresis*, of each other’s natural and essential possibilities or *energeia* and *entelecheia* – that the all-time factual situatedness-in-being of health and illness is outlined.

In effect, the all-time situatedness-in-being of health and illness, by the dynamis, the possibilities taken in the being and meaning outlined hereby, is sketched as a being historically and onto-historically articulated, relating – or in the case of man, explicitly referring – to the dynamis within it.

With respect, therefore, to being, the living beings, and their being, “illness” and “health” are not merely some mutually exclusive “states of being-alive”, but much rather possible modes of being-alive. Modes of being-alive which are articulated, in relation to the horizon-like possibilities of being of the living being, by precisely these particular possibilities, or *ousias* by the privation (*steresis*) of these possibilities. This articulation happens according to the principle (*arche*) of the dynamis, *energeia*, and *entelecheia* in the *physis*, originating and displaying it.⁴⁹

Because in fact – says Aristotle in the often neglected chapter 12 of book V of the *Metaphysics* – the *steresis*, privation, lack, or deficiency is also dynamis, or possibility, and as such, it pertains to the *ousia*, to its quality. Since whatever can fall

⁴⁹ The possibilities of being and life – according to, and on the basis of, the *physis* and the essence, the *ousia* – are therefore always articulated from the point of view of life history. For beings of nature as well as for humans. The being possibilities of a young, an adult, and an old person are different. And as far as man is concerned, who especially interests us of course, it is still clear that – from a life historical viewpoint – some possibilities have the tendency to become narrower, while others broaden and deepen.

apart, break down, or get harmed, possesses the possibilities of falling apart, breaking down, or getting harmed. That is to say, the possibilities of falling apart, breaking down, or getting harmed mean in their “positivism” that the living being lacks in some respect, in a certain sense or mode, and to some extent the dynamis of endurance, survival, and preservation.

Likewise, such are illnesses as well, as the possibilities of the living being, simultaneously connected as an undetermined dynamis to the mode-of-being-like privation of some of its possibilities of being, and the breakdown or harm of its modes of being, opposing the possibilities of health.⁵⁰ Illness is thus, in its primary meaning, the privation, deterioration, deficiency, or lack of health, but as such, it is still essentially and explicitly the ill person’s own “positive” possession (ousia).

While, of course, the illness is not merely the obtrusive, unavoidable, “positive” and articulate presence of one particular illness, but the privation, steresis of the fullness of health, and its “appearance” as deficiency. On such occasions therefore health does not only appear as a non-being, as something non-existent, but much rather as something explicitly absent. With the “opportunity” of illness then health does not simply “perish” or disappear, but is actually absent, it gets into privation and with it, into possibility, that is, dynamis, and what is more, precisely by the energeia of illness, and its “primacy” as compared to the dynamis.

However, as a dynamic steresis that has reached the energeia – that is, as an actus which deprives health –, illness is something which places “back” health into the dynamis, and keeps it there according to the entelecheia of the illness. But meanwhile, harmed and absent, health is still preserved as a dynamis. Nevertheless, when the energeia of illness eliminates the dynamis of health – for example, in the case of incurable diseases – then this can probably be regarded as the entelecheia of illness as illness. These are the actual dangers and threats of illness for the living being, and the human being in particular.

This is a completely different kind of connection than the “relationship” of “health” and “illness”, and even more different than what is usually said about the “opposition” of health and illness as “opposing concepts”. For the relation of illness and health – understood primarily as dynamis and further organically articulated in the energeia and entelecheia by the tension of forces – refers back in fact to the essence, its articulations and connections, and through these to the physis. Because to cure and be cured – that is, making and becoming again healthy – is only possible for an ill person whose essence connected to the physis still possesses to some extent and in some way the possibility of health. That is to say, the ill person possesses the dynamis of the forces of health according to the ousia and the physis, the dynamis of health to the essential forces of which other healing forces and the efforts of healing can still connect somehow in the interest of their energeia.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1019b.

⁵¹ It is not by chance therefore that – even if the importance of thoughts is not completely understood (see for example Petr Kouba’s study on this issue) – that in his Zollikon seminars Heidegger explains illness, connecting directly to Plato and even more to Aristotle, as a steresis, privation, or lack-deficiency. Namely, he grasps illness as a privation, limitation, deficiency, and narrowing of human possibilities of being, and as such, human freedom. See

There is nothing we can understand about illness or steresis as long as – picking out things mechanically – we keep repeating that the essence of privation, steresis, or lack is “the essence standing opposite to it”.⁵² As if the “substance” (sic!), the essence of illness would be health in general, in the privation, steresis, lack of which illness actually “exists”. Now, this would lead to that superficial and impossible idea that illnesses have no identity and essence of “their own”. However, one can see that living bacteria at least have their own particular being, and consequently also essence. Particular bacilli, fungi, viruses, parasites, etc. cause very well determined and outlined illnesses, with an articulateness, compactness, and complexity appropriate to their being, their essence. Secondly, however, this may also lead to that equally superficial claim that in order to “define” and understand illness, it suffices to “define” health, and “relate” it some way to its privation.

In fact, however, steresis is a relation in its own right, which concerns exactly the ousia and – evidently in its privative way and with its privative forces – rearticulates it over again, and modifies, while at the same time also mobilizes it.⁵³ Notwithstanding that all modifications of the ousia – and this is what we most often tend to forget! – are essential!

That is to say, the modification which happens thus in the ousia by the dynamis of steresis, privation, is not in fact the change of an otherwise immovably and unchangeably concealed “essence” (“substance”) and its external relations with its “attributes” and “accidences”.

This way the ousia of health and illness is practically the same, because both illness and health form the possibilities of being of the same living being, which means that they are the theoretically undetermined dynamis of the living being by the ousia of the same living being. On the other hand, however, by the *energeia*, the actualitas of the steresis-like dynamis of illness – actually in contrast to health –, an ousia rearticulated, modified, and brought thus to its own possibilities of being rests in fact in a different constitution. In a constitution which is different and new precisely as concerns the essence.

The sick person is of course not another person, notwithstanding he is a different person than he used to be while still healthy, and will be again when cured; he is different with regard to his being, possibilities of being, and the unfolding of his modes of being, as well as his limitations and their reflexivity. Therefore it is not about two different essences becoming almost unconnected, nor about two directly opposing hypostases of one and the same essence, but only about the fact that by the

Petr Kouba, “*Conceptualising Health and Illness*”, *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology* 39 (2008): 59–80; and Martin Heidegger, *Zollikonner Säminare, Protokolle – Gespräche – Briefe*, ed. Medard Boss (Frankfurt/M: Vittorio Klostermann Verlag, 1987), mainly 180–187.

⁵² See *Ibid.*

⁵³ Let us not forget that Aristotle in his *Categories* leaves the question meaningfully open whether the ousia, the essence in the articulations of its categorial structure – primary, secondary, etc. – is not relative itself, just like any other category. See Aristotle, *Categories*, 8a. (Whereas it is also true that – as we have seen in a citation in a previous footnote – most Hungarian editions (too) translate the category of ousia, the essence, incorrectly and incomprehensibly, with the term “substance”).

ousia, by its particular articulation, health and illness belong together, albeit in the indeterminacy of their oppositions, in the essential directions and meanings of their *energeia* and *entelecheia*.

The *ousia* of the living being according to the *physis* is that it can be both healthy and ill. That is to say, it is explicitly exposed to according to its own essence and its possibilities by the *physis*, as it is primarily and above all in continuous and challenging relations exactly in its connections according to the *ousia* and the *physis*, and as a particular being-here and being-human. These relations are the connections and relations of the *ousia* in the original and primal meaning of the *physis*.⁵⁴

It is therefore not accidental that we humans perceive illnesses first in their particular nature – as an illness, as one or the other particular illness – but at the same time, and inseparably from the first, in the view of their healing possibilities; that is to say, we grasp illnesses also with reference to health lacking in various ways.

In the *energeia* and *actualitas* of illness, health is withdrawn to the *dynamis*, in the same way as the being when healthy is threatened by the *dynamis* of illness in the *energeia* of health. In spite of this – let us emphasize it repeatedly – illness is by far not an absent health or health as an inarticulate absence, but it has a particular and determined constitution which conditions at the same time in its *energeia* the all-time *dynamis* and constitution of health. Since health is a different kind of possibility and is differently possible for each illness and each ill person, including as well its sheer impossibility, the possibility of the incurability of an illness, of the inability to restore health.

However, this only proves that in this context – ontologically, existentially, and in reality – the *steresis*, *privation* and *absence* are by far not connected merely or exclusively to illness, but health is nothing else in fact than the *steresis* of illness, and as such, the *dynamis*, possibility of illness. Truly alive and motional health only exists thus when illness meanwhile stands and lurks in the horizon-like ground of the *ousia* and *physis*, in its own *dynamis* and possibility. Otherwise it would be completely unfounded or meaningless for us humans – while being healthy – to deal with the cultivation, further insurance, or preservation of health.

However, what is absent from the *energeia* of health and in a way also from the *energeia* of illnesses, is both *dynamis* and *eidos*, both possibility and appearance, as a *steresis*. What is absent is not therefore merely some empty, “conceptual” non-being. Since the *energeia* of illness renders the (absent) appearance of health being in *dynamis* as well as its new possibilities and impossibilities with regard to their appearance. This is also valid, of course, on the reverse, to health and human relation to health. Because to endeavour to live a healthy life while being healthy, or to invent and apply vaccines, for instance, actually means nothing else than endeavouring to discover and grasp the illnesses threatening as possibilities with

⁵⁴ On the original meanings and senses of the *physis*, see for more details: István Király V., “The Sacred, Or the Bright Sounds of Silence – A thinking-experiment on nature, related (and created) to Heidegger and Hölderlin”, *Philobiblon Journal of the Lucian Blaga Central University Library Cluj* 14 (2009): 301–309.

regard to their known and projected appearance (eidos) and threatening possibilities (dynamis).

It should also be included that in the case of certain possibilities, for example, the dynamis of illnesses, we humans strive to repress or subdue them, to keep them in steresis and thus dynamis. In addition, we strive to cure illnesses, possible on the basis of our knowledge related to their *energeia* and *actualitas*, with our own mode-of-being-like nature and factual existentiality. We do not strive for it with the inarticulateness of mere indeterminacy, but as the encounter, actual, historical, and explicitly being-like, of the categorial, that is, always thematic meanings of human questioning and definite human questions and the all-time possibilities triggered by them.⁵⁵

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These possibilities may even be the dangers and threats mentioned before! Because danger is primarily also a possibility, which is revealed thematically or athematically – directly as a possibility, that is, connected to its future or coming into being – as something that threatens us and which on this account we should avoid or defeat. While the threat concerns our modes of being or our very life or being as the particular possibility of deficiencies.

Such a danger and such a threat for us is the possibility of illness, or illnesses. Which we beware or utterly fear, whether being healthy or already ill. However, human fear is not merely some “subjective” and floating “feeling” but an explicit and actual experience, which has the structure of questioning, or even challenge and ordeal. For this very reason, fear is not a mere rigidity or stiffness, but an experience, mobilizing and anticipatory at the same time, urging for awareness and circumspection. That is, one that would urge man to acknowledge and assume the pertaining essential question-structure of his experiences connected to illness and the fear from illness. Fear, therefore, and especially the fear from death, in its fundamental form – as Hobbes analyzed it profoundly and minutely in the *Leviathan*⁵⁶ – structures and constitutes the all-time historicity of human existence.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Nothing proves it better that we humans relate to the harsh and unavoidable, therefore uneliminatable “makings” of necessities and lawful matters than human history itself. For example, that the harsh and irrevocable earthly and universal rule and at the time being operating force of gravity, being in *energeia*, we humans use for “straightness” and the construction and safe operation of our ever higher buildings. And likewise, that we use this force and our historically shaping knowledge about it as well as our abilities for observing the dynamis necessary for lifting our aircrafts and spaceships up from the surface of the earth and operating them, and “applying” it as something utterly possible for calculating and putting them to work.

⁵⁶ Our more detailed and comprehensive analyses on Thomas Hobbes’ *Leviathan* can be found in the volume *Kérdés-pontok a történelemhez, a halálhoz és a szabadsághoz* (Question-points to history, death, and freedom), in the Excursus entitled “*Leviatán és az emberi dolgok*” (*Leviathan and the things of men*) (Cluj-Napoca [Kolozsvár]: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2008), 47–75.

Because in illnesses and in our fear from illnesses we do not only fear the suffering they cause, nor the deficiencies or breakages of our possibilities of being, but – ultimately – death and its possibilities outlined and determined by illnesses.⁵⁷

The failure to admit it renders fully incomprehensible not only the ways and efforts of any kind of medicine – recte: medicine itself –, but all medical habits, rules, and regulations as well. Just like several types and forms of behaviour described by Boccaccio in the Decameron.

The possibility of illness and illnesses is therefore such a danger and threat to us, of which our previous analyses have hopefully proved that it is not “that kind of” possibility which can be understood, authentically and in its entire amplitude, while calculating or reckoning its “probabilities”. For, as we have mentioned before, “probability” is something that one particular illness may have only. In reality, however, without the possibility of illness outlined here and understood in an even more profound way, there is no life, and consequently there is no living being.

This does not mean of course that there is no health whatsoever, nor that by this illness might acquire some kind of “normality”. In a much deeper sense it is “only” that these “terms” are just as “problematic” as “illness” itself. The “problematic nature” of these “terms” is precisely and actually connected to the questions of illness no longer understood as a “terminology”. This is not so much a “terminological”, “logical”, or “epistemological” problem, but mainly an existential, historical, or ontological one, a “problematic” which cannot be exceeded with a view to eliminate it by, let’s say, the piling up of knowledge and the perfection of methodology. This problematic must be clarified, understood, and assumed amidst our ambitions and efforts directed against it. And this clarification, understanding, and assumption should ultimately be understood and perceived as possibilities.

A living organism can both be healthy and ill as a possibility. This is why Aristotle stresses that medical knowledge treats health and illness at the same time. Medical knowledge has therefore consideration both for the preservation of health and its regaining in front of illness, which the observing-researching activity of medical knowledge deals with and faces in fact with the aim of healing.

Illness itself – illness actualized, standing in actus, in *energeia* – is always a particular kind of steresis, a particular kind of privation or deficiency. However, it is never merely the privation of “health” – that is, of “health” outlined in a purely formal sense, as some kind of ideal state – but a living deficiency which concerns the living with regard to its own essence, and as such, to its fullness. More precisely,

⁵⁷ Not only isolated human individuals, but also communities and civilizations stand in a permanent dialogue with fear, writes Jean Delumeau in his seminal study on the history of fear (in the West). See Jean Delumeau, *Frica în Occident (Secolele XIV-XVII) – O cetate asediată* (Fear in the West (14th – 17th century) – A Besieged Castle), vol. 1, (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1986), 7.

⁵⁸ Each illness proven to be incurable has its own definite and particular “mechanism”, way in which it ultimately causes the ill person’s death, and articulates its dying. These are different in the case of a stroke, AIDS, Alzheimer’s disease, etc. See Sherwin B. Nuland, *How We Die – Reflexions on Life’s Final Chapter* (New York: Vintage Books, A Division of Random House Inc., 1995), 279.

illness is actually the mode-of-being-like privation and deficiency of the modes of being of the living, their pursuance, and at the same time of the validation, the seizure of the possibilities of being of the living.

In an existential sense, that is, connected exclusively to man, to being-here, deficiency is always the privation of the modes of being, their world-like validation. These modes of being are, meanwhile, naturally and essentially, connected and related to possibilities, to their own world-like possibilities. They are related to the possibilities which are themselves not merely incidental “states”, but are organized as articulated mobilities, in a particular horizon-like way which is always articulated as lively in, and together with, the world, and changes in “time”, that is, in history and in the “life history” as well. In the history and life history which is just as motional, changing, and alive as human modes of being themselves, which are widening, narrowing, or restructuring in this history or life history together with their likeness of being, world, and horizon.

In a sketchy formulation, “human modes of being” are particular manifestations and ways of procedures and conducts by which man situates, accomplishes, and pursues himself and his own existence as historically present, historically being-there. Moreover, man accomplishes his own existence by perceiving and assuming the present challenges of his multiple relations and connections with being-here, with the other beings of his life, with other people.

That is to say, practically any human activity, from everyday caring activities, not to be neglected or despised, to the cultivation of sciences, technology, arts, religions, or philosophies, as well as the conception and operation of various institutions and organizations, can be regarded as man’s particular mode of being. Therefore natural sciences, for example, are not merely collections of theories, formulas, and experiments piled up, enriched, and made more accurate in the course of time, but human modes of being. Natural sciences are precisely those modes of beings in which man and the being-here – the living being which discovers and researches these sciences in the questionability of the pursuance of its life – situates and outlines itself by these sciences within the more general and also questionable contexts of “nature”, while it also organically pertains to these natural contexts.⁵⁹

It is also clear, nevertheless, that the deficiencies – being the deficiencies of the man’s, the being-here’s standing-in-the-world, its all-time situatedness, its own possibilities of being, inherent modes of being, and as such, originally, essentially problematic – are not merely raw “negativities” and “lacks” in a restricted sense, but on the contrary, since deficiencies essentially pertain to human existence, they also mobilize the living being called man. Of course, with respect to, and in the direction of its “given”, ongoing and outlined deficient modes of being in the first place, but also with respect to other modes of being as well. That is to say, deficiencies mobilize man to possibly transcend hindrances, fill out or eliminate lacks, shortcomings, or voids, or compensate or counterbalance privations. Furthermore, they explicitly mobilize the living being, since these only become visible, ponderable, and understandable in their actual significance, weight, and existential

⁵⁹ Even if this means the destruction of the things or states of nature.

“roles” in the unavoidable challenges and overwhelming urges-provocations of the constitutive negativities of deficiencies.

Illness, therefore, as we have stressed before, is deficiency, steresis, privation, factually and explicitly referring to the possible wholeness, fullness of the always possible modes and possibilities of being of the human being, of being-here. This also means of course that human illness is always reflexively characterized by also concerning in a deficient and privative way those mode-of-being-like human possibilities by which the ill person, the ill being-here may refer to the deficiencies of its own possible modes of being.

However well an illness may be defined as one particular illness with a particular structure and “positivity”, it is never only one specific, determined, and outlined deficiency. Illness always creates a deficiency, a connection of deficiencies which is projected to the entirety of the ill person’s possibilities of being,⁶⁰ and as such, it forms explicit existential deficiencies also in the possible reflexive relation of these deficiencies.⁶¹

Illness therefore brings into play the possibility, namely the possibilities of the being of the living, with regard to their becoming narrower, impeded, and restrained. Therefore illness, by its essence, narrows and restrains the abilities and life- and being-possibilities of the patient, and directly influences – being-like – the possibilities of the prevalence and pursuance of these. While it concerns and reorganizes his life, and his relation to the world, the living beings, being, and his own identity in this very sense and direction.

This is exactly what illness means as suffering, namely that it concerns and reorganizes the ill person precisely in its possibilities and abilities of beings, within them and in connection with them, on the one hand in a way that causes deficiencies and privations, and on the other hand with regard to the entirety, to the fullness of these possibilities and abilities. Suffering therefore does not only mean a merely “physical” suffering, even less merely pain, but the deficiency or the privation which

⁶⁰ It is perhaps enough to refer to the fact that even a “simple”, acute influenza fundamentally influences and modifies in a deficient sense not only the patient’s abilities for self-sufficiency, as well as his so-to-say “physical” possibilities and efficiency, but also his mental abilities, psychological dispositions, that is, the entirety of his modes, and therefore possibilities of being.

⁶¹ Aristotle’s example about the ill physician curing himself can of course only be interpreted with meaningful liveliness in this horizon. In the sense, that is, that even the ill physician – or the physician patient – needs someone who collects, prepares, and administers his “medicines”, who cares for him, even if it is not this caretaker but the ill physician who diagnosis himself, which sets in fact the treatment of the illness. So the fact that he is a physician, or that in this case he is his own physician, does not eliminate or modify at all that essential and fundamental situation that he is indeed ill, and as such, he is deficiently concerned in the possibilities of his own modes of being and the possibilities of his mode-of-being-like relations or references to these. That is to say, he is impeded in a being-like and mode-of-being-like way.

as a tendency interweaves the possibilities of the sufferer's modes of beings and the quality of these modes of being in their entirety.⁶²

Illness concerns and influences therefore in the first place the scope of possibilities of the ill person's modes of being, world, and being-in-the-world explicitly as deficiencies. By this, the world of the patient also becomes narrower. But it also reorganizes and restructures. In what other directions and in what senses beyond those mentioned?

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So far we have discussed illness primarily as the possibility of the living being, of life. That is to say, as a possibility which pertains to the essence of life to such an extent that it actually takes place in the natural and historical outlining and articulation of life. The man, the being-here however, as repeatedly proposed before, relates to illnesses – and not merely human illnesses – in a medical way, or in ways determined by a perspective which could be regarded as medical. However, it should be repeated over and over again, the ways of this relation are themselves also the determined modes of being of the man, the being-here.

We are speaking precisely about the modes of being in which the man, the being-here relates to illnesses from the perspective of their possible observation, possible cognition, possible prevention, possible treatment or soothing, or possible healing. But which modes of being – as was also discussed at the beginning of this research – do not exhaust the varied “entirety” of man's possible relations to illness, nor the full depths of the weight of their being. Just as they do not exhaust, of course, the meanings of this “situatedness” – namely, illnesses – and the relations and references to these.

Nonetheless, now one can understand more profoundly what is the essence of these specifically human relations and connections to illness. One can perhaps understand more deeply that the essence of man's particular relation to illnesses and

⁶² For the further emphasis of the above thoughts, one may turn once again to an Aristotelian example: that of the blind man. It is a handicap and an illness at the same time. As a handicap, blindness means the lack of seeing, the lack, privation, steresis of the possibility, dynamis of seeing. A blind man is a man of course, but one who lives while being deprived of this human possibility, of this ability essentially pertaining to the human race, a privation which is also possibility – since we have seen that steresis, privation is also dynamis. This very well determined, “outlined” deficiency however does not only deprive him of the experience of seeing, orientation, perceiving distance or colours, etc., but it also sets back his possibilities of motion, transportation, orientation, etc. Let alone that it also deprives him of access to several accomplishments of human culture, such as visual arts or the art of film, etc. While blindness – just like any kind of handicap – also causes permanent stress, which will then attack, sooner or later, the person's immune system, blood circulation, and nervous system as well. Nevertheless, the handicap of blindness as an illness becomes something which should be studied. The research may reveal that there are several kinds of blindness formed by various irregular factors. As it may also be revealed that in certain “types” of blindness the diminution or complete elimination of blindness can also be possible.

especially his own illness is precisely that in these mode-of-being-like relations he reveals illnesses for himself as “problematic possibilities” which essentially pertain to his own being in such a way that meanwhile they threaten with deficiencies the being- and mode-of-being-like possibilities of the pursuance of this kind of being.

These possibilities are continuously outlined for the man and by his being, primarily as questionable and challenging possibilities, or from the point of view of possibility, that is, as the possibilities of their possible prevention, healing, soothing, reception and acceptance, or possible assuming.

This is what usually happens with palliative medicine, in relation to incurable illnesses, and patients suffering of such illnesses, possibly already being in its “terminal phase”. The actualitas, *energeia* of illnesses and the various kinds of deficiencies created by them urge the man precisely for assuming these as essential possibilities. That is to say, illnesses urge us to perceive and assume them first as possibilities of being which threaten man’s all-time possibilities of being with deficiencies and privations with regard to their entirety. So the specificity of the possibility of illness and of illness as a possibility is the following: illness is the threatening and also alive possibility, essentially pertaining to life itself, of the deficiencies of living or pursuing one’s life.

We are speaking about the challenging possibilities of deficiencies which, however, explicitly and factually turn man towards himself. Illness is therefore such a living possibility which is, on the one hand, a possibility of deficiencies constitutive for life, while on the other hand it is essentially reflexive as a living human possibility. And as such, illness is also a possibility which constructs, shapes, articulates, and changes life itself. It may suffice to think of the long-lasting and always renewing medieval epidemics of plague and smallpox, which could not be stopped, nor cured at that time. And which, on this account, immunologically and biologically reorganized and restructured the entire mankind attacked by them. Since these diseases were only survived by those “rare” individuals – and only they could further “reproduce” then – who had already had some resistance against those bacteria, and who could transmit this resistance to their descendants. These descendants “reorganized” mankind in matters of immunity and resistance both in terms of population, and also biologically. However, the epidemics did not only reshape mankind in a biological way, but also socially and mentally. They had their effects also about the appearance or stricter observation of regulations and institutions of public hygiene, demographic registries, etc.

Illness therefore, just like the possibility of illness, refers to man, regards man, and pertains to man. It does not only concern the human body, the human soul, or the human mind. The person is ill in his personal existential entirety, in the fullness of his being-in-the-world, and with regard to his own modes of life and being, and the entirety of the possibilities of these modes of being. While of course the possible world of the ill person is constituted and outlined precisely in this particular way. The world in which he in this particular way – as being ill – meets other people, whether ill or healthy.

Illness as a possibility is therefore the also living possibility of the deficiency of life, which at the same time forms the mode-of-being-like deficiencies of the ill person’s possibilities and abilities of life and being. This however – taking

a step further – also means that illness is particularly that deficiency, that challenge of being and existential questionability which – in the particularly human, being-here-like relation and reference to it – founds, while at the same time also surfaces the possibility and all-time actuality of medical science. Since “medical science” exists, and we humans cultivate it with laboriously and perhaps also dangerously as our own mode of being, because on the one hand illnesses exist and are always possible, and on the other hand because we relate to them in our particularly human ways, repeatedly outlined before. Our relation to illnesses is thus directly in the science and in the practice which never perceives them in their mere *energeia*, *actualitas*, but always considers them determined possibilities, threatening in the future.

Possibilities however mostly become visible by deficiencies, or their unavoidable challenges. Possibilities furthermore become explicitly assumable in their overwhelming questionability by the deficiencies, moreover in an actually pursued searching questioning, direct and taken to the end. Medical science does not grasp possibilities in their given “reality”, but together with the search of their possible treatments, soothing, and healing. This is about the research of treatments which are outlined themselves as possibilities in this research. Possibilities which in there determined situatedness can develop just as well as they can be stranded. Nonetheless, they cannot disappear as possibilities only together with the disappearance of medicine – that is, of the man in general.

Only now can we see indeed that in the everyday of “health” and “normality”, health is usually something that we have not looked at yet, consequently we haven’t seen it. In the everyday of “health” and “normality”, health is usually still very far from us. And again, only now can we see indeed that primarily and mostly health becomes visible precisely in, and by, the deficiencies of illness, namely, as that which, while being absent, has become something distanced. And which, therefore, must be brought back somehow, by special effort, to a new proximity, made visible in its essentiality.

Health itself appears and becomes visible in the deficiencies of illness as something that must be reclaimed from the respective deficiency of life, of being-here. This “reclaim” “happens”, on the one hand, precisely by the possible healing or curing of the illness; or, on the other hand, by the searching outline and settling of this curing or healing as a future possibility. These are possibilities or requirements which require themselves, and urge to, adequate researching-developmental efforts.

Therefore illnesses, just like the particular modes of being of human reactions to them, are essentially historical. On the one hand, in the sense that new or previously unknown illnesses always appear or may appear. For example, new kinds of viruses or virus mutations, or unknown illnesses generated by new circumstances occurring historically in people’s world, life conditions, or ways of life.⁶³ On the other hand, however, with the development of sciences and medicine in particular, and its effects on general life conduct, some illnesses are gradually superseded in wide areas, while some others previously considered incurable will eventually have some remedy.

⁶³ For instance, new illnesses which have appeared lately, due to the wide use of computers.

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Illness as a possibility of the living being – let us repeat – is itself a living possibility which, consequently, living within the ill person, lives together with the ill person, and vice versa. Evidently in such a way that meanwhile the illness diminishes or forays the possibilities of the ill person's modes of life and being.

The ill person is alive of course, but he lives together with his illness. Furthermore, the ill person lives at the same time against his illness, or directly in spite of it. Illness therefore reorganizes, changes the life of the person who lives together with it and despite it at the same time.⁶⁴

One must very clearly see and admit, without denial and obscurity, the basic circumstance that precisely by the presence of illness in life, proven to be essential, it is not merely "health", but life itself that begins to show itself, ever more unavoidably, in its reality, its trueness, its actuality and weight. Life begins to show itself in illness in its actuality and its own weight ever more undeniably, unavoidably, and factually challenging way as something essentially, originally, and constitutively finite! Or more accurately: mortal!

So, although illness can by no means be regarded as something which may "autonomously" constitute some kind of meaning for life, illness is nevertheless such a mode of being for man, or such a deficiency of modes and possibilities of being by which we humans can clarify for ourselves the origins, sources, "nature", weights, perspectives, and possibilities even of meanings. Illness is a particular way of the encounter with life, pertaining essentially to life, with help of which one may clarify those origins and sources of meaning which may ultimately only derive from the finiteness, or more accurately mortality of human life.

Illness is therefore by no means some kind of arbitrary "attribute", nor is it merely a "state" of life and the living, which "falls into" it, but an explicitly essential mode of being, only possible as such. Since illness as a possibility is nothing else than the possibility of the deficiencies of possibilities of being and life, and abilities of being and life.

Illness is such an essential and particular possibility therefore which concerns possibility precisely in its own, essential, and intimate deficiencies. By this, however, illness – especially in this deficient and threatened meaning – turns back the possibility reflexively towards itself. And it is exactly in this possibility returned towards itself, in the tensions of its deficiencies triggered, created, and represented by the illness, that the fundamental questions connected to meanings appear or at least may appear. The questions which have never emerged before, or which have been overshadowed, or always postponed. But these questions, if being further

⁶⁴ Diabetes for instance is a kind of disease which requires the introduction of a completely new system of nutrition, as well as the acceptance and observance of a new order of treatment and life for the patient, which "he can live with". But in perspective the diabetes, with all this, and in spite of all this, still shortens the life of the patient. It leads to his death, and partakes in the concretization – its How? and When? – and actual "causation" of this death.

questioned for clarifications, may reveal and outline “new” meanings and “new” possibilities. For the ill person just as much as for those with whom he meanwhile sets up “specific” human relations. (Even if these new and different possibilities – for example, in the case of dementias, that is, the gradual, but complete loss of selfsameness or selfness – will only exist for those around the ill person. For them, dementia will appear as the threatening and prospective, yet possible mode of their own being!)

Illness therefore – at least by the deficiencies of the ill person’s possibilities of being – isolates, while at the same time it also presupposes, necessitates, and makes possible indeed the building of new, determined, and particularly human, being-here-like relations. Since, being turned towards himself because of his illness, the patient finds himself in the situation that he must ask for the support and care of others. While others turn towards the patient, taking care of him, helping and curing him, they can perceive his illness as something “given”, as a privation, standing in *energeia*, in *actus*, but at the same time also as a possibility. They can perceive it as a possibility which – beyond that particular patient, that particular being-here who actually suffers in it – can also attack others, can reach others, the caretaker and healer themselves included!

This is precisely the most essentially and particularly characteristic kind of utterly human relation to the possibilities of illness. That is to say, the human being relates – or at least may relate – to the possibilities of illness while experiencing them, understanding them, and assuming them as its own possibilities, as the privative possibilities of its own, determined, articulated deficiencies.

In contrast, the non-human living beings – although “disposing” in their being of illnesses as a being-like possibility essentially pertaining to their lives – cannot relate to them otherwise than states and processes formed as facts, which are decided only and exclusively in their sheer living being, its parameters, and together with their lives.⁶⁵

Illness and its possibility therefore does not turn “back” the ill person, nor the people, the beings-here with whom he had determinedly articulated personal contacts as a patient, nor the human being “as such” towards a kind of “health” to be preserved and taken care of, or restored and reclaimed! But illness, facing and assuming it, turns us humans first towards life “as such” – and thus towards the *physis* of course –, then towards the questions, challenges, stakes, and chances of the possible meanings of our lives. It turns us towards those questionable possible meanings which may derive and prevail exactly from the uniquely and unrepeatably – that is, mortally – constituted experience and understanding of this human, being-here-like life, of this living-being. Ultimately therefore both human illness and its

⁶⁵ For example, if in case of animals their natural systems of self-defence and instincts prove to be inefficient against illnesses, than the need for human – e.g., veterinary – intervention emerges. Or for plants the intervention of the agronomist. Without these, however, neither animals nor plants have any kind of defence system. Their “fate” connected to the diseases attacking them can only be decided within the framework of these facts of their lives. Or, perspectively perhaps, by the new chances offered by evolution and its possible consequences for the species.

possibility turns us humans towards being and the question of being, as towards a question being-like pertaining to our being.

It is only because of these – equally ontological and existential – foundations that medical science deals not only with illness, with being ill, and specific illnesses, and not only with health, but also with death. Because illness represents, surfaces, and makes visible, as well as assumable and clarified by questioning the weights, stakes, and possible meanings and significance of the constitutive finiteness of life in general and human lives in particular, and of death. Illness therefore clarifies the always possible, and as such, always problematic meaning of human life as well. It is not by chance that we Hungarians call the illnesses which threaten the patient exactly in his “life”: “weighty” (meaning: serious). Those which threaten the patient precisely with his own death.

For “immortals” however illnesses, suffering, or their soothing, caretaking, or healing could have no weight or stake whatsoever. So such things would serve “for them” as no kinds of sources of meaning. Consequently amongst them – besides many other things – medicine could not be discovered. Therefore the ultimate origin and source of all kinds of illnesses proves to be life, the constitutive and essential finiteness of any life. Since the living being, its life can only be disturbed and threatened by anything at all, and particularly by something like illness, because it is theoretically and essentially finite.

Now, as far as man is concerned – that is, we ourselves – his living being-here is characterized and particularized by his not simply being “finite”, but actually a mortal. More precisely, it is characterized not only by the fact that he dies, but that he may become a mortal, exclusively in the unique unrepeatability of the pursuance of his existence, of his life.⁶⁶ It may become a mortal in his unrepeatability uniqueness (individuality) which can only be understood as being-like and gained by assuming the multiple possibilities of our own mortal life. This means the understanding and clarifying assuming of the possibilities to which illness also explicitly pertains in an essential, dangerous, and threatening way.

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Here are, to conclude, some possible and possibly very particular directions, meanings, and hopefully also results of those which we humans can only and exclusively raise for, and in the interest of, our possible – both ontological and existential – horizons of meaning and possibilities of being by a sui generis and explicitly philosophical and well outlined thematization and questioning about illness, and human illnesses in particular.

Translated by Emese G. Czintos

⁶⁶ On the question and subject of death, for more detailed and profound analyses of the ontological, existential, and historical horizons of death, see mainly the study entitled *A meghalásról* (On dying) in the volume István Király V., *Halandóan lakozik...*, 9–206., and the chapters and studies of the volume István Király V., *Kérdés-pontok ...* .