FAMILY, RELIGION, PEDAGOGY AND EVERYDAY EDUCATION PRACTICE

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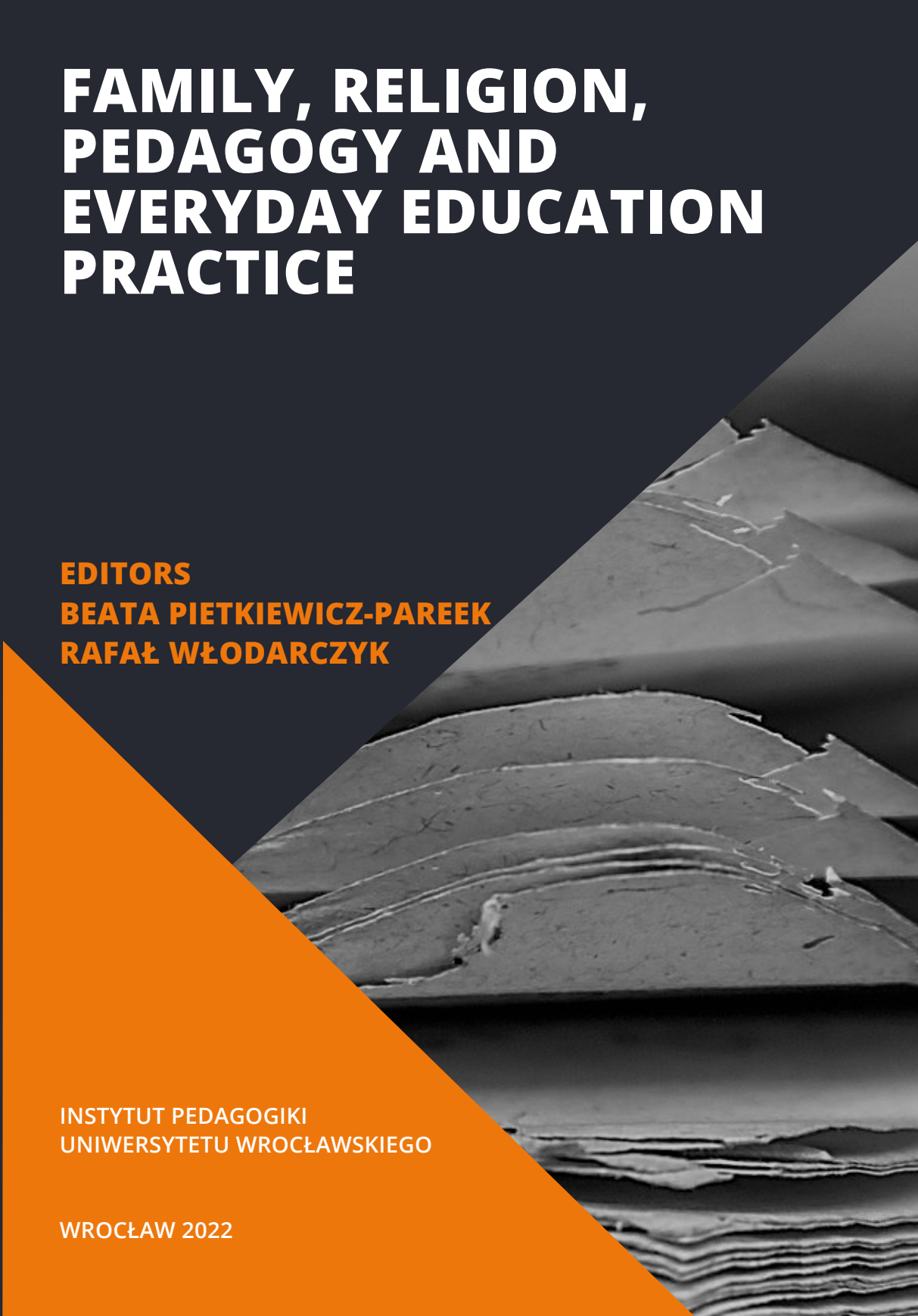

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CRUELTY, VIOLENCE AND EDUCATION BY MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE. AN ESSAY ON PEDAGOGICAL DEONTOLOGY[1]

ABSTRACT:

The aim of this paper is to analyse the phenomenon of cruelty according to pedagogical deontology. Cruelty is a significant threat to the educational relationship for two reasons: it is a form of aggression and occurs mostly in a veiled or camouflaged form. The author refers to concepts of cruelty by Michel de Montaigne and Judith N. Shklar and indicates the difference between cruelty and violence and highlights the measures to prevent the emergence of atrocities in education and everyday life.

KEYWORDS:

cruelty, aggression, violence, education, pedagogical deontology

...violence is nothing more
than the most flagrant
manifestation of power

Hannah Arendt, *On Violence*

[1] Originally published: Rafał Włodarczyk, "Okrucieństwo, przemoc i wychowanie według Michela de Montaigne'a. Szkic z deontologii pedagogicznej", *Studia Edukacyjne* 2017, no. 43, p. 295–314.

We show our ingenuity only
by ill-treating ourselves
Michel de Montaigne, *Essays*

Taking up the issue of cruelty on the grounds of pedagogical deontology, i.e. studies focused on recognizing the duty and moral obligations of educators, we accept as settled the problem of evaluating aggression. The available knowledge concerning the occurrence of aggression in educational practice allows us to claim that its presence in the process of upbringing can be justified yet cannot be morally pardoned from the point of view of pedagogy[2]. Still, we should be mindful of the fact that pedagogical deontology continues to face unresolved theoretical issues when analysing violence. The disputes over definitions that we can find in the relevant literature, resulting mainly from difficulties in defining the scope of the phenomena, make the terms *aggression* and *violence* sometimes used interchangeably. The definition of violence against a child, and basically child maltreatment, adopted by the WHO indicated that this involved "all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power"[3]. In this approach, attempts to isolate the act of violence in a system of reactions or to distinguish it from other forms of aggression, i.e. a wide range of human actions that are characterized by attacking or hostility[4] – cruelty, neglect, destruction of objects, control, deterrence, ignoring, etc, are doomed to failure. This does not mean such attempts are not useful from the point of view of

2 See *Encyklopedia pedagogiczna XXI wieku*, vol. 1, ed. T. Pilch, Warszawa 2003, p. 39-47; J. Danielewska, *Agresja u dzieci – szkoła porozumienia*, Warszawa 2002; B. Śliwerski, "Pseudowychowanie", [in:] B. Śliwerski, *Pedagogika ogólna. Podstawowe prawidłowości*, Kraków 2012, p. 313-334; D. Zając, "Obszary przemocy w wychowaniu", [in:] E. Kubiak-Szymborska, D. Zając, *Podstawowe problemy teorii wychowania. Konteksty współczesnych przemian*, Bydgoszcz 2006, p. 243-259.

3 World Health Organization, *Preventing child maltreatment: A guide to taking action and generating evidence*, Geneva 2006, p. 9.

4 See A. S. Reber, *Dictionary of Psychology*, London 2001, p. 17; E. Fromm, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*, New York, Chicago, San Francisco 1973, p. xv-xvi.

pedagogical theory. The premise developed in this study posits a qualitative difference between cruelty and narrowly defined violence, i.e. the exploitative use of physical or psychological force by the perpetrator or perpetrators to coerce the victim to change their actions or attitudes, to subjugate others to one's will, and to deprive the victim of life.

Cruelty, an incarnation of aggression and thus a phenomenon that, in light of deontology and its view of the well-being of people in an educational relationship, should be excluded from educational practice, seems easy to identify if it occurs together with violence or persecution and is therefore often identified or confused with them. It is far more difficult to see and identify it when it lacks such a clear context. It is not certain, therefore, if by removing violence and tyranny from the process of education, we will also get rid of cruelty. In other words, in seeking to counter cruelty, we run the risk that by turning to more transparent forms of aggression, such as maltreatment, oppression or manipulation we leave cruelty itself unrecognized (and possibly intact), or that we make suspect any form of coercion, including persuasion, since we see them as vehicles of aggression in the form of veiled cruelty. In this case, too, we will overlook this elusive phenomenon. What is more, trying to oppose and counteract it, we may be doomed to failure in advance, because, as Judith N. Shklar admits in the introduction to her book *Ordinary Vices*, inspired by Michel de Montaigne's ideas, "we can live neither with it nor without it. Moreover," she adds, "it puts us face to face with our irrationality as nothing else does"[5].

Shklar's claim is very unsettling. Considering its consequences on the grounds of pedagogical deontology, we can conclude that education faces an unsolvable problem that undermines the humanistic foundations of contemporary education[6]. Therefore, mindful of the moral aspect of upbringing, we should review the phenomenon of human cruelty.

5 J. N. Shklar, *Ordinary Vices*, Cambridge, London 1984, p. 3. Shklar's book dealing with the moral and political significance of cruelty, hypocrisy, snobbery, treachery, and misanthropy, takes as its starting point the enumeration of the author of the *Essays*, published almost exactly four hundred years earlier, and his sketches devoted to these moral phenomena.

6 See B. Śliwerski, "Wychowanie jako działanie", [in:] B. Śliwerski, *Pedagogika ogólna*, op. cit., p. 144-188; S. Kunowski, "Znaczenie współczesne wychowania", [in:] S. Kunowski, *Podstawy współczesnej pedagogiki*, Warszawa 1993, p. 19-25.

PHYSICAL AND MORAL CRUELTY ACCORDING TO SHKLAR

In her reflections on cruelty, Judith N. Shklar draws on Michel de Montaigne's observations. According to the philosopher, the Renaissance humanist was the first thinker of significance for the intellectual traditions of the West to recognize cruelty as a fundamental moral threat. As he confessed in the *Essays*, "Among the vices, both by nature and judgement I have a cruel hatred of cruelty, as the ultimate vice of them all"[7]. Before de Montaigne, the question of cruelty, Shklar notes, both as a core ethical issue and a major moral problem, had not garnered the attention of philosophers or theologians, or this is at least what the scholar was able to ascertain on the basis of familiar and available source texts. Montaigne's significance for the question at hand goes beyond singling out this kind of moral threat from among other 'ordinary vices', such as treachery, infidelity or tyranny. As Shklar explains, the 16th-century thinker used the above, somewhat surprising term, since these are "the sort of conduct we all expect, nothing spectacular or unusual"[8]. (This is another source of possible anxiety for both the educator and the educational researcher, as are the philosopher's conclusions in the end of the book's introduction about ordinary vices: "Cruelty, hypocrisy, snobbery, and treachery will certainly never go away"[9]). De Montaigne's *Essays*, which, in the 17th century, one hundred years after its publication, was entered on the index of banned books, while not a systematic lecture on the subject of interest to us, abounds in fragments of substantively momentous inquiry, penetrating remarks, valuable digressions, and, above all, instructive illustrations, which can form the basis, as Shklar convinces us, for the effort to understand the problems brought about by the phenomenon of human cruelty.

Before turning to the musings of the Renaissance thinker, however, let us examine the reading of Montaigne's essays and the reflections on

7 M. de Montaigne, "On Cruelty", [in:] M. de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, London 1991, p. 480–481.

8 J. N. Shklar, *Ordinary Vices*, op. cit., p. 1. Shklar's motto preceding the introduction is a passage from Montaigne's essay "On the Cannibals": "treachery, disloyalty, tyranny and cruelty, which are everyday vices in us" (M. de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, op. cit., p. 236).

9 J. N. Shklar, *Ordinary Vices*, op. cit., p. 6.

cruelty offered in *Ordinary Vices* by a contemporary political theorist. Shklar links the top position of cruelty in the hierarchy of moral offenses in the ethical structure of liberal theory to the terror of modern religious wars. As she points out with regard to the political consequences of the use of terror, the resulting "fear destroys freedom" and reduces people "to mere reactive units of sensation and that this does impose a public ethos on us"[10]. Fear is not only the enemy of human freedom in that it effectively deprives individuals of initiative and inhibits their involvement. Its domination combined with its prolonged influence adversely transforms social relations, perpetuating norms and patterns of behaviour based on tyranny and subjugation. Moreover, according to Shklar, fear makes the oppressors cruel and fear increases the suffering of the victims[11]. According to the philosopher, it constitutes the motivation of the perpetrator of physical cruelty, which is "the willful inflicting of physical pain on a weaker being in order to cause anguish and fear". As she adds, it is "is a wrong done entirely to *another creature*"[12], which seems to refer likewise to the other kind of cruelty addressed by the scholar, i.e. moral cruelty.

Four questions deserve special attention in Shklar's definition and discussion of physical cruelty in *Ordinary Vices*. Firstly, the physical cruelty she distinguishes is based on a relationship of inequality. The victim is a weaker being: physically, socially or as a species. Even in the case of resentment discussed by Nietzsche and revisited by Scheler, or rather its grounds, a deferred revenge of the weaker party must exploit momentary advantages against the dominant party[13]. Secondly, unlike ethics, in which a moral norm has been established on the basis of authority (Shklar refers to the Christian's sin of pride against God) and its

10 Ibidem, p. 2, 5. See also: ibidem, p. 23, 236-238. See H. Arendt, "Mankind a Terror", [in:] H. Arendt, *Essays in Understanding 1930-1954. Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism*, ed. J. Kohn, New York 2005, p. 297-306. Instructive in this context is Franz Kafka's story "In the Penal Colony".

11 See J. N. Shklar, *Ordinary Vices*, op. cit., p. 23.

12 Ibidem, p. 8.

13 See M. Scheler, *Ressentiment*, Milwaukee 2007. On the connection between social distance and cruelty see J. N. Shklar, *Ordinary Vices*, op. cit., p. 27-29. The classic novel by Honorius Balzac, *Cousin Betty*, can serve as an illustration of the phenomenon of resentment and is a penetrating study of cruelty. Similarly, François Mauriac's *The Knot of Vipers*.

violation is associated with its rejection, insult or disobedience, physical cruelty as an evil done to 'another creature' can be judged without reference to a higher authority, for it is "part of our normal private life and our daily public practices"[14]. In other words, physical cruelty and its judgment, according to the philosopher, relate directly to the persons involved. They do not require, as many religious and ethical doctrines do, recourse to external factors and criteria whose recognized customary priority might justify the perpetrator's harmful action and disavow the victim's suffering. Thirdly, physical cruelty is an intentional act with an unambiguously attributed goal of inducing fear and terror, and thus, fourthly, physical suffering here is only a means, and the effect expected by the perpetrator can be achieved in other ways (what Shklar refers to as moral cruelty in the later parts of her essay). If we add that the instilment of fear and terror results in the subjugation of the victims to the perpetrators, we should recognise that the description offered by Shklar basically coincides with what scholars have often tended to see as violence, without identifying it with cruelty[15]. It is also necessary to ask how the philosopher's account of physical cruelty relates to the other kind of cruelty she discusses in *Ordinary Vices*. In other words, we should ask about the relation between violence and cruelty, which (even though Shklar assumes a relation here) is problematic for another reason than the one mentioned above.

According to the liberal theorist's definition, the infliction of physical suffering for no other purpose than to induce fear and terror, i.e. to punish or to save life, should not be identified as cruelty. However, such a distinction seems difficult to sustain. As an example, consider excerpts from 18th- and 19th-century parenting manuals, cited by Alice Miller after the anthology *Schwarze Pädagogik* by Katharina Rutschky[16]. Here the authors approve of corporal punishment for the purpose of teaching children obedience, improving their behaviour or helping them

14 J. N. Shklar, *Ordinary Vices*, op. cit., p. 9.

15 See D. Zając, *Obszary przemocy w wychowaniu*, op. cit., p. 243-246. See także: *Przemoc i agresja jako zjawiska społeczne*, ed. M. Binczycka-Anholcer, Warszawa 2003; *Różne spojrzenia na przemoc*, ed. R. Szczepanik, J. Wawrzyniak, Łódź 2008; *Agresja i przemoc: współczesne konteksty i wyzwania*, ed. K. Barłóg, E. Tłuczek-Tadla, Jarosław 2013.

16 See A. Miller, *For Your Own Good. Hidden Cruelty in Child-rearing and the Roots of Violence*, New York 1990, p. 3-91.

adapt to social norms. The Swiss psychoanalyst, however, using Freudian theory of transference, argues that the overt aim in such cases is secondary to the aggressor's covert and unconscious intention to humiliate the weaker one, which often stems from the perpetrator's earlier experience of being a victim of aggression at the hands of someone stronger, and is in fact a reconfigured repetition of past humiliation, just as acts of self-mutilation or other forms of self-destruction would be. The therapist's perspective on the analysis of violence will further complicate Shklar's definition of physical cruelty if we consider that the question that makes it even more troublesome to point out the proper teleology of cruelty needs to be resolved, namely: aren't psychological compensation and repetition themselves at least equally important goals, the realization of which is promised to the perpetrator by the situation he creates? On the other hand, Miller herself, commenting on the examples selected from Rutschky's anthology, does not hesitate to use the term "cruelty", but not in the sense that Shklar is trying to grasp, but rather as an expression of disapproval of all forms of violence and, more broadly, aggression of adults towards children.

The political theorist would probably disagree with the consequences of the view that every act of violence is in principle physical cruelty, since it is in fact aimed, regardless of the declared intentions, at arousing fear in the victim weaker than the perpetrator by means of physical suffering. As he notes, "Punishment is justifiably inflicted in the service of retribution, education, or public security; but if it goes away from, or beyond, these ends we call it 'cruel and unusual' and forbid its use"[17].

The term "go away from, or beyond, these ends" shows a certain excess yet is not imprecise. However, according to Shklar, it means that something more is needed in order to be able to say not only that a given punishment constitutes violence, but that it is cruelty.

The philosopher's view on the function of punishment seems to correspond to the pessimistic view of human nature and the organization of common life of people, which we can find in Freud, for whom culture in its broadest sense is the result of sublimation forced by social norms on members of a community. In other words, the individual is

[17] J. N. Shklar, *Ordinary Vices*, op. cit., p. 24. See also: H. Arendt, *On Violence*, San Diego, New York 1970.

determined by the dynamics of the action of drives proper to his organism. These drives, along with desires, are responsible for the mental tension and pressure arising in the clash with the moral expectations and limitations imposed on him by the community. Violence, the use of force, although morally reprehensible and psychologically crippling, turns out to be politically necessary to sustain social order, among other things as a means of instilling and maintaining among its members the fear of possible sanctions for this order's transgression. Since this order is, usually correctly, internalized by the individual in the process of upbringing, including the sense of fear of its violation, he is capable not only of sublimating and approving behaviour, but also of self-censorship and of inflicting an appropriate punishment on himself. (Similar conclusions about the violent nature of culture, although from a different research perspective, are made by reproduction theorists[18]. Consequently, this means that in the face of state regulation, social norms, environmental impact, upbringing, or the nature and course of interaction, the individual is subject to permanent violence. Importantly, reproduction theorists seem to share with negative educators the view of the permeation of educational relations with violence. In one of the key books of this scholarly perspective we read that all pedagogical action "is, objectively, symbolic violence insofar as it is the imposition of a cultural arbitrary by an arbitrary power"[19]).

If Miller's views on the constitution of the individual and the aim of therapy deviate in many respects from the original assumptions of the founder of psychoanalysis, both authors seem to share a weakness, also characteristic of pedagogy, towards social engineering, for which education is synonymous with the grooming of individuals and the formation of society. In other words, it is not at all clear that Miller, who advocates Ekkefard von Braunmühl's anti-pedagogical theories, while criticizing black pedagogy and the grooming of individuals, also rejects the temptation to mould society via education.

In contrast, classical liberalism, within which Shklar operates, assumes that social life is determined by politics, while politics is determined

18 See P. Bourdieu, J.-C. Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, London, New Dehli 1990; R. Moore, *Education and Society. Issues and Explanations in the Sociology of Education*, Oxford 2004 (chapters 2 and 3).

19 P. Bourdieu, J.-C. Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, op. cit., p. 5.

by autonomous citizens. Liberal theory[20] sees the individual as free and equal to others, focuses attention on adults and independent individuals, assumes a diversity of attitudes, value scales, worldviews, competencies, knowledge, interests, and positions and statuses coexisting in society, and assumes that counteracting the conflicts resulting from pluralism allows for a limited right to use force and coercion, redistributed among individual institutions. Such is the importance of the philosopher's nuanced understanding of violence that the moral and political impact she is interested in among adult free citizens will have a different character and consequences for her than Miller's participation of violence in child development. In this sense, physical cruelty is, according to the political theorist, unlawful and unjustifiable violence.

It can also be said that both scholars do not so much want to talk about cruelty itself as about violence and other forms of aggression. Miller refers to their effects in upbringing and Shklar's in interpersonal relations and politics. While for Miller any use of physical or psychological force is abuse, Shklar would only consider unjustified violence as cruelty. Both, however, show a clear tendency to reduce cruelty to violence, whereas these two are separate phenomena that often co-occur. In other words, Shklar's account of cruelty seems to elude comprehension, perhaps because of the liberal theoretical stance she has taken and the focus of the political science discipline she represents, which suggests that in order to verify her conclusions she should go directly to the source of her reflection, i.e. de Montaigne's essays.

Before that happens, however, let us say a few more words about the second kind of cruelty that the philosopher distinguishes:

> It is deliberate and persistent humiliation, so that the victim can eventually trust neither himself nor anyone else. Sooner or later it may involve physical hurt, but that is not inherent in it. Painful as humiliation is, it does no bodily damage[21].

20 See J. Gray, *Liberalism*, Minneapolis 1986; W. Kimlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy. An Introduction*, Oxford 2001, p. 53-101.

21 J. N. Shklar, *Ordinary Vices*, op. cit., p. 37. In the characterization given by Shklar, the term "persistent" may suggest sadism, but the philosopher herself distinguishes between the two (see ibidem, p. 43-44).

First of all, the idea expressed in the quote seems to bear out the earlier conclusions that cruelty cannot be reduced to violence, and therefore there is only one kind of cruelty, moral one, while violence and physical suffering, being one of many means of possible control over the victim, remain a separate phenomenon that may accompany cruelty. Also Shklar seems to provide an argument in favour of this claim when she writes that: "Montaigne was well aware of moral cruelty, and saw it as a personal danger, but he never confused it with physical brutality"[22].

The excerpt from Shklar's discussion of moral cruelty brings another important element to her understanding of it. The philosopher speaks of the victim's disorientation, which we can combine with the experience of loneliness[23], since, humiliated, victims cannot explain to themselves or to others the reason for their suffering. The question raised by Shklar allows us to ask: to what extent is the act of cruelty disguised? To what extent, therefore, can it be grasped and explained? Shklar, too, notes that there is a reason why Montaigne does not explicitly say what cruelty is but instead uses stories. As she explains, "It may well be that the vices, and especially cruelty, escape rationalizing so completely that only stories can catch their meaning. Of this I am not entirely sure, again in keeping with Montaigne's caution and skepticism"[24]. Although Shklar's proposed distinction between physical and moral cruelty seems misleading, one should prudently take attempts to define the phenomenon.

MONTAIGNE ON CRUELTY AND CUSTOM

In Chapter XXXI of Book One of the *Essays*, "On the Cannibals", Michel de Montaigne describes customs of dealing with captives of an unspecified tribe of 'savages', which he learns from an account related to him:

22 Ibidem, p. 37. Erich Fromm does the same in his remarkable study *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*, addressing aggression, distinguishing between cruelty and destructiveness. Nevertheless, he points out that the two phenomena occur together (see op. cit., p. 1-10).

23 See J. N. Shklar, *Ordinary Vices*, op. cit., p. 10-11, 23.

24 Ibidem, p. 6.

> For a long period they treat captives well and provide them with all the comforts which they can devise; afterwards the master of each captive summons a great assembly of his acquaintances; he ties a rope to one of the arms of his prisoner and holds him by it, standing a few feet away for fear of being caught in the blows, and allows his dearest friend to hold the prisoner the same way by the other arm: then, before the whole assembly, they both hack at him with their swords and kill him. This done, they roast him and make a common meal of him, sending chunks of his flesh to absent friends. This is not as some think done for food – as the Scythians used to do in antiquity – but to symbolize ultimate revenge. As a proof of this, when they noted that the Portuguese who were allied to their enemies practised a different kind of execution on them when taken prisoner – which was to bury them up to the waist, to shoot showers of arrows at their exposed parts and then to hang them – they thought that these men from the Other World, who had scattered a knowledge of many a vice throughout their neighbourhood and who were greater masters than they were of every kind of revenge, which must be more severe than their own; so they began to abandon their ancient method and adopted that one. It does not sadden me that we should note the horrible barbarity in a practice such as theirs: what does sadden me is that, while judging correctly of their wrong-doings we should be so blind to our own[25].

Let us leave aside the question of how far Montaigne's description reflects the patterns of behaviour we might have experienced in the world at the time. Resolving that question is not necessary here. Assuming that the essay expresses the author's views, we can take the story of the customs of both the cannibals and the Portuguese as an illustration of Montaigne's notion of cruelty. Although the term itself does not appear in the above passage, having referred to what Shklar writes about cruelty, based on the *Essays*, we can assume that the above description confirms and actually enhances our knowledge of the Renaissance humanist's views on the subject of interests to us.

The comparison made by Montaigne between the customs of the members of two different cultural groups allows us to again pose the

[25] M. de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, op. cit., p. 235. See also: ibidem, p. 125-126, 131, 236-237, 481-486.

question about the relationship between violence and cruelty. Here, in an act of revenge, cannibals prepare a meal from the body of a prisoner of war. They kill the enemy, but the very manner in which they do so seems to introduce into the whole situation an additional element, independent of the act of violence. The cannibals, as Montaigne depicts them, are not indifferent to the kind of death inflicted. What leads to it seems to arouse fear in the captive and to deepen, in their view, his suffering. Equally importantly, revenge does not end with his death. What happens around the act of violence itself, both before and after the captive's death, and what is only incidentally related to it, becomes significant. According to Montaigne's narrative, the cannibals decide to change the ritual and imitate the Portuguese in order to mete out revenge by other means and more completely. Death is not enough. It is the 'something more', the excess of which Montaigne writes in another essay: "As for me, even in the case of Justice itself, anything beyond the straightforward death- penalty seems pure cruelty [...]"[26].

Had it not been for the decision to change the ritual, this element and the attendant passion would have remained masked under the guise of a custom adopted from previous generations and repeated by the members of the tribe not so much, as we suspect, out of a personal desire for cruelty, but out of respect for tradition. This excess, which aggravates suffering and which Montaigne unmasks in his narrative, seems to elude discussion by virtue of the fact that the act of violence, i.e. the murder and death of a captive, is at the centre of the event, and the very manner of taking his life is beyond choice and is justified by the established custom. Thus, at most, we can say about it, and not about the people who cultivate it, that it permits cruelty, which at the same time exonerates the members of the tribe who follow a pattern. It is not difficult to explain why murdering a captive is violence, while proving that preparing and eating the victim's body should be considered cruel is not so obvious. When asked why we would want a different kind of death for a captive, we could only answer that we think this one is cruel. Yet when asked why we think another type is less cruel, we would probably be at a loss for words. Certainly, cruelty is easier to sense than to discuss or prove. That seems to be the reason for its appeal as a tool of aggression.

26 Ibidem, p. 482.

In Montaigne's description of the custom of the cannibal tribe we are able to see this excess, perhaps not only thanks to the author of the *Essays*, but also because the followers of this barbaric ritual are not ashamed of their cruelty and try to highlight it themselves. The situation is different in another case described by the Renaissance humanist:

> St Hilary, the Bishop of Poitiers and a famous enemy of the Arian heresy, was in Syria when he was told that his only daughter Abra, whom he had left overseas with her mother, was being courted by some of the most notable lords of the land since she was very well brought up, a maiden fair, rich and blooming. He wrote to her (as we know) that she should get rid of her love of the pleasures and favours that were being offered her, saying that he had found for her during his journey a Suitor who was far greater and more worthy, a Bridegroom of very different power and glory, who would vouchsafe her a present of robes and jewels of countless price. His aim was to make her lose the habit and taste of worldly pleasures and to wed her to God; but since the most sure and shortest way seemed to him that his daughter should die, he never ceased to beseech God in his prayers, vows and supplications that he should take her from this world and call her to Himself. And so it happened; soon after his return she did die, at which he showed uncommon joy. [...] when St Hilary's wife heard from him how the death of their daughter had been brought about by his wish and design, and how much happier she was to have quitted this world than to have remained in it, she too took so lively a grasp on that eternal life in Heaven that she besought her husband, with the utmost urgency, to do the same for her. Soon after, when God took her to Himself in answer to both their prayers, the death was welcomed with open arms and with an uncommon joy which both of them shared[27].

It seems highly doubtful that a father who prays for his daughter's death and then considers his intercession to God to be a glorious accomplishment actually contributed to her parting from life. Yet the story told by Montaigne is disturbing. We are surprised by the reaction of St. Hilary's wife, in whom not only the death of her daughter but also the bishop's attitude should trigger suffering, frustration and anger. Actually, however, the pain of the loss draws her closer to her husband

27 Ibidem, p. 246.

and his stratagem. The tenor of Montaigne's story seems ironic, but the realization that faith in God, religious devotion and the typical medieval attitude toward earthly life can explain the authentic zeal of the parents helps us understand the solace obtained by St. Hilary's wife. Could Abra's mother resent her husband's desire for the supreme good of faith for their daughter, i.e. 'eternal life in Heaven'? Her petition to St. Hilary seems to prove that she believed that her husband had indeed obtained God's intercession and could obtain it again for her. Because of her views at the time, she is unable to expose her husband's cruelty. This does not mean she does not feel it, for there is a high probability that by attempting to accuse him of it, she would expose herself to ridicule and misunderstanding on the part of the community. She may not even understand it herself. Hence, humiliated, feeling alone, unable to oppose the veiled cruelty (veiled probably also for the bishop), possibly even unable to understand her own contradictory feelings, her pain and despair pitted against the 'eternal life in Heaven' of her daughter, she decides to surrender to his action herself.

What, then, is cruelty? It is disguised aggression which makes the victim feel lonesome, left alone with her fear and suffering, which to a large degree intensifies it, because she becomes confused about the causes of the pain she feels. As a result of this dissonance, she is unable to convince herself and others that she has been wronged and that she deserves understanding and compassion, in other words recognition of the harm she has suffered. It seems that it is this lack of recognition of the victim's suffering that is crucial here. Since cruelty is veiled and evades verbalisation, recognition is difficult to come by, which at the same time helps the perpetrators to remain above suspicion and often to be seen as the victim's benefactors. Similarly, when cruelty is based on or related to an act of violence, the recognition of the victim's suffering is limited to the effects of the violence, which masks it, diverts attention from the act of cruelty which remains in its shadow and is often more severe, and blames the perpetrator only for the act which is easier to prove. Unmasking the atrocity is difficult and in principle only a confession or ostentatious display by the perpetrator can help.

Naturally not all the aforementioned conditions need to be met in a particular case. As we read in de Montaigne's example, the cannibals exposed their own cruelty, which helped to unmask it. Nevertheless, we

realize that a substantive discussion about which kind of death or violence is more or less cruel boils down to tautological statements (we accept something as less cruel because we accept it as such) or a sense of powerlessness. We may tacitly empathise with the person who has been wronged, showing solidarity with them because of the suffering they are experiencing, Yet when dealing with cruelty, we are faced with the problems of grasping, understanding or communicating to others the victim's rationale, which could open the way for them to fully acknowledge the pain they are experiencing and free them from the sense of loneliness that greatly exacerbates the humiliation.

When a parent hears: "Mom, I don't think I love you", is the five-year-old spontaneous or cruel? Can one ascertain this without risking showing bad faith? Can a friend who because of her friend's engagement will lose an important part of herself in a way confide her feelings of loneliness in the happy engaged friend? What does a pupil feel when, complaining to his guardians about constant violence from one of his schoolmates, he is reproached for not knowing how to defend himself? Or the one who has become the object of embarrassing anecdotes offered during social visits to friends by parents, who in this way show their attachment to the child? There are children who are always the last to be chosen for play.

In a popular American action movie production, both the positive and negative protagonists are violent, which does not prevent the audience from perceiving one of them more favourably. What makes them different, then? The scale of destruction, motivations or the fact that one of them is shown as cruel? Similarly large audiences are attracted to entertainment programs in which newcomers to the scene voluntarily accept unfettered and patronising criticism by a group of celebrities.

According to Montaigne, followed by Shklar, cruelty belongs to the 'ordinary vices' that constitute our everyday life. It is a series of small stabs and pricks, often escaping our attention, alongside the big picture, making up a "tangle of lies, betrayal, anger, and cruelty", whose examples are offered by Ivan Karamazov in a conversation with his brother Alyosha. Dostoyevsky's protagonist exemplifies the philosopher's claim that putting cruelty first makes us prone to misanthropy, which can be accompanied by a tendency to glorify the victims[28].

28 See J. N. Shklar, *Ordinary Vices*, op. cit., p. 12-15.

CRUELTY AND UPBRINGING ACCORDING TO MONTAIGNE

The story of the cannibal ritual reveals an interesting conviction, perhaps shared by the author of the *Essays* himself: our sensitivity to cruelty is a permanent disposition that transcends cultural boundaries. Noticing and appreciating the barbarity of the Portuguese, the members of an exotic tribe decide to change their characteristic custom. While their gesture may be considered a sign of the gradation of physical pain common to all human beings, Montaigne points to the reaction of the Europeans, who feel 'the horrible barbarity' of cultivating cannibalism. Although sensitivity to others' cruelty does not go hand in hand here with the ability to distance oneself from native cultural practices, to recognize one's own "wrong-doings," it does not mean its complete disappearance either. Montaigne confesses that he has not become desensitised by the number of encounters or the passage of years:

> I live in a season when unbelievable examples of this vice of cruelty flourish because of the licence of our civil wars; you can find nothing in ancient history more extreme than what we witness every day. But that has by no means broken me in[29].

While the question of universal human sensitivity to cruelty was unresolved by the author of the *Essays*, the idea itself seems noteworthy.

In one other respect, Montaigne seems to ponder the question of the universal nature of cruelty, as the propensity to cruelty is according to him a component of human nature, albeit he is not consistent on this point. In the essay "On Cruelty" he observes:

> I fear that Nature herself has attached to Man something which goads him on towards inhumanity. Watching animals playing together and cuddling each other is nobody's sport: everyone's sport is to watch them tearing each other apart and wrenching off their limbs[30].

29 M. de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, op. cit., p. 484. See P. Sloterdijk, A. Finkielkraut, "Le stade et l'arène", [in:] P. Sloterdijk, A. Finkielkraut, *Les battements du monde*, Paris 2003, p. 55–72.

30 M. de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, op. cit., p. 485.

(Although it is hard to agree that "Watching animals playing together and cuddling each other is nobody's sport", we do realise that scenes of violence and cruelty gather a disproportionately bigger audience).

He says something similar in chapter one of Book Three of the *Essays*: "Our being is cemented together by qualities which are diseased. [...] for in the midst of compassion we feel deep down some bitter-sweet pricking of malicious pleasure at seeing others suffer. Even children feel it [...]"[31]. The way this 'instinct of inhumanity' is going to develop or get stifled depends on the impact of the environment's upbringing. Montaigne recognises the ambivalence of parents' and educators' efforts with respect to what would seem children's natural inclinations (in line with the aforementioned quotations). He notices that humanistic tendencies are accompanied by unperturbed cherishing of human vices, cruelty included:

> I find that our greatest vices do acquire their bent during our most tender infancy [...] Mothers think their boys are playing when they see them wring the neck of a chicken or find sport in wounding a dog or a cat. Some fathers are so stupid as to think that it augurs well for a martial spirit if they see their son outrageously striking a peasant or a lackey who cannot defend himself, or for cleverness when they see him cheat a playmate by some cunning deceit or a trick. Yet those are the true seeds by which cruelty, tyranny and treachery take root; they germinate there and then shoot up and flourish, thriving in the grip of habit. And it is a most dangerous start to education to make excuses for such low tendencies because of the weakness of childhood or the unimportance of the subject[32].

Of course, according to Montaigne, one should counteract the perpetuation of harmful custom by implementing and habituating valuable behaviours. He recommends as follows:

> We must carefully teach children to detest vices for what they consist in; we must teach them their natural ugliness, so that they flee them not only in their deeds but in their minds: the very thought of them should be hateful, whatever mask they hide behind[33].

31 Ibidem, p. 892.
32 Ibidem, p. 124. See also: ibidem, p. 185, 437, 809-810.
33 Ibidem, p. 124.

Beneficial customs instilled in the process of upbringing are what can prevent people from resorting to cruelty. Montaigne is one of those thinkers who attach great importance to the cultural practices in which human action and thought are embedded[34]. Hence, he sees habit as a chance for efficient social control. He notes:

> The laws of conscience which we say are born of Nature are born of custom [...]. But the principal activity of custom is so to seize us and to grip us in her claws that it is hardly in our power to struggle free and to come back into ourselves, where we can reason and argue about her ordinances[35].

The passages quoted from Montaigne's essays highlight another aspect of the presence of upbringing and custom in our lives that should be considered relevant to the issue at hand. Perhaps because, as the Renaissance humanist claims, custom "hides the true aspect of things from us"[36], cruelty can be masked. In other words, in such a case, custom, like a law issued by a higher authority, not only distracts us from the role of the perpetrator of the humiliation, his initiative and the abuse he has committed, but also exonerates him of the responsibility for the consequences of his actions and justifies and legitimises their presence. Therefore, the remedy proposed by Montaigne to prevent the development of vile tendencies by means of an upbringing which moulds the deeds and the heart, which fixes people's virtuous habits and the corresponding laws of conscience in conformity with the prevailing custom of a particular community, in a certain way favours the moral danger it seeks to counteract. Habit in itself need not contain and preserve cruelty, but by enslaving us and obscuring the "true aspect of things", it fosters its hidden presence in our lives. In this sense, Shklar may be right when she claims that "Cruelty, hypocrisy, snobbery, and treachery will certainly never go away", and given the current state of cultural practices to which "we all expect", and which, contrary to Montaigne's hopes, continue to nurture

34 A significant remark on the relationship between action and thought is made by Montaigne in his essay "On Habit: and On Never Easily Changing a Traditional Law": "And does not habit teach the roughest of the rough something which the whole of philosophy fails to implant in the heads of the wisest of men?" (ibidem, p. 129).

35 Ibidem, p. 130.

36 Ibidem, p. 131. See also: ibidem, p. 122–139; J. N. Shklar, *Ordinary Vices*, op. cit., p. 27–28.

our sordid tendencies, including cruelty, she may also be right in that "we can live neither with it nor without it". These are, as has been said, important sources of anxiety for both educators and educational researchers.

There is, however, another lesson that Montaigne teaches us: "My horror of cruelty thrusts me deeper into clemency than any example of clemency ever could draw me"[37]. Perhaps by practicing gentleness and critical thinking, to which not only the above passage, but in a sense all the *Essays* proves, we are able to avoid inflicting and experiencing, the pain of cruelty, to avoid fear, disorientation and loneliness. By exposing this excess and seeking recognition of the victims' reasons, perhaps we can also reduce their suffering. Along these lines, it should be considered whether, in addition to the formation of valuable habits, the duty to educate for gentleness and critical thinking, intended to counteract the appearance of cruelty in education and everyday life, could not be an important contribution of pedagogical deontology to pedeutology and pedagogical and professional ethics.

Finally, one more example of double cruelty. Known as *Job Taunted by His Wife*, a painting by Georges de La Tour depicts a woman bent over a tormented figure of an old man. Sitting on a stone block, the almost naked Job tilts his head to see her candle-lit face in the darkness. The old man is listening. The wife's statement in the biblical text does not lend itself to straightforward interpretation, but it can be assumed that, in contrast to her husband's friends who are about to arrive, the woman does not blame him for the trials and tribulations that have befallen her, him, their relatives, and their home. According to Bildad, as well as the other companions of the anguished Job, his misery and suffering must be a deserved punishment for hidden or forgotten sins. Yet we know that this is not the case. God tries Job, but not for his faults. On the contrary, in the opening scenes of the book, we and we alone are witnesses to a discussion between the Creator and Satan, in which the former presents to his adversary the man from Us as impeccably righteous. Job's friends interpret the situation differently. Their whole cruel tirade seems to be summed up in the statement of Eliphaz the Temanite: "Can mortals be acquitted by God?

37 M. de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, op. cit., p. 1045.

Can man be cleared by his Maker?" (Job 4:17). They have no evil intentions; this is what their faith dictates. What can Job say to his unbelieving and uncomprehending friends when all explanations fail? Ironically: "Indeed, you are the [voice of] the people, And wisdom will die with you" (Job 12:2), seems to be both an expression of resignation and loneliness. Does Job believe himself, since he demands an explanation directly from the Creator?

De La Tour's canvas rivets our attention to another moment in the fate of the faithful servant. The female figure in the biblical story is at the centre of the Baroque artist's poetics. If we were not familiar with the text, we might assume that her face expresses gentleness and understanding. This is what Alice Miller calls a 'helping witness', someone who, because of her experiences and background, is able to recognise victims of cruelty and empathetically support them so that they do not feel alone in their suffering[38]. But this is merely conjecture. All the more problematic because, as we read in the Talmudic treatise *Bava Batra*, "Job never existed and was never created; there was never such a person as Job. Rather, his story was a parable" (15a).

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