Summary

The anti-hero: Perspectives from modern literature and philosophy

The anti-hero is a literary figure attesting to the crisis in the philosophy of the subject, expressing the irreducible tension between the demand for freedom, authenticity or autonomy of existence and the simultaneous feeling of entanglement in forces, processes or institutions that invalidate the demand for this autonomy in various ways. This introduces an indelible sense of crisis in the subject, who—plunged into turmoil, anxiety and darkness—loses self-transparency. The anti-hero turns out to be a category that goes strictly beyond literature, referring also to non-literary, not to say "real" attitudes that we observe in the world around us. Although associated with literature, the anti-hero is no longer a category that can be reduced to it. It is a particular model of humanity, a category that is anthropological in the broad sense. The concept of the anti-hero thus shimmers with diverse and rich meanings.

Reflecting on the anti-hero raises issues concerning the modern formation of culture, as well as existential, moral and social issues. The question of the anti-hero poses challenges related to the individual and the drama of consciousness they experience. It is a testimony to the search for one's own separate subjectivity, but also to the crisis of the subject—torn, deprived of a permanent and stable metaphysical reference point, which they nevertheless never cease to seek. The problem of the anti-hero radicalises existence in its individual, singular and unique dimension. This is a question of existence that does not lend

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itself to generalisations and suspends the possibility of an unambiguous answer to the question of how the individual can be elevated to the rank of the universal. This is a very important issue, because it also implies a hermeneutic question about the possibility of understanding the individual. How can we understand something that resists easy generalisation? If this is what renders existence difficult and dramatic, it is also what makes it beautiful and extraordinary, in that the individual does not allow itself to be elevated to the general, except through laws unjustly imposed on it, such as the laws of nature or social laws. Meanwhile, *individuum est ineffabile*—'the individual is inexpressible'. The anti-hero is a tragic figure, not in the sense given to tragedy by Max Scheler, who wants to consider it in terms of a choice between two high values leading to disaster; rather, it is about tragedy, whose most important source is consciousness, leading to recognising oneself in multiple entanglements with the surrounding world. Consciousness also constitutes existence, positioning it in opposition to the world (reality) as a system of organised connections that are unacceptable to the anti-hero. Consciousness reveals to the anti-hero the necessity of existing in the irreconcilable tensions between freedom and enslavement, authenticity and inauthenticity.

The book is divided into four parts. In the first, entitled *Between philosophy and literature*, the author initially addresses the relationship between philosophy and literature, including their mutual entanglements and complications. Chapter One (*Philosophy and literature—complications and transactions*) serves as a preparation for understanding the anti-hero as an interdisciplinary category, although it does not yet address the problem of the anti-hero itself. However, it provides an introduction to the development of this problem in the light of existentialist philosophy (Chapter Two: *The anti-hero from the perspective of the philosophy of existence*). Chapter Three (*Truth and subjectivity: Kierkegaard and the Romantic sources of modern hermeneutics*) reflects on the question of existential, or subjective, truth, which is an important complement to the problem of authenticity discussed in the previous chapter.

Part Two, titled *From the history of ideas*, consists of two chapters (Chapter Four: *The (anti)hero of our times—a brief history*, and Chapter

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Five: *The anti-hero as a "superfluous man"*) and focuses on the issue of the anti-hero from the perspective of the history of ideas; it attempts to provide a panoramic view (Chapter Four), and a detailed examination of the problem from the perspective of the so-called superfluous man, an extremely interesting construct that emerged in 19th-century Russian philosophy and literature.

The third part is entitled *Hermeneutics of the subject*. Its aim is to understand the problem of the anti-hero first as an anthropological category (in the sense of the intertwined anthropologies of literature and philosophy), which is discussed in Chapter Six: *The anti-hero as a category of literary anthropology*. Later, I attempt to elaborate on this issue in two ways: firstly, in Chapter Seven, which concerns Fyodor Dostoyevsky's novel *Notes from Underground* (*Hermeneutics of the underground…*), which I treat as the culminating part of the entire book; secondly, in Chapter Eight (*Søren Kierkegaard's aesthetic man*), where I point to another important source of understanding the anti-hero, alongside Dostoyevsky.

Finally, the fourth part, entitled *Against the world*, focuses on specific issues related to the anti-hero's characteristic attitudes, which can be described as a kind of withdrawal from the world, a radical rejection of any involvement in its affairs (Chapter Nine: *Lying down*), or, alternatively, engaging in a special and dangerous game with it (guided by the idea of freedom as self-will, and manifested in particular by the *acte gratuity*—a selfless act that has nothing to do with a Christian attitude nor with ethics in the broad sense; Chapter Ten—*Without reason: A brief history of acte gratuit*). Although these chapters present two opposing attitudes—passive and active—they essentially speak of the same thing: the world (reality) is not a space in which one can feel settled. Therefore, one must either withdraw from it or actively oppose it. The eleventh and final chapter, devoted to Gustaw Herling-Grudziński's *Wings of the Altar* (*The hope-lessness of loneliness or loneliness as a possibility of hope...?*), presents a third perspective, organised by the experience of loneliness as a space of both social exclusion and existential choice.

Translated by Rob Pagett

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