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# AIR AND BREATH IN RELIGIONS AND PHILOSOPHIES: INTRODUCTION

Of what is this *is*? Of air.  
(Luce Irigaray)<sup>1</sup>

Nothing is more common to the diverse indigenous cultures of the earth than a recognition of the air, the wind, and the breath, as aspects of a singularly sacred power.  
(David Abram)<sup>2</sup>

For contemporary philosophy of religion (in particular within the analytic tradition) “breath” still might seem like a peculiar project, or at the very least disconnected from the way in which most European (or, largely, Western) philosophy has understood itself and its goals. But the forgetting of air in Western philosophical discourse is by itself one of the deepest, unacknowledged tensions, shaping its unfortunate outlook on the world. A new philosophy of religion that is sensitive to air and breath/ing thus has the double merit of decolonising the philosophical curriculum through an inclusion of non-European sources and insights and of revealing how such breath is a fundamental (if erased) element of its own history. The potential of such a paradigm shift inaugurates a new field within philosophy (including philosophy of religion) – called “respiratory philosophy.”

For the ancient cultures and religions of the world living in the natural environment, breathable air was regarded as sacred and known un-

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<sup>1</sup> Luce Irigaray, *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger*, trans. Mary Beth Mader (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999; first published as *L'oubli d'air chez Martin Heidegger*, Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1983), 5.

<sup>2</sup> David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human-World* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), 137.

der denominators such as *ruah*, *aér*, *psyche*, *pneûma*, *prāṇa*, *sās*, *jabān*, *qilki*, *ik'*, *mana*, or *sila*, among others. With the demise of ancient cosmological schemes especially in the West, material and elemental denominators such as “psyche,” “air” and “breath” quickly solidified into new metaphysically underpinned concepts of “soul” and “spirit”. These shifts downplayed respiration as a fact of human and other bodies. Western philosophy became a story of masculine domination and the forgetting of the body and its vital breath as one of its main features. Post-Platonic Western traditions of thought gradually de-spiritualised *pneuma* and interiorised the breath into an abstract and disembodied ego/subject/spirit category. Respiration as the *material* ground of our existence has been transformed into various metaphysically solidified and artificially “spiritualised” essences, now fully detached from the body.

Breathing is also closely related to atmospheric thinking. All living beings necessarily dwell in an atmosphere, and atmospheres represent elemental spacetimes whose force and variations can be felt in our bodies on a daily basis. We all are parts of various atmospheric envelopes and experience their contents and discontents throughout our lives. All breathing beings need their own free space to breathe – an envelope or atmosphere in which they are free and which is not possessed by anything or anyone. Around the living breathing being, breathing gathers a sphere of air, called an elemental atmosphere and *being-in-the-air* is the most elemental way of our being-in-the-world. According to David Kleinberg-Levin, “breathing is our very first teaching – a silent teaching – in a life of interdependency, continuity, relationship, giving and receiving.”<sup>3</sup>

Interestingly enough, it was Karl Marx who already recognised in his *Economic Philosophic Manuscripts* this forgotten material genealogy of the breath when he stated that “man, exhaling and inhaling all the forces of nature” has been an aspect of humanity radically forgotten by history.<sup>4</sup> With this gesture, Marx inaugurated – for the first time in philosophical history – a new, politically invested way into thinking

<sup>3</sup> Lenart Škof and Petri Berndtson, eds., *Atmospheres of Breathing* (New York: SUNY Press, 2018), 10.

<sup>4</sup> *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. R. Tucker (New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company, 1978), 115.

about breath within the philosophical tradition. Philosophy of the 19th century brought another important invention with Feuerbach's radical restructuring of the philosophy of religion and theology. Ludwig Feuerbach prophetically wrote in 1841 that his philosophy must be understood as a pneumatic water therapy (*pneumatische Wasserheilkunde*)<sup>5</sup> – in this he gave specific priority to air and water. Feuerbach's idea was also that we need to find and regain our way to nature and our elemental sensibilities and thus a new possibility was initiated to reconnect with “nature,” its elements and our forgotten ontologico-environmental-material being. Feuerbach understood elements in the sense of the Pre-Socratics as water, air, fire, and earth. And, finally, William James was the first Western thinker to question the spirit-breath relation in his *Essays on Radical Empiricism* as he argued: “The ‘I think’ which Kant said must be able to accompany all my objects, is the ‘I breathe’ which actually does accompany them.”<sup>6</sup> James' contention that breath must be the epistemological root of our experience is crucial for respiratory philosophy and has long-lasting consequences.

To work with air sometimes means to become more sensitive to the internal breath, but also to the variety of breathing postures or dispositions of other living beings in their respiratory environments or atmospheres. Sometimes it implies a need to excavate forgotten layers of our bodily sensations and related natural and ethical proximities. A future philosophy of religion must therefore become sensitive to air, breath and breathing and the main aim of this special issue is to point to more hidden, forgotten or less known aspects of respiratory phenomena of the natural environments and life-worlds that we all share.

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This special issue of *Poligrafi* presents ten original interpretations of air and breath in various religious and philosophical contexts – from Jewish and Islamic mysticism to religious and philosophical respiratory thought within Christianity, and further within Asian contexts of

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<sup>5</sup> Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. G. Eliot (New York: Harper, 1957), 276.

<sup>6</sup> William James, *Essays on Radical Empiricism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1976), 19.

Hinduism and Zen Buddhism. Contributors have also focused on air and natural elements in the Natural Worshippers' religion of Slovenia as well as within the philosophical anthropological tradition of the modern era. Finally, this collection of articles brings new approaches towards respiratory philosophy of religion – as presented by our contributors with their insightful elaborations of the philosophy of breath in thinkers such as Augustine, Franz von Baader, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, María Zambrano, Luce Irigaray and Giorgio Agamben.

*Lenart Škof*

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Z R A K I N D I H  
V R E L I G I J A H I N  
F I L O Z O F I J A H :  
U V O D

Iz česa [je ta] *je*? Iz zraka.  
(Luce Irigaray)<sup>1</sup>

V ničimer si najrazličnejše avtohtone kulture na Zemlji niso bolj sorodne kot v prepoznavanju zraka, vetra in diha kot vidikov edinstveno svete sile.  
(David Abram)<sup>2</sup>

Za sodobno filozofijo religije, še zlasti v okviru analitične tradicije, se »dih« morda še vedno zdi nenavaden projekt ali vsaj nepovezan s tem, kako večina evropske (oziroma zahodne) filozofije opredeljuje samo sebe in svoje cilje. Toda pozaba diha je eno od največjih notranjih nasprotij v zahodnem filozofskem diskurzu – saj kljub temu, da se ga ne zaveda ali ne priznava, vpliva na njen odklonilen svetovni nazor. Nova filozofija religije, senzibilna za zrak in dih/anje, ima tako dvojne zasluge za dekoloniziranje filozofskega kurikula, upošteva namreč tudi neevropske vire in uvide ter razodeva dih kot enega od temeljnih (červno izbrisanih) elementov svoje zgodovine. Potencial takšnega paradigmatkega premika odpira novo področje v filozofiji (vključno s filozofijo religije), imenovano »respiratorna filozofija«.

V starih kulturah in religijah sveta, ki so živele v naravnem okolju, je vdihani/izdihani zrak, poznan pod imeni *ruah*, *aér*, *psyche*, *pneúma*, *prāna*, *sās*, *jabān*, *qi/ki*, *ik'*, *mana*, *sila* in drugimi, veljal za svetega. S propadom starodavnih kozmoloških shem, zlasti na Zahodu, so se snovni in elementarni označevalci, kot so »*psyche*«, »zrak« in »dih/sapa«, kmalu utrdili v nova, metafizično utemeljena koncepta »duše« in »duha«. Te spremembe so zmanjševale pomen dihanja kot danosti človeškega in

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<sup>1</sup> Po angleškem prevodu: »*Of what is this is? Of air.*» Luce Irigaray, *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger*, angl. prev. Mary Beth Mader (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999; prvič objavljeno pod naslovom *L'oubli d'air chez Martin Heidegger*, Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1983), 5.

<sup>2</sup> David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human-World* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), 137.

drugih teles. Zahodna filozofija je postala zgodba o moški prevladi ter pozabi telesa in njegovega življenjskega diha kot ene njegovih poglobilnih značilnosti. Postplatonske zahodne tradicije filozofije so postopoma razduhovile *pneumo* in ponotranjile dihanje kot abstraktno in nesnovno kategorijo ega/subjekta/duha. Dihanje kot *materialni* temelj našega obstoja so spremenile v različne metafizično podkrepljene in umetno »poduhovljene« esence, zdaj popolnoma ločene od telesa.

Dihanje je tesno povezano tudi z atmosferskim razmišljanjem. Vsa živa bitja neizogibno bivajo v nekem ozračju, ozračja ali atmosfere pa tvorijo elementarne prostore-čase, katerih moč in spremembe lahko vsakodnevno fizično občutimo na sebi. Vsi smo del različnih atmosferskih ovojev in vse svoje življenje doživljamo njihove pozitivne in negativne vidike. Vsa dihajoča bitja potrebujejo za dihanje svoj lasten, svoboden prostor – ovoj ali atmosfero, v kateri jih nič ne omejuje in ki si je nihče in nič ne more lastiti. Okoli živega dihajočega bitja se dihanje oblikuje v zračno plast, imenovano elementarna atmosfera, in *biti-v-zraku* je najbolj prvinska oblika našega bivanja-v-svetu. Kot pravi David Kleinberg-Levin, je »dihanje naš prvi nauk – tihi nauk – v življenju, ki sooblikujejo soodvisnosti, kontinuitete, odnosi, dajanje in prejemanje.«<sup>3</sup>

Zanimivo, da je to pozabljeno materialno genealogijo diha prepoznal že Karl Marx, ko je v svojih *Ekonomsko-filozofskih rokopisih* izjavil, da je »človek, ki izdihuje in vdihuje vse sile narave«, vidik človeškosti, ki ga zgodovina radikalno pozablja.<sup>4</sup> S to gesto je Marx – prvič v zgodovini filozofije – v filozofsko tradicijo vpeljal nov, politično angažiran način razmišljanja o dihu. Filozofska misel 19. stoletja je doživela pomembno inovacijo s Feuerbachovim korenitim restrukturiranjem filozofije religije in teologije. Ludwig Feuerbach je leta 1841 preroško zapisal, da je treba njegovo filozofijo razumeti kot nekakšno dihalno hidroterapijo oziroma pnevmatično vodno zdravstvo (*pneumatische Wasserheilkunde*)<sup>5</sup> – v kateri je posebno prioriteto dal zraku in vodi. Izrazil je tudi mnenje, da moramo iskati pot nazaj k naravi in naši elementarni senzibilnosti, in pozval, naj

<sup>3</sup> Lenart Škof in Petri Berndtson, ur., *Atmospheres of Breathing* (New York: SUNY Press, 2018), 10.

<sup>4</sup> *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ur. R. Tucker (New York in London: W. W. Norton and Company, 1978), 115.

<sup>5</sup> Ludwig Feuerbach, *Bistvo krščanstva*, prev. F. Jerman in B. Kante (Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 1982), 58.

se človek znova poveže z »naravo«, njenimi elementi in s svojim pozabljenim ontološko-ekološko-materialnim bitjem. Feuerbach je pod elementi, enako kot predsokratiki, pojmoval vodo, zrak, ogenj in zemljo. Nazadnje je William James kot prvi zahodni mislec v svojih *Esejih o radikalnem empirizmu* pod vprašaj postavil odnos med duhom in dihom z izjavo: »Tisti ‚jaz mislim‘, za katerega Kant trdi, da mora moči spremljati vse moje predstave, je ‚jaz diham‘, ki jih dejansko spremlja.«<sup>6</sup> Jamesova trditev, da mora biti dih epistemološki izvor našega izkustva, je ključnega pomena za respiratorno filozofijo in ima daljnosežne posledice.

Ukvarjanje z zrakom lahko spodbudi senzibilnost za notranji dih, pa tudi za najrazličnejše dihalne položaje ali dispozicije drugih živih bitij v njihovih dihalnih okoljih ali atmosferah. Lahko tudi poraja potrebo po odkrivanju pozabljenih plasti telesnih občutij in raziskovanju z njimi povezanih naravnih in etičnih bližin. Bodoča filozofije religije bi zato morala postati bolj občutljiva za zrak, dih in dihanje. Osrednji cilj te tematske številke je prav opozoriti na bolj skrite, pozabljene ali manj znane vidike dihalnih pojavov v naravnih okoljih in življenjskih svetovih, ki jih vsi skupaj naseljujemo.

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V tej posebni številki *Poligrafo*v je predstavljenih deset izvirnih interpretacij zraka in diha v različnih religijskih in filozofskih kontekstih, od židovskega in islamskega mysticizma do religijske in filozofske respiratorne misli v krščanstvu ter znotraj azijskih kontekstov v hinduizmu in zen budizmu. Sodelujoči avtorji se posvečajo tudi zraku in naravnim elementom v okviru slovenskega naravoverstva in filozofske antropološke tradicije moderne dobe. Zbirka člankov ne nazadnje predstavlja tudi nove pristope k respiratorni filozofiji religije, ki jih naši avtorji nakazujejo s svojimi pronicljivimi elaboracijami filozofije diha pri mislecih, kot so Avguštín, Franz von Baader, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, María Zambrano, Luce Irigaray in Giorgio Agamben.

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<sup>6</sup> William James, *Essays on Radical Empiricism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1976), 19.