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PATHS OF VIRTUE IN *VADE-MECUM*
CYPRIAN NORWID'S POETIC ARETOLOGY

1.

We come across the concept of “virtue” more than once in the pages of the *Vade-mecum* cycle. For the reader of Norwid’s writings, this fact cannot be a surprise, since “virtue” and “virtues” are ethical terms that appear in Norwid’s language frequently, of course along with rich intellectual, cultural and literary contexts within the entirety of his work – we can find them in lyric and epic poetry, artistic and journalistic prose, drama and private correspondence, which is fully confirmed by lexicographic research conducted by the authors of the online edition of *Słownik języka Cypriana Norwida* [*Dictionary of Cyprian Norwid’s Language*]¹. Moreover, this sort of terminology is present in all phases of Norwid’s work, starting with the first poetic works from his youth in Warsaw, such as *Dumanie II* [*Meditation II*], *Burza* [*Storm*], *Pożegnanie* [*Farewell*], until the end of his creative life, including *Milczenie* [*Silence*]. Such consistent returns of the writer to the language and issues of virtue must provoke a series of questions about the sources, artistic and intellectual sense and purpose of these authorial choices. To begin with, it is worth noting that in the more than forty-year span of his writing activity, Norwid does not fundamentally undermine the established understanding

¹ The semantic scopes of the term “virtue” identified in the dictionary include: 1) a set of positive moral qualities (and manners); 2) a morally positive human characteristic; 3) virginity, purity.

of the word, supported by centuries of tradition, and the accompanying axiology² – “virtue” is always synonymous with high values accepted by the poet, not subject to rational questioning or poetic irony. At the same time, he often differentiates the semantic nuances within the basic meaning of this concept³. The selected examples, taken from the poet’s various writings, illustrate just how extensive, rich and internally nuanced the semantic field of “virtue” in Norwid’s language is.

We will find there a number of phrases in which virtue is a sign of the value of man and the life he leads; it turns out to be his goal, signpost, model, guiding idea. In understanding virtue in this way, Norwid, especially in the early phase of his work, pays poetic homage to it, formulating, in an unambiguously declarative tone, important instructions, almost life mottoes:

Śmiało więc zdążaj ku przezycyściej cności,
Jeśli zaś burza wyrwie ci wawrzyny,
Myśl wskrzeszać będzie naśladowców krocie,
A w posąg własne skamienieją czyny!
(*Burza I [Storm]*, PWsz I, 48)⁴

[Thus go boldly towards pure virtue,
But if the storm uproots your laurels,
The thought will resurrect followers in multitudes,
And your own deeds will petrify into a statue!]

[...] jakby, zbawion ludzkich ułomności,
Mnóstwo szyderstw i wściekłych utyskiwań mnóstwo
Odepchnął znakiem krzyża, jak pogańskie bóstwo,
I tylko siłę cnoty, tylko czystość cnoty

² Samuel Bogumił Linde provides the following basic meaning of the term: “a totality, a collection of features, inclinations, deeds of a rational creature congruent with its duty, and thus deserving to be pursued, endeavoured to meet those duties”; he also quotes numerous examples of the use of the word confirming its widespread and vivid presence in the Polish language (see S. B. LINDE, *Słownik języka polskiego*, Vol. I, Lwów 1854, pp. 318-319).

³ Mickiewicz follows a similar approach (cf. *Słownik języka Adama Mickiewicza*, eds. K. Górski, S. Hrabec, Vol. I, Wrocław 1962, pp. 491-493). In his language, “virtue” essentially denotes a conduct in accordance with moral principles, but is also associated with reason, science, beauty, charm, chastity, femininity, an ethical attitude – both pagan and Christian.

⁴ In addition to the editions DW and PWsz, I also refer to the *Vade-mecum* edition: C. NORWID, *Vade-mecum*, ed. J. Fert, 2nd edition, revised, Wrocław 1999 (henceforth VM, the Arabic numerals denote the page).

Na chwilowych wieki nie ugiętej głowie
 Piastuje świętobliwie, niby promyk złoty,
 Błady, drżący, jak swarem poźółkłe sitowie.

(*Dumanie II [Meditation II]*, PWsz I, 41)

[...] as if, saved from human frailties, [referring to “man”– A. Z.],
 Sneers and angry complaints aplenty
 He pushed back with the sign of the cross, like a pagan deity,
 And only the strength of virtue, only the purity of virtue
 On a temporarily unbent head
 He holds sacred, like a ray of gold,
 Pale, trembling, like dispute-yellowed rush.]

Biedni ludzie! niech im cnota
 Rozpromieni noc żywota...

(*Pożegnanie [Farewell]*, PWsz I, 53)

[Poor people! may their virtue
 Light up the night of life...]

– Nie, Bracie, ja nie mogę patrzeć na suchoty
 Tu, tam, trapiące żywot p o b ł a ż a n i e m... c n o t y!...
 – Cnota jest zdrową siłą: buduje, nie traci,
 Pobłażań też nie czeka i wspaniale płaci,
 Królewski mając akcent, i kmieczę rzewliwość,
 I moc – a ta jest w sobie oliwna jak tkliwość.

(*[Na jakie stać mię, bracie – takieć piszę listy]*

[What letters I can write brother – I do], PWsz I, 242)

[– No, Brother, I cannot look at the illness
 Afflicting life, here, there, with the indulgence... of virtue!...
 – Virtue is a healthy force: it builds, it does not lose,
 It does not await indulgence and pays magnificently,
 Having a royal accent, and a peasant’s gloominess,
 And power – and that power is inherently olive-like as tenderness.]

Norwid thus treats virtue not only as an object of veneration, worship, but also as an area of education, a factor in the formation of man on the model of the ancient *paideia*, where the problem of *arête* was one of the key ethical-pedagogical

issues⁵. In his work, he mentions Homer, Socrates and Plato in this context (in connection with the form of Plato's dialogue, conducted by "ludzi zwykłych, ludzi na ulicach Aten spotykanych, a poszukujących nieznanego Boga, prawdy i cnoty wśród doczesnych i arcypotocznych bytu warunków" [ordinary people, people met in the streets of Athens, and seeking the unknown God, truth and virtue in the midst of temporal and arch-common conditions of being] *Milczenie* [Silence], PWsz VI, 225). Plutarch is also mentioned (the thinker who as the author of *Parallel Lives* is associated with teaching virtue in the form of anecdotes: "Których by kiedyś z retorycznym szumem / Uczono w szkołach, chcąc nauczyć cnoty; / A nowy Plutarch – w nowe wlał żywoty..." [Who once would be thought with rhetorical hype / In schools, wishing to teach virtue; / And which the new Plutarch poured into new lives]; *W pamiętniku L. A. Improwizacja* [In the Diary of L. A. Improvisation], PWsz I, 73) as well as Pythagoras, the Stoics and the Cynics as ancient masters of virtue⁶. An interesting example in this context presents *Quidam*, in which the intellectual and spiritual formation of Alexander of Epirus is depicted by Norwid as follows: "W śmierć wierząc – jako w szczelnie zwarte wrota, / W miłości napój wiosenny i w wiedzę / Matematyczną – i w dźwięk słowa: cnota. / Blisko znaczący wyrazowi: zdrowie / I wyrazowi siła – rzecz podobna / Do zaklęć, których jasno nikt nie powie, / A która wszakże jest, i jest osobna" [*Believing in death* – as in tightly closed gates, / In the spring drink of love and in mathematical / Knowledge – and in the sound of the word: virtue. / Nearly synonymous to the word: health / And to the word strength – a thing akin / To incantations which no one will clearly say, / But nevertheless exists, and is separate] (DW III, 229). It is significant that the author of the poem links virtue with health (bodily health and spiritual power), thus remaining within the circle of ethical thought of antiquity, often emphasising this very connection. The Platonian and Aristotelian doctrines

⁵ See W. JAEGER, *Paideia. Formowanie człowieka greckiego*, transl. M. Plezia, H. Bednarek, Warszawa 2001; J. KUREK, *Paideia rzymska. Model formowania człowieka w myśli Seneki, Epikteta i Marka Aureliusza*, Warszawa 2016.

⁶ I have written more extensively on the role of the Pythagorean tradition as well as the Socratic-Platonic and Stoic-cynical traditions in the paideutic strand of Norwid's work; see "O 'rozmowy ducha,' czyli o dialogowej formie 'Promethidiona,'" in: *Poszukiwanie wspólnoty. Estetyka dramatyczności a więź międzyludzka w literaturze polskiego romantyzmu (preliminaria)*, Kraków 2011, pp. 165-196; „W stronę Diogenesa. Z problematyki Norwidowskiej koncepcji kultury”, *Wiek XIX* 2015, pp. 297-316; „Pochwała kontemplacji. Norwid wobec Pitagorasa i pitagoreizmu”, in: *Loci (non)communes. Prace ofiarowane Profesor Marii Korytowskiej*, eds. O. Płaszczewska, M. Siwiec, Kraków 2017, pp. 81-98.

closely linked the virtues of the soul with the virtues of the body, combining anthropology with medicine⁷.

Christian *paideia* also focuses on the question of virtue, which Norwid is well aware of in that he refers directly to biblical personal models of virtue: e.g. to David with his harp “promienna jak cnoty” [radiant as virtues] (*Rzecz o wolności słowa [On the Freedom of the Speech]*, DW IV, 235), to the Virgin Mary as “współ-pracująca wszystkimi cnotami” [co-operating with all virtues] (*Do Najświętszej Panny Marii. Litania [Litany to the Blessed Virgin Mary]*, PWSz I, 193), obviously co-operating in the work of salvation, which is why in the litany she earns the nickname “Kończąca wszystko” [The Finisher of all]⁸, and repeatedly pointing, though sometimes indirectly, to Jesus Christ – the Messiah endowed with the fullness of the virtues (Isaiah 11:2), the personal incarnation of the virtues, their model and teacher.

Virtue is frequently associated by Norwid with a situation of spiritual exercise, carried out in a master-disciple relationship⁹ or individually, through spiritual reflection, moral and devotional reflection, as well as with a situation of psychomachy, i.e. according to the meaning of the term: “the struggle within the human soul,” “the struggle for the human soul” or “the struggle to save the human soul, i.e. oneself” – with vices, transgressions, sin, evil¹⁰. In the well-known passage

⁷ See Z. PAŃPUCH, „Areté,” in: *Powszechna encyklopedia filozofii*, ed. A. Maryniarczyk, Lublin 2004, Vol. 1, pp. 320; Z. PAŃPUCH, „Aretologia,” in: *Powszechna encyklopedia*, pp. 325-329; Z. PAŃPUCH, *W poszukiwaniu szczęścia. Śladami aretologii Platona i Arystotelesa*, Lublin 2015. Similarly, in Christian moral teaching, sin is sometimes presented as a disease of the soul, while virtue is presented as a foundation and a sign of health, and thus a factor enabling a truly Christian life, opposed to spiritual death.

⁸ In Christian iconography we can find both depictions of David surrounded by virtues (e.g. David with Power, Wisdom and Prophecy, *Paris Psalter*, 9th century) and widely popularised depictions of the Virgin Mary surrounded by virtues. See A. KATZENELLENBOGEN, *Allegories of the Virtues and Vices in Medieval Art: From Early Christian Times to the Thirteenth Century*, New York 1939.

⁹ I presented a paper on the traces of the philosophical tradition of spiritual exercises in Norwid's work at the conference “*Thou art a person*”. *Persons in the circle of Cyprian Norwid's biography and works*, held at the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń on 27-28 September 2018.

¹⁰ The motif of the struggle for man's soul appears in early Christian literature, e.g. in the Life of St. Anthony by St. Athanasius (ca. 357 or 365). However, it was popularised mainly through the work *Psychomachia* by the Christian poet Aurelius Clement Prudentius (b. 348 - d. ca. 413), which depicts the moral struggle between good and evil as a series of battles fought between personifications of various virtues and vices (see Fr. M. STAROWIEYSKI, “Psychomachia' Prudencjusza, czyli katecheza o cnotach i grzechach, *Ethos* 2010, Issue 92, pp. 171-182;

from *Quidam*, these struggles acquire an almost cosmic dimension, co-creating an ethical-metaphysical-religious framework both for the historical situations presented in the poem and for its historiosophic semantics:

Pomiędzy świtem a nocy zniknięciem
Płomienne blaski różowe z mrokami
Walczą, jak cnota z *świata-tego* księciem –
Mdlawe, lecz ufne, choć wciąż je coś mami.
(DW III, 131)¹¹

[Between dawn and dispersion of night
Pink-flaming light wrestles with darkness
Like virtue with *thisworld's* Evil prince –
Dim, yet sanguine, though ever beguiled¹².]

Norwid's conceptual and pictorial image of virtue includes light, goodness, truth, beauty, divine inspiration, power (virtue as "boska siła w ciele człowieczości mdlawej") [divine force in the frail human body]; *Odpowiedź krytykom "Listów o emigracji"* [*Reply to the Critics of "Letters on Emigration"*], PWsz VII, 35),

S. STABRYŁA, *Chrześcijański świat poezji Prudencjusza*, Kraków 2011, pp. 54-91). At the beginning of the 15th century, this type of representation was combined with the then developing motif of the "good death"; the effects of this synthesis can be found especially in treatises *artis bene moriendi*, morality plays, and ascetic literature (the most common version presents the battle between an angel and Satan or the clash between man and the evil spirits, personifications of temptations and sins). See M. WŁODARSKI, „Motyw 'psychomachii' w literaturze polskiej XV i XVI wieku,” *Pamiętnik Literacki* 1983, Issue 2, pp. 3-22. Incidentally, it is worth noting that the theme of "good dying," which was extremely important for Norwid, is traditionally linked with virtue. However, the poet's poems dealing with the concept of death do not contain direct references to aretological questions and thus are excluded from my considerations. The presence of psychomachic elements in Norwid's poetry was noted by Józef FERT, who linked this motif to the works *Przeszłość* [*The Past*], *Przyszłość* [*The Future*] and *Addio!* (see J. FERT, *Poeta sumienia. Rzecz o twórczości Norwida*, Lublin 1993, p. 153).

¹¹ Let us also quote words from Prudentius' interpretation of *Psychomachia*: "The ongoing wrestling in the soul of man between good and evil, between virtues and sins, is at the same time a struggle between Christianity and paganism, between light and darkness, and the victory of the virtues signifies the triumph of divine love over barbarism" (see S. STABRYŁA, "Z badań nad poezją Prudencjusza," in: *Stromata historica in honorem Romani Mariae Zawadzki*, Kraków 2006, p. 679).

¹² English translation by D. BORCHARDT, in collaboration with A. BRAJERSKA-MAZUR, C. NORWID, *Poems*, New York 2011, p. 101.

health, heart, conscience¹³, duty, innocence, chastity (*Dumanie* II [*Meditation* II]; PWSz I, 41), virginity, and even femininity in general (e.g. *Do wieśniaczki* [*To a Peasant Woman*]), because in ancient iconology and emblematics, virtue – as Norwid reminds us in *Emncypacja kobiet* [*Emancipation of Women*] – is feminine (PWSz VI, 653)¹⁴. Moreover, the poet often differentiates between virtues and thus writes about “human virtues” (Letter to Maria Trębicka of 28 August 1857; DW XI, 186), domestic, civic, aristocratic virtues (“cnota wrodzonego dostojęstwa” [the virtue of innate dignity]; Letter to Władysław Czartoryski, Paris 1881; PWSz X, 164), spiritual virtues: pagan and Christian, sometimes highlighting the relation of continuity between them, at other times their contrariety (in the tragedy *Słodycz* [*Sweetness*], stressing the opposition of pagan and Christian virtues, Pamphilus says: “...Cnota u nas jest zapałem / Iskrą boską... U chrześcijan ciemnych jest to niby / Płyn... eter... płyn przejrzysty jak lodowe szyby. / [...] I stąd ta... pewna... słodycz!...” [...For us, virtue is fervour / A divine spark... For dark Christians it is like / Liquid... ether... liquid as clear as ice panes. / [...] And hence this... certain... sweetness!..]; DW V, 283-284)¹⁵. Referring to the Christian virtues, the writer most often points to the theological virtues: faith, hope and love, consistently emphasising their unity, their interaction, which has been an important theme of both

¹³ Józef FERT wrote extensively on Norwid’s semantics of conscience (see idem, *Poeta sumienia*), regarding it as one of the key ethical concepts in the writer’s language. It is connected with truth and law, preserves autonomy from the sphere of subjectivity, including feelings, it requires self-knowledge – as the researcher argues, conscience is the organ of the moral life of the individual and the nation. The semantic scopes of the notions “conscience” and “virtue” are not disconnected in Norwid’s poetry, sometimes they overlap, but conscience here has clearly Christian and rather modern connotations, while virtue evokes the ethical traditions of the ancient world, including early Christianity.

¹⁴ A number of examples of the personification of virtues are included, for example, in Cesare Ripa’s popular compendium. See C. RIPA, *Ikonomia*, transl. I. Kania, Kraków 2004.

¹⁵ In characterising the Christian attitude, Norwid focuses his attention here on the notion of sweetness, because of its evangelical origin and its presence in Christian apologetics (e.g. Tertulian), but it is also important to remember the idea of heroic virtues, which was equally important to the writer. Christianity drew on the models of pagan heroism and at the same time reinterpreted them; a heroic virtue was thus ascribed to that degree of Christian virtue which is attained by the person practising it without calculation and for a supernatural purpose (with the participation of the Holy Spirit), exceeding the ordinary measure of moral perfection. The theological sense of the concept was developed by St. Thomas, and its canonical sense – for beatification and canonisation processes – by Pope Benedict XIV (1841). See H. MISZTAŁ, “Heroiczność cnót,” in: *Encyklopedia katolicka*, collective ed., Vol. IV, Lublin 1993, pp. 798-799.

philosophy and moral theology for centuries¹⁶. In the *Zarysy z Rzymu* [*Sketches from Rome*], he writes explicitly:

Ale podobno wszystkie doby chrześcijańskiego społeczeństwa w jednej z trzech cnót węgielnych rozmiłowały się szczególnie, zapominając, iż do każdej przez inne jest droga. I oto była doba WIARY bez miłości i nadziei – i MIŁOŚCI doba, tak pamiętna z najabsolutniejszego niedowiarstwa, a dziś jesteśmy o NADZIEI, lecz – ile dotąd sądzić można – zbyt dużą wiarą nie grzeszymy, a zaś miłości, śmiało powiem, iż brak dość jest widoczny. Nadzieja wszakże bez dwóch drugich współ-cnót, współ-sił, współ-pojęć, z proroczej nagle wysokości na potoczne spada spodziewania, które nie tylko kroków butnych, ale i samej beczynności niewinnić nie może” (PWsz VII, 13)¹⁷.

¹⁶ The thinker who initiated the theory of the interaction of the virtues was Plato, who pointed to justice as the guiding virtue in relation to the other virtues (wisdom, valour, temperance) and the one guaranteeing harmony between the mental and political spheres. According to Aristotle, it is prudence that plays a superior role, provides the basis for the other virtues, guarantees their coherence, but also itself depends on them. In Stoic philosophy, on the other hand, the individual virtues are subordinated to *apatheia*, which is the main goal of moral life. In the Christian system of virtues, which was subject to relatively frequent modifications, depending on the accepted conception of the human person, priority and the leading role were assigned at one time to valour (St. Ambrose), at another to love (St. Augustine), at another to humility (St. Gregory I the Great) or to prudence as a virtue which is both moral and intellectual, but which is also, like all virtues, a form of expression of love (St. Thomas Aquinas). Of course, against the background of the anthropocentrically oriented aretology of the ancients, Christian aretology was distinguished by its inherent theocentrism – the transcendent God is the ultimate goal of the virtuous life and the source of its fulfilment.

¹⁷ See also *O Juliuszu Słowackim* [*On Juliusz Słowacki*] (PWsz VI, 409), where hope is mentioned in connection with the Christmas mystery: “kapłanowie nadziei nie mieli już co robić u Betlejemskiego żłobu. Nadzieja wszelako odsłoniła nam przez to samo opony i pokazała pierwociny całokształtu architektury swojej, objawiła się niejako i stała się jedną z trzech cnót, gdy pierwiej była jedną” [the priests of hope had nothing to do anymore at Bethlehem manger. Hope, however, lifted the veil and showed us the beginnings of its entire architecture, revealed itself and became one of the three virtues, when previously it had been the only one]. Also in a letter to Konstancja Górska (Paris, first half of September 1862), Norwid presents his understanding of the virtue of Hope, “która jest z Wiarą i Miłością stawiona w rzędzie jednym” [which is placed alongside with Faith and Love], reminding us of its Christian foundation: “Ależ powiedziane nam było i nie zakryte, że światłość w ciemnościach świeci – a ciemności Jej nie ogarnęły!” [We were told though, without being kept in the dark, that the light shines in the darkness – and the darkness did not embrace it!] (PWsz IX, 53-54). In turn, in a letter to Józef Ignacy Kraszewski (Paris, May 1866), the writer stressed the importance of the relationship between truth and hope: “u fanię w konsekwencje prawdy zwie się NADZIEJĄ (cnotą)” [trusting in the consequences of truth is called HOPE (virtue)]. (PWsz IX, 222). Such a strong concentration of Norwid’s attention on Hope as a virtue conceals, I believe, an important polemical accent, addressed to various Romantic prophets who, in his opinion,

There is only *expectation*, or *fortune* – a formal belief and love as it pleases one... With this, all sincere *seriousness* is lost – as the *Serious Vessel* is lost, and without it no collective or individual whole can survive. What we (Poles) lack is not even the Polish soil, but the *Serious Vessel*. I am not prophesying any false changes – *everything will be what is*, only *everything from a higher source*, while that which has not stood the test – that will go to dust.]

2.

Against this background, *Vade-mecum* can be regarded as the highpoint of Norwid's aretology. The notion of virtue becomes here an integral element of the author's poetic language, intrinsically linked to the world of his ideas and imagination. It reappears many times in the cycle, invoked directly or suggested by the historical, personal and ethical context. The concept is directly evoked in the following works: XIII. *Larwa* [*Larva*], XXXV. *Ironia* [*Irony*], XXXVIII. *Zawody* [*Disappointments*], XXXIX. *Centaury* [*Centaur*], LXXV. *Ideal i reformy* [*Ideal and Reforms*], XCIX. *Fortepian Szopena* [*Chopin's Grand Piano*]. But also in other poems, such as XXX. *Fatum* [*Fate*], XLI. *Królestwo* [*Kingdom*], LXXIV. *Bohater* [*Hero*], these issues come to the fore, albeit indirectly, without lexical references to virtue. Furthermore, poem XLV of the *Vade-mecum* is entitled *Cnót-oblicze* [*Face-of-Virtues*], and virtue lies in this case at the thematic centre of the work, which was undoubtedly conceived as a key poem for Norwid's interpretation of virtue within the cycle. Here we find a combination of Norwid's important takes on the issue: the exaltation of virtue as the ideal of human life, the poetic definition of *arête* as valour, the depiction of the triumph of "wszech-królującej wielmożnie" [almighty reigning] (VM, 86) virtue, its sacralisation through the vision of a statue being led into the church ("W Kościół Tryumfu wysoki" [Into the high Church of the Triumph]; VM, 87), the anthropomorphisation of virtue (the title refers to a "a face of virtues"), the depiction of the act of "seeing" or the sequence of "visions" of virtue through a dramatic-theatrical prism (tragic virtue, dramatic virtue, the third one – perhaps comedic). The use of theatrical metaphors may guide the reader both towards Norwid's conception of the dramatic nature of being, so strongly accentuated, for instance, in *L. Bliscy* [*The Loved Ones*], where the object of poetic analysis is "śląd dramatyczny bytu" [the dramatic trace of being] (VM, 91), taking various forms, and towards his concept of theatre – as a space of self-knowledge and self-improvement of individuals and societies, as an extremely important tool for the formation of human morality¹⁸. Unfortunately, the truncated text does not allow for a precise and conclusive interpretation.

¹⁸ In this spirit, the theatre is interpreted by Norwid in the *Introduction* to *Pierścień Wielkiej Damy* [*The Noble Lady's Ring*]. It is presented there as an artistic and social institution entrusted

Nevertheless, in spite of the lack of a complete version of the poem, so important for the issues raised here, it is possible (based on thinking in the categories of virtue, so evident throughout Norwid's work) to risk a thesis that aretology co-creates in *Vade-mecum* that "misterna nić wewnątrzna" [intricate internal thread], which the author mentions in a letter to Merzbach (of 7 June 1866; PWSz IX, 288) – that it is one of the cohesive elements of the cycle on several levels.

Firstly, at the level of the authorial subject and the creation of the work's subject, of which the moralist Self is an important aspect. We need to remember that "skręt konieczny w poezji polskiej" [the necessary turn in Polish poetry] postulated by Norwid is intended, *inter alia*, to avert the crisis for which Norwid also blames his "great and famous predecessors" using these very words:

Wszelako: szkoła ta, cechująca się rozjaśnianiem i wyrokowaniem o szerokich historycznych sytuacjach lub o prawach narodu, nie miała zapewne dosyć czasu, aby w utworach jej strona obowiązków, strona moralna, znaczne zajmowała miejsce... W ogóle literatury naszej moralistów zbyt szczupłym są zastępem dlatego, że położenie narodu daje więcej folgi głosom o prawa wołającym niżli zajmującym się obowiązkami (VM, 8)¹⁹.

[However, this school, which is characterised by clarifying and passing judgements on broad historical situations or the nation's rights, has probably not had enough time to give the side of duties, the moral side, a prominent place in its works... In our literature in gen-

with important moral tasks, for it opens "pole do budującego działania wobec chrześcijańskiego społeczeństwa" [the field for constructive action towards Christian society] (DW VI, 110), or, to put it differently: it participates in moulding it according to the rules of virtue.

¹⁹ In his letters to Henryk Merzbach of 1866, concerning the *Vade-mecum* cycle, Norwid gives this idea a slightly different form: "Część moralna i obowiązkowa jest u poetów naszych na stanowisku wyjątku i maleńkiego odsyłacza, ale nie uzasadnia i nie uźródla poezji: moralistów prawie nie mamy" [In the case of our poets, the moral and obligatory part is an exception and a tiny cross-reference, but it does not justify or give rise to poetry: we hardly have any moralists] (PWSz IX, 236). The poet is critical of his fellow writers, recognising that, like boarding schoolgirls, "niepewne swej cnoty i jej zasad" [uncertain of their virtue and principles], "grzeszą przez brak czujności i brak odwagi w ilnej" [they sin through lack of vigilance and lack of civil courage]. He contrasts them with his own position, respecting the requirements of virtue: "Ja odpowiadam sam przed publicznością i jej w i e k i e m" [I answer alone to the public and its age] (PWSz IX, 233). Years later, in the essay *Emancypacja kobiet* [*Emancipation of Women*], the writer would argue again: "Moralistów w literaturze społeczna polska wcale nie ma i podobno że mieć nie może, albowiem przeważny jest rozwój dziennikarstwa i powieści" [Polish contemporary literature has no moralists at all, and it is said that it cannot have any due to the prevalent development of journalism and novels]; these in turn, with their aim of "zadowolenie publiczności" [pleasing the public], are unable to take up the fight for moral principles (PWSz VI, 652).

eral, the moralists are too few in number, because the situation of the nation affords more freedom to voices calling for rights than to those concerned with duties.]

Thus, for poetry in decline, the antidote may lie in a return to its original moral duties, which in relation to the artist means the need to enter the role of a moralist, for whom the category of virtue must be an important point of reference. Let us recall that Norwid wrote about his own work that it is “jakoby idącą już w te strony nowe poezją” [rather a poetry already taking this new path] (Letter to Henryk Merzbach, Paris, ca. 25 June 1866; PWSz IX, 236), perhaps also because it is an example of the poetic promotion of virtue.

Secondly, the aretological motif also contributes to the coherence of the *Vademecum* cycle at the narrative level (its epic dominant)²⁰. If we assume, following Juliusz Gomulicki and Józef Fert, that the semantics of the title apostrophe includes, *inter alia*, a call “to walk with me”, “to follow me”²¹, i.e. together with the poet-moralist, whose work should be a guideline for the reader, an encouragement for “reflections, intended for daily contemplation and internal betterment”²², then the title allusion to the road, wandering, journey, has an analogy in the imagery widespread in aretological discourse – virtue is acquired, cultivated, developed through the toil of walking its paths, because the path or journey is a universal metaphor for human life and behaviour, a commonly accepted image of the teleological concept of human existence, marked by a multifaceted effort to strive for perfection. The formation, upbringing of man – *paideia* – was often presented by the old culture as a process, or more precisely as a pathway, usually divided into stages or steps on which it is possible to acquire knowledge of virtue and proficiency in its implementation. We find such depictions in Socratic and Platonic thought, which were close to the poet. Socrates recognised in his teaching that the path to the goal of being a good person leads through the virtues that are synonymous with the knowledge of truth, with wisdom; this must include the care for the soul – self-knowledge and work on oneself. Plato, his disciple, would portray the process of educating people as an “upward journey,” tantamount to a liberation from misconceptions towards the light of true knowledge, and thus towards the perfection of individuals and the prosperity of the state, and finally towards

²⁰ A. MACINTYRE writes inspiringly about the relationship between forms of narrative, especially those constituting community, and virtue pedagogy. See A. MACINTYRE, *Dziedzictwo cnoty. Studium z teorii moralności*, transl. A. Chmielewski, Warszawa 1996.

²¹ It is not my ambition to decide which of the formulas is closer to the poet's intentions. See J. W. GOMULICKI, “Norwidowe ‘Idź za mną’,” in: C. Norwid, *Vademecum*, edited and with introduction and addendum by J. W. Gomulicki, 2nd ed., revised, Warszawa 1969; J. FERT, commentary (VM, 3-4).

²² J. FERT, commentary (VM, 4).

the highest Good²³. The concept of the path was particularly readily evoked in the Stoic and Cynic tradition. Here, following the example of Socrates, knowledge of the virtues is transmitted by itinerant teachers who present an ideal image of the human being who, through wisdom, deeper self-knowledge and especially the practice of the virtues, should become ever more perfect. Christianity, as we know, presents its own variant of these paideutic practices “on the road”. The Gospels, after all, contain the image of Jesus as an itinerant preacher, an indefatigable teacher of the Christian virtues, who is himself their embodiment, their model, the way as “the way and the truth and the life” (John 14:6). In both the ancient and Christian traditions, there also appears the metaphor of two ways, one of which is the way of virtue and the other of transgression. In Greek mythology, Heracles stands at the crossroads²⁴, while in Christian teaching, this situation can happen to anyone, as is perfectly illustrated both by the world of morality plays and by the detailed catalogues of virtues and vices, first used in Stoic diatribes and then developed in Christian paraenesis (already present in the *Epistle of Barnabas* and the *Didache*) under the influence of the Gospels: the parables of the Wise and Foolish Virgins, the Narrow and Wide Gate or the Sermon on the Mount. This type of thinking and imagery was also adopted by the great epic poetry of journey, both pre-Christian and Christian. Suffice it to say that both Homer’s *Odyssey* and Dante’s *Divine Comedy* are based on the motif of the hero’s journey and, at the same time, highlight the dynamics of human moral life, centred on the practice of the virtues. In Homer’s epic, ethical issues are linked with an attempt to depict social change – the age of heroes comes to an end and the human, historical world begins, which entails the twilight of the individualistic ethos, the aristocratic understanding of *arête* and the heralding of the culture of the *polis*, with its inherent moral and legal forms of social life (the seeds of which can be seen in the scene

²³ Thus, Socrates and then Plato expose the shallowness of the sophistic teaching of virtue, which was dominated by egalitarianism and relativism (virtue as a set of practical skills, needed to perform specific tasks, and available to anyone who submits to sophistic pedagogy). In Plato’s *Apology of Socrates*, the hero describes his efforts to promote virtue as follows: “I do nothing else but go about and exhort the young among you and the old, that they should care neither for the body nor for money above all things, nor so much as for the soul so that it may be as good as possible: and I tell them that it is not from money that bravery grows, but from bravery that money and all other human and private and public goods are derived” – cf. PLATO, “Obrona Sokratesa,” in: PLATO, *Dialogi*, transl. W. Witwicki, Warszawa 1988, p. 267.

²⁴ The parable of Heracles, who meets Virtue and Vice at the crossroads, is referred to by XENOPHON in his *Memoirs of Socrates*, following the Sophist Prodicus of Ceos, author of *Horai* (see XENOPHON, *Pisma sokratyczne*, transl. and with preface by L. Joachimowicz, Warszawa 1967, pp. 76-81). It is worth adding here that in the iconography of the virtues, the figure of Heracles often symbolises valour.

of the gathering of the people of Ithaca)²⁵. Dante, on the other hand, depicts the successive steps of the moral progress of the Christian man, his ascent towards holiness, which is tantamount to addressing the theme of virtues and transgressions, and especially the poetic interpretation of the theological virtues (the allegorical depiction of Faith, Hope and Love)²⁶. It does not need to be specially reminded, as Norwid himself suggests, that these both epics, to some extent of course, provide the backdrop for *Vade-mecum*, and it seems that the moral programme outlined in them, the aretological ideal encapsulated in them, is not without significance for the poet. Prudentius' *Psychomachia* should also be recalled at this point, because although it is not an epic poem based directly on the journey motif (according to some scholars it is an allegorical epic, full of reminiscences from the Stoic diatribe and from Roman poetry, especially Virgil, others qualify it as an allegorical-didactic, catechetical and ascetic poem), its plot, through the successive struggles of virtues against vices, alluding to the cardinal sins, reflects the dynamic, agonistic nature of moral life and its progression – in the conclusion of the work, after the transgressions have been overcome, the virtues, under the guidance of Concord and Faith, build Christ a temple in which Wisdom will sit.

Norwid's depictions of the way of virtue, closely linked to the conviction of the pilgrim condition of man and his aspirations to personal fullness, are undoubtedly situated in the context of the cultural traditions indicated above. The author of *Vade-mecum* perceives following the path of virtue as a process of organic development, of man's gradual maturation into humanity, completing it in acts of successive trials. At the end of this path, one can reach the state symbolically represented by the idea of a golden age (mentioned in the context of virtue in the work *Ironia* [*Irony*]: "Ty myślisz może, że wiek złoty,/ Bez walk, sam przyjdzie do ludzkości? – / A gdzież?... powiodą piérw te c n o t y" [You think perhaps that the golden age/ Will come to mankind by itself, without struggle? – / And whereto?....

²⁵ According to more recent interpretations of the epic: "The walls of Troy are a visible sign, a kind of boundary post of this turn of the epochs". (B. PATZEK, *Homer i jego czasy*, transl. M. Tycner, Warszawa 2007, p. 99). See also: E. HEZA, „Kryzys arystokratycznego pojęcia areté. Z badań nad historią myśli greckiej,” *Etyka* 1972, pp. 61-85. This opposition of epochs and ethos resounds in the motto of the *Vade-mecum* cycle: Achilles is juxtaposed with Ulysses, aristocratic ideals – with democratic ones; the existential dimension of opposites is also important here – death is a counterbalance to life perceived as a value. Norwid's situating of Homer's poetry on the verge of epochs (this time between legend and epic) is also present in *Milczenie* [*Silence*] (PWsz VI, 245).

²⁶ The theological and moral programme of *The Divine Comedy* illustrates the process of spiritual rebirth and the victory of eternal life over death; the call to cultivate the virtues is an important psychagogic, pastoral aspect of it.

will first these v i r t u e s lead]; VM, 66) or by “jabłoń-cnót” [the apple tree of virtues] (as in the final metaphor in the piece *Zawody* [*Disappointments*]; VM, 75), which seems to point to the goods achieved through the practice of virtues and, in the longer term, through the association with the tree of life, to man’s eschatological goals. Therefore, it can be said that the path is crowned with the achievement of *humanitas*, *humanitas christiana*²⁷. While emphasising the positive role of time in human growth in virtue, Norwid does not, of course, accept acts of acceleration and competition or external interference – a theme raised in connection with the issue of virtue in the poems *Zawody* [*Disappointments*] and *Centaury* [*Centaurs*] – because these actions easily push man off the chosen path into a state of under-fulfilment, immaturity, barbarism, adequately illustrated with the figures of centaurs.

As outlined above, the issue of virtue plays a particularly important role at the level of the anthropological-ethical reflection developed in *Vade-mecum*. This is the third level of coherence of the cycle mediated by aretology²⁸. Indeed, aretology is closely linked to anthropology, *paideia* is always oriented towards a particular ideal of man, and the invocation of virtue in this context points to the ideal of

²⁷ The ideal of *humanitas* appears, as we know, very often in Roman literature, e.g. in the writings of Cicero. The broad meaning of this concept includes human qualities responsible for one’s personal culture, such as kindness, gentleness, benevolence, wisdom, dignity, refinement, nobility, excellence. In early Christian authors, the concept adopts a moral meaning, rooted in Christ’s teaching and the Gospel messages (it includes love of neighbour, charity, mercy). However, it was not until Prudentius, especially his *Psychomachia*, that he created a distinct conception of *humanitas christiana* based on a canon of Christian virtues represented allegorically, including faith, hope, modesty, patience, mindfulness, humility, self-restraint, charity, and concord. See, for instance, F. KLINGER, *Humanität und Humanitas*, in *Römische Geisteswelt*, Hamburg-München 1961, pp. 690-732; H. KUHN, *Humanitas Christiana*, in *Interpretationen der Welt. Festschrift Romano Guardini*, ed. H. Kuhn, Würzburg 1965, pp. 151-171; W. PAWLAK, „Z dziejów pojęcia ‘humanitas’ (do XVII wieku),” in: *Humanitas. Projekty antropologii humanistycznej*, Part 1: *Paradygmaty – tradycje – profile historyczne*, ed. A. Nowicka-Jeżowa, Warszawa 2009-2010, pp. 168-186; S. STABRYŁA, „Humanitas Christiana w poezji Prudentiusa,” in: *Świadek Chrystusowych cierpień. Prace dedykowane Księdzu Profesorowi Adamowi Kubiśowi*, Kraków 2004, pp. 839-853.

²⁸ In his interpretation of *Vade-mecum* as an expression of Norwid’s philosophy of man, Władysław Stróżewski highlights primarily the metaphor of the man-pilgrim who remains *in statu viae*. The road he travels offers a chance to acquire the fundamental attributes of a person. It leads, through toil, towards the fullness of personal being, towards human perfection, self-awareness, priestly maturity, freedom, truth, transcendence. However, in this convincing and inspiring analysis of Norwid’s poetic anthropology, we do not find references to aretology. See W. STRÓŻEWSKI, „Filozofia człowieka w ‘Vade-mecum’ Cypriana Norwida,” in: W. STRÓŻEWSKI, *O wielkości. Szkice z filozofii człowieka*, Kraków 2002, pp. 7-27.

man, defined by *areté* or “excellence”²⁹. In ancient Greek, the word “areté” is a synonym for the maximum of man’s capacity and ability to act, efficiency, efficacy of man in goodness³⁰. Thus, it describes a man aspiring to excellence, permanently turned towards the good, striving to achieve it, having goodness itself – the highest good – as the goal of his existence.

Norwid’s attention in *Vade-mecum* is focused on several virtues. The first place occupies the virtue of valour, or even heroic valour, originally identified with *areté*, e.g. in Homer’s *Iliad* celebrating the deeds of heroes distinguished by their strength, courage, combat effectiveness, and aristocratic birth. Aretology defines valour as the general constancy of a person’s mind, a condition of every other virtue, or as a special fitness to endure hardship and persevere in the face of all evil, including the danger of death. Valour enables one to master the escape reflex, empowers one to attack opponents and defeat them, but sometimes it also helps to moderate boldness³¹. It seems that it is exactly in this spirit that Norwid conducts his poetic interpretation of the virtue of valour. In the poem *Fatum* [*Fate*], valour, not named explicitly, compared to the actions of an artist³², allows one to confront misfortune, withstand its onslaught and finally overcome it, which also entails the victory of a valorous man over himself³³. On the other hand, in the poem *Cnót-oblicze* [*Face-of-Virtues*], tragic virtue has at its core the valiant overcoming of resistance: “Od hardych mieczów – do krzyżowych ćwieków; / Od więzień – pod sznur i topór” [From heavy swords – to cross studs; / From prisons –to rope and axe] (VM, 86). The piece *Bohater* [*Hero*], on the other hand, offers a kind of recapitulation of the

²⁹ The word “areté” is derived from the word “áristos”, the superlative form of “agathós”, i.e. “good”; it could therefore be best rendered as “excellence”.

³⁰ See Z. PAŃPUCH, “Areté,” pp. 318-325; S. WITEK, H. WEGNER, “Cnota,” in: *Encyklopedia katolicka*, Vol. III, Lublin 1979, pp. 521-527; F. GRYGLEWICZ, H. WEGNER, “Cnót katalogi,” in: *Encyklopedia katolicka*, collective ed., Vol. III, Lublin 1979, pp. 527-530; „Cnoty i wady,” [entry] in: *Słownik teologii biblijnej*, ed. X. Leon-Dufour, transl. and compiled by Bishop K. Romaniuk, Poznań 1990, pp. 160-162.

³¹ See Z. PAŃPUCH, „Męstwo,” in: *Powszechna encyklopedia filozofii*, Vol. VII, Lublin 2006, pp. 140-143.

³² In Norwid’s work, the artist acquires the status of a cultural hero. I wrote more extensively on this subject in the article entitled “Norwidowskie miary i oglądy heroizmu” (*Kultura Słowian. Rocznik Komisji Kultury Słowian PAU*, Kraków 2018, pp. 113-133).

³³ In his commentary on the work, Józef Fert emphasises the motif of trial, experiencing, “examining” misfortune, regarding it as an essential, recurring component of “Norwid’s view of the vocation of the artist-thinker-discoverer” (VM, 58). Among the contexts, he aptly mentions Marcus Aurelius’ *Meditations* (VIII, 28), which, we should add, is a sequence of Stoic spiritual exercises aimed, *inter alia*, at shaping a virtuous man.

history of valour – from the myth of the Argonaut expedition, through the heroism of Moses and the valour of the Christians, seen in the light of both the death-sacrifice of Christ and Christian sweetness, by no means opposed to the former virtue, but treated as its spiritual complement: “ona raczej – jako białogłowa / Wierna – współ zwycięża duchem!” [she (it) rather – as a maiden / Faithful – co-triumphs in spirit!] (VM, 120), right through to the 19th-century form of heroism, namely work. In this poem, the poet presents heroic valour as one of the universal themes of human history, as one of the key factors of “zaciąg-dziejów” [conscriptio of history]. He writes: “Bohaterowie wszak od wieków w wieki / Kraj zdobywają z a k l ę t y –” [After all, for centuries heroes/ Have been conquering t h e a c c u r s e d l a n d –] (VM, 119), and one can probably add that, according to Norwid, they should be doing so by exhibiting an attitude of valour until the end of time.

The second cardinal virtue highlighted within the anthropological plan of *Vademecum* is temperance, i.e. the set of attributes that the ancients referred to as *sophrosyne* – a sense of moderation, prudence, discipline and internal balance, the ability to hold in action a middle path between the extremes. For proper action requires proportionality and measure in relation to the good chosen as the goal; the measure should take into account not only the nature of the object but also the subject of the action. Both excess and insufficiency of action in relation to the good make it impossible to achieve it and may cause numerous defects. Therefore, the quintessence of the virtue of temperance, in its various interpretations, becomes the ideal of man’s mastery over himself, not yielding to the forces of nature, but submitting the lustful part of the soul, i.e. the affections, passions, also the senses, to the ordering power of reason (*logos*) as the disposer of measure³⁴. One can safely say that it is a specifically Norwidian topic and certainly worthy of a thorough study on a broader textual basis. Meanwhile, I would like to draw attention only to the poem *Królestwo* [*Kingdom*], in which the author symbolically places man at the crossroads, between two extremes: freedom, which takes the form of unrestrained individualism, and the bondage of small-mindedness, which reduces human life to the level of animal existence. In the conclusion of the work, Norwid proposes a third way:

³⁴ In Plato’s *Republic*, Socrates states that temperance is “a certain order and inner mastery over pleasures and lusts, as it is said. It is, after all, power over oneself [...]”. And he goes on to explain the meaning of the phrase “mastery over self”: this phrase means that “in man himself, in his soul, there is a certain part that is better and another that is worse. And when that which is intrinsically better prevails over that which is inferior, it means that man prevails over himself, and this should be praised [...]” (430 E – 431 A). Quoted after: PLATO, *Państwo*, transl. W. Witwicki, Warszawa 1991, Vol. 1, p. 203.

Nie niewola ni wolność – są w stanie
Uszczęśliwić cię... nie! – tyś osobą:
Udziałem twym więcej!... p a n o w a n i e
Nad wszystkim na świecie – i nad sobą.
(VM, 79)

[Neither slavery nor freedom – are able to
Make you happy ... no! – you are a person:
Your share is greater!... the r e i g n
Over everything in the world – and over yourself.]

This poetic proclamation of personalism, of the royal dignity of man as a person, contains clear references to the virtue of temperance. Mastery over creation is integrated with the ideal of mastery over oneself, i.e. the ability to transcend all determinants of an internal nature, but also social pressures, which requires power and nobility of will and, above all, spiritual perfection, involving the respect for the power of reason and the law³⁵.

In the *Vade-mecum* cycle, Norwid also alludes to the virtue of justice, and hence his poetic aretology touches upon issues of communal life. Virtue was made a public matter by ancient thinkers, who saw it as a fundamental category of social life. As we know, Plato and Aristotle, extending the meaning of *areté*, placed justice at the head of civic virtues. According to the author of the *Symposium*, justice lays the foundation for not only the consonance of man's spiritual forces³⁶, but also the harmony between the human interior and the political structures of the state, which is the space that enables people to lead a true life. Aristotle, on the other hand, seeing man as a social being, considers functioning within the *polis* as a necessary context of human existence, as an important, inalienable stage of human improvement, mainly due to the educational role of the *polis*. In dialogue with this widely known intellectual tradition, in *Vade-mecum* Norwid undoubtedly

³⁵ In the poem (*W pamiętniku*) [*In the Diary*], which forms part of the Prologue to *Tyrtej* [*Tyrtaeus*], the idea of self-mastery is linked to a situation of trial and self-discovery: “Wtedy to próba jest, wtedy jest waga, / Ile? nad sobą wzięłeś panowania; / Wartość się twoja ci odsłania naga – / I oto widzisz, ktoś-ty? ... bez pytania” [Then it is a *trial*, then it is a *weight*, / How much? dominion over yourself have you taken; / Your worth is laid bare to you – / And now you can see *who you are?* ... without asking] (DW VI, 17).

³⁶ A just man is one who “has arranged his inner household as one should, is in control of himself, maintains order in his own interior, is a friend to himself; he has harmonised his three inner factors [this refers to the three “parts” of the soul: the rational, the impulsive and the lustful – A. Z.], as if the three strings were in good harmony [...] and has become by all means a single unit rather than a collection of many units”. See PLATO, *Państwo* (443 C-E), Vol. I, p. 228.

gives the virtue of justice the status of a factor shaping interpersonal relations, permeating civic life and guaranteeing social harmony. The ideal of a political community, organised around the virtue of justice understood in this way, emerges from the poem *Ideal i reforma* [*Ideal and Reform*]. The concept of virtue forms here part of the language and worldview of the Sage-Monarch³⁷, compared to Trajan and Marcus Aurelius, i.e. to two eminent and distinguished emperors, a social reformer and an eminent philosopher, who in his *Meditations* explains (also to himself) the Stoic understanding of virtue and defines ways of exercising it to gradually achieve moral perfection, until its full embodiment in the role of an ideal ruler. In the speech quoted in the poem, this Monarch observes among the citizens a deficiency of *areté*, understood as the basis of social order and reciprocity and as a potential source of the state's political power. His statement seems to express a conviction of the almost unattainable state of equilibrium between philosophical virtue and political virtue, between cognition and action³⁸. It should be noted, however, that the Monarch complains about the citizens "w swej warowni i w kraju podbitym" [in his stronghold and in a conquered country], which in turn may be a direct allusion to the biography of Marcus Aurelius, who during his reign spent more time on bloody war expeditions than in Rome, but it may also suggest that a shadow of irony is cast on the aretological remarks of the Monarch – an aggressor and tyrant, essentially isolated from social reality, alienated in his "inner fortress". This figure may also be interpreted through the prism of the cycle's motto: in his complaint, the dead Achilles rejects the fate of the Monarch, reigning "over the nation of the dead" (VM, 3). Once again, it is difficult to attain interpretive precision, as the work has not been preserved in its entirety³⁹.

³⁷ As a side note, the representations of the virtues that form part of the ornaments on the columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius in Rome were the source of the illustrations for *Psychomachia*.

³⁸ Among the emperor's notes we can find such an entry: "Do not expect Plato's Republic: but be content if the smallest thing goes on well, and consider such an event to be no small matter" (9.29). Quoted after: MARCUS AURELIUS, *Meditations*, transl. M. Reiter, Warszawa 1984, p. 110. These words demonstrate the author's doubts, his inner split, and even his loss of illusions about the chances of achieving perfection in politics, of harmoniously combining the role of philosopher and ruler. See M. DZIELSKA, „Idee polityczne Marka Aureliusza,” in: *Teoria i praktyka polityczna Marka Aureliusza*, ed. K. Marulewska, Warszawa 2010, pp. 81-93.

³⁹ Examples of Norwid's interest in virtue, linked to social duty, to action for the common good, can also be found in his other works. Here, I will only note Norwid's fascination with the person of Tyrtæus. This "prophet of virtue", as W. JAEGER described him (*Paideia. Formowanie człowieka greckiego*, p. 58), giving him a political, civic, patriotic value, disturbed Norwid's imagination so effectively that *Tyrtejos* [*Tyrtæus*] offers a significant revision of the legend surrounding his actions as a leader and poet, also from the perspective of aretological reflection.

And finally, it is necessary to mention one more virtue, which plays an exceptionally important role in Norwid's poetic aretology. It is, of course, *kalokagathia*, or goodness-beauty, a virtue which in the ancient tradition was the culmination of all virtues, denoted their fullness, for it was a sign of the nobility of the soul of the best people and the highest educational ideal of culture, emphasising man's moral qualities, directed towards an end in itself, towards the good in itself (as opposed to the pleasant or useful good). In the early Christian tradition influenced by Greek culture, the notion of "*kalokagathia*" was retained and supplemented with faith and love, as well as revealed knowledge (e.g. the Cappadocian Fathers, Clement of Alexandria)⁴⁰.

Within the context of *kalokagathia*, the author of *Vade-mecum* situates the figure and work of Chopin as an artist embodying the ideal of art, its maturity and perfection. In *Fortepian Szopena* [*Chopin's Grand Piano*], the personal beauty of the artist (suggested by the image of an "alabaster white" hand, delicate touches on the keyboard – "like an ostrich plume", demeanour full of "both manners, and chic"⁴¹) is presented as the source of art, which is an expression of virtue, even

⁴⁰ As is well known, the development of the Christian religion in the first centuries of its existence is accompanied by an uninterrupted interpretative process in which the Hebrew religion is presented in terms of Greek philosophy. Despite the separateness of the languages, their interpenetration becomes apparent, up to the symbiosis of Hellenistic and early Christian thought in the intellectual circles of Alexandria. In this process of "translating" concepts and ideas, there appear also the terms: *areté*, *kalokagathia* and *paideia*; the foundations of Christian aretology and the concept of the teaching of the virtues are thus established with reference to the Greek tradition. See W. JAEGER, *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia*, Harvard 1962. The formation of the term *kalokagathia* and its different semantic scopes is discussed by P. JAROSZYŃSKI, "Kalokagathia," in: *Powszechna encyklopedia filozofii*, Vol. V, Lublin 2004, pp. 444-447.

⁴¹ Chopin's intriguing personal beauty was more than once the subject of Norwid's reflections – especially in *Czarne kwiaty* [*Black Flowers*], where he focused on the beauty of the artist's figure: "On, w cieniu głębokiego łóżka z firankami, na poduszkach oparty i okręcony szalem, piękny był bardzo, tak jak zawsze, w najpowszedniejszego życia poruszeniach mając coś skończonego, coś monumentalnie zarysowanego... coś, co albo arystokracja ateńska za religię sobie uważać mogła w najpiękniejszej epoce cywilizacji greckiej – albo to, co genialny artysta dramatyczny wygrywa np. na klasycznych tragediach francuskich [...]. Taką to naturalnie apoteotyczną skończoność gestów miał Chopin, jakkolwiek i kiedykolwiek go zastałem..." [He, in the shadow of a deep bed with curtains, propped up on pillows, and wrapped in a shawl, looked very beautiful, as always, displaying in the most mundane movements something of perfection, something of monumental outline... something which either Athenian aristocracy could have adopted as a cult in the most beautiful epoch of Greek civilisation – or that which an artist of dramatic genius portrays, for instance, in classical French tragedies [...]. Such was the naturally apothotic finitude of Chopin's gestures, however and whenever I found him...] (DW VII, 47). Obviously, the poet was trying to understand the nobleness of Chopin's appearance and spirit, his genius, by immersing into his music, "its form (in the broadest sense of the word) and the rich-

the speech of virtue. Norwid portrays the creative act of the musician as achieving the ideal of “Periclean perfection”, thus being, according to the Greeks, the embodiment of the highest perfection in art, which is not only an aesthetic but also a moral value – beauty combined with goodness is the basis of *kalokagathia*. The appearance in this context of the ancient Virtue, a synonym for perfection, is therefore not surprising. Within the comparison containing the soliloquy of Virtue, it appears as “ochrzczona” [baptised] perfection, “odrodzona w Niebie” [reborn in Heaven], transformed in the light of the Christian mysteries of faith – the Eucharist and the Transfiguration⁴². In this way, in the vision of which Virtue is the subject, “D o s k o n a ł e - w y p e ł n i e n i e” [C o n s u m m a t e - c o m p l e t i o n] is made apparent, taking the form of a symbolic (sacramental) reconciliation of man and God, earth and heaven, time and eternity, the spiritual and the material⁴³, which is also a form of integration of national elements (“I była w tém Polska – od zenitu / Wszech doskonałości dziejów / Wzięta tęczą zachwytu / – Polska – p r z e m i e n i o n y c h k o ł o d z i e j ó w” [And in this was Poland – from its zenith/ Through Ages’ all-perfection, / Captured in songs of rapture / –That Poland – of wheelwrights transfigured into kings!⁴⁴]; VM, 160) and general, particular, folk elements (suggested by the “dom modrzewiowy wiejski” [larch wood country manor] entered by the ancient Virtue), as well as universal, humanistic and religious, Christian ones⁴⁵. At the same time, Norwid presents this

ness of spiritual experience that it expressed. These two ideals: formal perfection and greatness of spirit were also closest to Norwid” (see W. STRÓŻEWSKI, “Chopin i Norwid,” in: W. STRÓŻEWSKI, *Wokół piękna. Szkice z estetyki*, Kraków 2002, p. 292). Note that these are ideals that situate Chopin’s character in the dominion of virtue as the path to perfection and human greatness.

⁴² It is worth recalling that the assimilation of elements of Greek philosophy (here: virtue) by Christianity is sometimes combined with a statement of their similarity and, at the same time, of their difference in levels of knowledge; Christianity is presented as a philosophy, but *philosophia Christi* is superior to the philosophy of the Greeks, as “the Divine wisdom”, overcoming the “wisdom of the world” and the “wisdom of the Gentiles” (1 Corinthians 1:21-25). Ancient intellectual culture thus becomes a preparation for receiving the truth of the Gospel (*praeparatio evangelica*). Thinking in terms of similarity is also fostered by the nature of philosophy in the Hellenistic era – it often fulfils religious functions, because philosophers want to guide human life and expect the adepts of their teachings to apply the recommendations in a practical way. See J. DOMAŃSKI, „Chrześcijaństwo a filozofia grecka,” *Znak* 1992, Issue 1, pp. 58-66.

⁴³ In Norwid’s understanding of *kalokagathia*, its original ancient sense obviously interferes with modern interpretations of the category (Shaftesbury, Winckelmann, Schelling, Hegel), which recognise the unity of spirit and matter as a particularly important aspect of it.

⁴⁴ English translation by D. BORHARDT, p. 69-77.

⁴⁵ W. STRÓŻEWSKI, in his interpretation of *Fortepian Szopena* [*Chopin’s Grand Piano*] (“Doskonałe-wypełnienie. O ‘Fortepianie Szopena’ Cypriana Norwida,” *Pamiętnik Literacki*

moment as the culmination of a journey along the paths of virtue – the values developed by humanity are synthesised, spiritually transformed, transferred to the level of the sacred, reaching eschatological fullness:

Odrodziłam się w Niebie
 I stały mi się Arfą – wrota,
 Wstęgą – ścieżka...
 Hostię – przez blade widzę zboże...
 Emanuel już mieszka
 Na Taborze!

(VM, 159)

[I was reborn in Heaven
 And the gate became – my Harp,
 Its path – my ribbon...
 The Host – through the pale wheat I see...
 And Emmanuel already dwells
 On Mount Tabor!]⁴⁶

It is, of course, an extremely dangerous path, because, after all, “Piętnem globu tego – niedostatek” [Privation is this globe’s stigma], but great art, and especially great music, as the implementation of the ideal of *kalokagathia*⁴⁷, can be a valuable signpost, because in his brilliant creations the artist is able to reveal the higher purpose of wandering. Writing about the ideas of cyclicity and path in the *Vademecum* cycle, Władysław Stróżewski emphasised the exceptional significance of the piece *Fortepian Szopena* [*Chopin’s Grand Piano*] in this context: “This work is undoubtedly the culmination of a cycle. The path, or rather the multiplicity of polyphonically guided paths, comes to an end here, which is its true but dramatic completion. The final piece, the miraculous *Na zgon Józefa Z.* [*On the Death of Józef Z.*], sounds already like a blessing given in the greatest silence and concentration to the wanderer standing on the threshold of eternity”⁴⁸. It is impossible to

1979, Issue 4, pp. 43-72), understands “Doskonałe-wypełnienie” [Perfect completion] as the effect of a process of transformation, dynamic development, synthesis of values, which, at the moment of reaching the absolute optimum, is equivalent to the actualisation of the ideal in art, to the axiological unity of different kinds of values (aesthetic values become integrated with moral, religious values), to the fusion of the artist with the work.

⁴⁶ English translation by D. BORHARDT, p. 71.

⁴⁷ It is worth recalling that in *Republic* (401 D – 402 A), Plato associates *kalos kai agathos* with education, the basis of which is music. Its rhythm and harmony shape the human soul in the right way, directing it towards goodness and beauty.

⁴⁸ W. STRÓŻEWSKI, „Chopin i Norwid”, p. 301.

resist the conviction that aretology plays an important role in the creation of this climax in *Vade-mecum*.

3.

Reading the *Vade-mecum* cycle through the lens of Norwid's aretology shows clearly how the poet's reflection on virtue is deeply immersed in philosophical and religious traditions. Socrates, Plato, the Stoics and the Cynics seem to be Norwid's main guides to the world of ancient virtue. Of course, Norwid links their ideas to the Christian perception of virtue. This was, after all, an issue still very much alive in the teaching of the Church in the 19th century⁴⁹, and at the same time firmly rooted in the Christian intellectual and pastoral tradition, which was a subject of the poet's keen interest. Suffice it to recall the Church Fathers, in particular St. Thomas, who in *Summa Theologica* presented a great aretological synthesis, encompassing three theological virtues, five intellectual skills and four cardinal virtues, based on the content of Revelation but also ancient ethics: Aristotle, the Stoics, the Neoplatonists, and Christian thought: patristic, monastic, scholastic⁵⁰. Certainly, literary sources were also important for Norwid-aretologist, especially Homer, or, as Plato claimed, "the educator of all Greece" (*Republic*, 606 E) in the spirit of *areté*, but also Dante presenting his version of man's journey through hell and purgatory towards heaven, i.e. towards spiritual rebirth, good, God, and finally – Prudentius, so far unrecorded in the context of the poet's works, but in his *Psychomachia* he shaped a very lasting model depicting the struggle between virtues and vices, which then becomes a universal model of Christian life, a depiction of *humanitas christiana*. Norwid's aretological imagination probably also owes a great deal to the plastic representations of the virtues. After all, under the influence of Prudentius, a very rich iconography of psychomachia developed, first in the illustrated manuscripts of his work (9th-13th century) and then permeating into painting, sculpture (often sepulchral sculpture), stained glass art and architecture. Norwid could have conducted a regular study of this phenomenon during his stay in Italy, for instance,

⁴⁹ Moreover, the problem of the virtues is so keenly debated in the second half of the 19th century that in the 1899 encyclical *Testem benevolentia enostrae*, Pope Leo XIII condemns the view (so-called Americanism) proclaiming the superiority of active over contemplative and natural over supernatural virtues.

⁵⁰ See St. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Traktat o cnotach. "Summa teologii" I-II, 49-67*, transl. W. Galewicz, Kęty 2006.

in Tuscany, because eminent artists such as Giotto di Bondone, Pisano, Donatello, Lippi, Luca della Robia were particularly fond of this type of imagery, in some cases using inspiration from the *Divine Comedy*. Also in France, where the poet spent many years of his life, the iconography of the virtues is extremely widespread, above all in cathedral art (the most spectacular portal of Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris, depicting the Porta Dei, Porta Paradisum, shows Christ at the moment of the Parousia, surrounded by the apostles, prophets and martyrs and the twelve throning virtues, and let us add that this cycle was subsequently repeated in the cathedrals of Amiens and Chartres; while the theme of the struggle between virtues and vices was employed in the Cluny Abbey and Strasbourg Cathedral)⁵¹. It seems that the female personifications of the virtues, the visions of the triumph of virtue, the apple tree of virtue as a variant of the very popular depiction of the blossoming tree of virtue (contrasted with the withered tree of vice), or the path that becomes a ribbon (i.e. a sign of reconciliation, but perhaps also a banner with the allegory of the virtues) can be considered precisely in the context of Norwid's plastic experiences.

By introducing the notion of virtue into his poetic language and world of thought, Norwid stands in opposition to the ethical reflection of his time, and may even appear anachronistic against its background. In 19th-century ethics, various views of modern, often Enlightenment provenance coexisted in moral discourse. At that time, emotivism (derived from David Hume's thought) acquires great importance. In its light, morality, based on the arbitrary, irrational act of choice of an autonomous subject, turns out to be the expression of passions, feelings, predilections and egoism. As it is well known, Immanuel Kant and his followers opposed this tendency, searching for a universal principle of moral conduct and recognising that the maxim which expresses the moral law and determines the will cannot be rooted either in the pursuit of happiness or in God. By abandoning the moral content of the imperative, Kant opts for the autonomy of the moral subject, but at the same time endorses ethical formalism that attempts to found morality on reason alone. Post-Kantian formalism clashes in the 19th century with various forms of utilitarianism (Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill), emphasising the importance of happiness, seen through the prism of utility, efficiency, the sum of the various benefits that people

⁵¹ See S. WITEK, H. WEGNER, *Cnota*, pp. 523-527; M. U. MAZURCZAK, „Spes – nadzieja wśród personifikacji cnót. Wokół Andrei Pisana drzwi południowych bazyliki we Florencji,” *Ethos* 2010, Issue 92, pp. 183-199. It is worth remarking that in Poland, particularly rich iconography of virtue can be found in the Wawel Cathedral (St. Leonard's crypt, sarcophagi and sepulchral monuments of rulers), as well as in the churches of St. Anne in Kraków, St. Andrew in Olkusz, Holy Trinity in Strzelno (iconography referring to the vision of the tree of virtues and the tree of vices). This iconography is also common in many secular, royal or magnate residences.

wish to pursue in their lives. At the end of the century, both ethical Kantianism and utilitarianism found an ardent opponent in the person of Friedrich Nietzsche, who, rejecting all concepts of morality justified by rational or eudaimonistic reasoning, proclaimed voluntarism and moral solipsism, and essentially nihilism.

The main tendencies of 19th-century ethical reflection cited above can hardly be considered as important for Norwid. On the contrary, their foundations and practical manifestations were repeatedly criticised by the poet as reducing, instrumentalising human dignity. Thus, Norwid's adherence to classical virtue ethics should be regarded as a fully intentional choice, falling within the framework of his polemic against modernity, an important argument in the battle against the degeneration of man of the epoch⁵². It is certainly the choice of a Christian convinced of the importance of the virtues in the code of Christian morality and at the same time aware of the ancient origin of *areté*. It is also the choice of a personalist, because the category of virtue harmonises with the concept of the person as synonymous with the quality of the human soul and as a factor in the personal perfection of man and his moral efficiency in action. At the same time, it opens a potential field of discussion with 19th-century individualism, with 19th-century conceptions of human

⁵² It is significant that contemporary critics of modern moral theory juxtapose Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment ethics, i.e. the ethics the shortcomings of which were insightfully diagnosed by Norwid, with the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition, because in its key concept of the virtues they discern a potential source for the renewal of morality, human education and culture. In the works proclaiming the need to return to virtue ethics, it is primarily a matter of restoring, in place of the currently dominant emotivism, the teleological scheme of moral action (the good as the supreme goal; the relationship between virtue, happiness and the good or God) and objective, rational justifications of morality, which would draw on the concept of truth, as laid out by Aristotle (truth as the adequacy of the mind in relation to its objects) and then defined by St. Thomas as *adaequatio rei et intellectus*. Thus, what is formulated in these ethical discussions is a proposal to go beyond the limits of individualistic and cultural relativism in the philosophy of morality. The point of view outlined above was repeatedly presented in the famous and widely commented publications by one of the representatives of Anglo-American virtue ethics, Alasdair MACINTYRE (see, for instance, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* Notre Dame 1988; *First Principles, Final Ends and Contemporary Philosophical Issues*, Milwaukee 1990; *The Legacy of Virtue. A Study in Moral Theory; Dependent Rational Animals. Why Human Beings Need the Virtues*, Chicago 1999). Also in contemporary theology, there are attempts to return to the recognition of aretological issues as the centre of ethical reflection, which means rediscovering the virtues of the Thomistic doctrine of virtue (see Fr. L. MELINA, "Problematyka cnoty we współczesnej teologii moralnej," transl. P. Mikulska, *Ethos* 2011, Issue 9, pp. 61-77). It should be noted that contemporary cultural theory also participates in this peculiar renaissance of thinking in terms of virtue (see I. CHŁODNA-BŁACH, *Od paidei do kultury wysokiej. Filozoficzno-antropologiczne podstawy sporu o kulturę*, Lublin 2016).

subjectivity, emphasising the importance of purely subjective feelings⁵³, but neglecting the idea of a moral and internally integrated subject, respecting at the same time an objective point of reference for the Self. The polemic may also include the conceptions of collective life born in the individualist culture of the time, which, while conforming to the vision of society as the sum of egoisms, depart from the traditional recognition of virtues as the focal point of communal life or merely as a stabilising factor in interpersonal relations. It is also the choice of a critic of his contemporary culture, in which there seems to be no place for virtue anymore, because “nie czas myśleć... o cnocie!” [it is no time to be thinking... of virtue!], as we read in *Larwa* [*Larva*] (VM, 36), because “cofa starch śmieszności” [the fear of ridicule repels] people from virtue, as we can read in *Ironia* [*Irony*] (VM, 66). In his poetry, therefore, Norwid revindicates the meaning of virtue in the role of a cultural factor, which is tantamount to evoking, on the basis of an ideal, a vision of culture as an environment for the formation of man striving towards the highest values. According to Norwid, Chopin realises this ideal to the fullest, but we should add that the poet himself also strives to embody it in his work.

Of course, *Vade-mecum* is dominated by the author's attitude of ironic criticism, but one cannot fail to notice that his aretology is nevertheless based on affirmation – the affirmation of the effort to strive for virtue and to live according to the virtues, despite everything and against everything, because this is the only way to become a person, the only way leading to the fullness of humanity. At this point we have to recall that in the classical theory of the virtues, a person equipped with the appropriate intellectual and moral abilities should be able to improve one's personal, inner and spiritual life through action, and at the same time be ready to perform in the best possible way the social roles assigned to one and to act for the common good. I believe that in Norwid's poetry, the aretological tone of affirmation also encompasses a certain type of poetic activity, namely the stance of the poet-moralist, who cultivates poetry understood as a path to the formation of virtue in its recipients, as an encouragement to exercise virtue, that is, he cultivates poetry closely linked to the good, both individual and collective, and ultimately leading to the Good as its supreme aim.

After reading the *Vade-mecum* cycle, it is certainly difficult to unequivocally and precisely define Norwid's positive programme, but supposedly the inclusion of are-

⁵³ Norwid is convinced that in his contemporary culture it is not uncommon for emotions to impersonate virtue. In the context of his remarks on the press, he says: “udramatyzowane zręcznie pasje mogą otrzymywać efektu do cnót podobne” [the passions skillfully dramatized can receive effects similar to virtues] (Letter to Władysław Czartoryski, Paris, 20 February 1863; PWsz IX, 80).

tological questions makes at least some aspects of this programme more visible. A circle of important ethical issues crystallises around the category of virtue, which is Norwid's attempt at a mentor-like, psychagogical response to the deprivations afflicting humanity. In addition, a theme of the mystery of man, namely the question of his condition as a being who acts and fulfils himself through deeds is revealed – this theme is less frequently studied but clearly important to the poet. We already know a great deal about Norwid's reflection on human cognition and the importance of T(t)ruth in it, but less about the writer's perception of human action, without which, in his opinion, truth cannot achieve its goal, because it should be incessantly put into practice, attested in action. The fulfilment of this postulate is made possible precisely by moral virtues as forms of spiritual fitness preparing for adequate action in the world, as ways of man's being capable to do what is good, what is best.

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VADE-MECUM DROGAMI CNOTY
O POETYCKIEJ ARETOLOGII CYPRIANA NORWIDA

Streszczenie

Artykuł dotyczy obrazowania i koncepcji cnoty w cyklu poetyckim *Vade-mecum*. Przedmiot analizy stanowią utwory, w których mamy do czynienia z bezpośrednimi nawiązaniem do tej problematyki (*Larwa*, *Fatum*, *Ironia*, *Zawody*, *Centaury*, *Królestwo*, *Cnót-oblicze*, *Bohater*, *Ideal i reformy*, *Fortepian Szopena*), jednak widzianymi w kontekście całego dzieła pisarza i sytuowanymi na tle starożytnej, greckiej i rzymskiej, oraz chrześcijańskiej refleksji aretologicznej. Poetycka aretologia Norwida pozostaje w ścisłym związku z wymienionymi tradycjami, podlega również inspiracjom literackim (zwłaszcza Homer, Prudencjusz, Dante), a także artystycznym (ikonografia cnoty). Jak dowodzą przeprowadzone analizy, wątek aretologiczny, obejmujący przede wszystkim refleksję nad takimi cnotami, jak męstwo, umiarkowanie, sprawiedliwość i *kalokagathia*, jest ważnym czynnikiem spójności *Vade-mecum* (na poziomie kreacji podmiotu dzieła, w epickiej płaszczyźnie cyklu, w obrębie problematyki antropologiczno-etycznej). Jest to zespół zagadnień pozwalających lepiej zrozumieć Norwidowską koncepcję poety-moralisty oraz Norwidowską diagnozę kryzysu człowieczeństwa w XIX wieku.

Słowa kluczowe: Cyprian Norwid; cnota; aretologia; męstwo; umiarkowanie; sprawiedliwość; *kalokagathia*

PATHS OF VIRTUE IN VADE-MECUM.
CYPRIAN NORWID'S POETIC ARETOLOGY

Summary

The article discusses the concept and imagery of virtue in Norwid's cycle of poems *Vade-mecum*, focusing on lyrical pieces that refer directly to this subject (*Larva* [*Larva*], *Fatum* [*Fate*], *Ironia* [*Irony*], *Zawody* [*Disappointments*], *Centaury* [*Centaurs*], *Królestwo* [*Kingdom*], *Cnót-oblicze* [*Face-of-Virtues*], *Bohater* [*Hero*], *Ideal i reformy* [*Ideal and Reforms*], *Fortepian Szopena* [*Chopin's Grand Piano*]). They are nevertheless considered in the light of Norwid's entire body of work and against the backdrop of ancient – Greek and Roman – as well as Christian aretology. Norwid's poetic study of virtue remains closely connected with these traditions, but is also inspired by literature (especially Homer, Prudentius and Dante) and art (the iconography of virtue). As the conducted analyses demonstrate, an aretology that involves reflection on virtues such as valour, temperance, justice and *kalokagathia* constitutes an important factor that binds together *Vade-mecum* at the levels of the development of the lyrical subject, the epic dimension of the cycle, as well as the anthropological and ethical issues it raises. These facilitate better understanding of Norwid's concept of the poet-moralist and his diagnosis regarding the crisis of humanity in the 19th century.

Keywords: Cyprian Norwid; virtue; aretology; valour; temperance; justice; *kalokagathia*

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