

### The concepts of the wisdom and sagacity in „The Knight in the Panther's Skin“

**Abstract:** In Rustaveli's epic poem „The Knight in the Panther's Skin“ there are plenty discussions about human wisdom and its related issues.

First of all, we have to notice that in Rustaveli's poem as a sage are referred male as well as female heroes.

For Rustavelian wisdom the unity of theory and practice is very important.

Rustaveli's wisdom implies dialectical attitude towards the phenomena of life. For Rustaveli the principle of negativity is as fundamental as the principle of positivity.

**Key words:** Rustaveli; wisdom; theory and practice; principle of negativity.

### The concept of the wisdom and sagacity in „The Knight in the Panther's Skin“

In the poem's prologue it is said: "*Poetry is (...) a branch of (...) wisdom*" (Urushadze 1986: 16). Thus, it is no surprise that in his poem Rustaveli often discusses human wisdom and its related issues: What does wisdom mean? What features distinguish the wise man? Who can be called a sage?

Viktor Nozadze left unfinished work "*Sagacity [in "The Knight in the Panther's Skin"]*". What the scholar managed to do, was published in the Parisian journal "*Kavkasioni*" (XVIII, 1976) at the first anniversary of the scholar's death (Nozadze 1976: 49-70). My goal is to add a few to that what Viktor Nozadze has undertaken, to make modest contribution in the investigation of the important philosophical issues of the poem "*The Knight in the Panther's Skin*".

First of all, it should be noted that in the Shota Rustaveli's poem male as well as female personages are considered to be wise.

Before enthroning her, Rostevan so addresses Tinatin: "*You are indeed wise ...*" (Urushadze 1986: 20), i.e. Rostevan believes that a woman can wisely rule the state.

Tariel introduces Davar in this way:

"Davar was the king's sister, a widow who had been wedded in Kadjet'hi; to her the king gave his child to be taught wisdom" (Wardrop 1966: 86).

Obviously, to whom the king's daughter is sent to learn wisdom should also be wise. More importantly, Davar's wisdom is spoken in such a way that it is evident that this fact – i.e. a woman's wisdom, is considered to be ordinary, normal one. It is formulated in that kind of phrase, via which an ordinary fact is usually described, for example: a bird flew from a tree to a tree.

Davar fulfilled brother's assignment perfectly: She reared Nestanas a wise woman.

Gulansharo's king Melik-Surkhav characterizes Nestan-Darejan using the word "sage" and explains why this unknown young woman leaves impression of a wise woman:

"Or she is some sage, lofty and high-seeing; joy seems not joy to her, nor sorrow when it is heaped on sorrow, as a table she looks on misfortune and happiness alike; she is elsewhere, elsewhere she soars, her mind is like a dove's" (Wardrop 1966: 262).

“Joy seems not joy to her, nor sorrow when it is heaped on sorrow, as a table she looks on misfortune and happiness alike” – it is very noteworthy characterization of a personage to understand Rustaveli’s concept of the sage and thus, this phrase will be a focus of more attention.

First of all, it should be noted that shortly earlier Patman similarly characterizes Nestan. In particular, she speaks about Nestan in this way:

“Joy no longer seemed joy nor did woe seem woe to her” (Wardrop 1966: 260).

(Rustaveli repeats most important for him concept twice and sometimes more times with more or less exactness).

This description follows the assessment of Nestan’s state by herself, after Patman gives her sad information that Patman’s gossip husband disclosed to the king their secret and the king asked her for Nestan’s hand in marriage. Patman-Khatun describes Nestan’s wise reaction in this way:

“She said to me: ‘Sister, marvel not, however hard this may be! Luckless Fate hath ever been a doer of ill upon me; if some good had befallen me thou mightest have wondered. what marvel is evil? All kinds of woe are not new to me, old are they’” (Wardrop 1966: 260)

Victor Nozadze makes comment on Melik-Surkhav’s above cited characterization of Nestan:

“Such a characterization of Nestan really belongs to that of a wise woman – a woman who is lofty, who can see everything highly, who is higher than the earthly life, for whom funis not considered to be a feast, who doesn’t give a damn about a disaster which befalls her, disaster and fate are a tale for her; she is elsewhere, her thoughts fly elsewhere, and her mind is as quiet and calm as a dove. Nestan is described as a real wise woman” (Nozadze 1976: 56).

Clearly, Shota Rustaveli recognizes equal intellectual abilities of a man and woman, i.e. the author discusses the aspect of gender from philosopher Plato’s standpoint and does not share Aristotle’s viewpoint on “anti-feminism”.

The mental abilities of Plato’s character - the wise woman Diotima (“*The Symposium*”), who was Socrates’ teacher, even if do not exceed those of men’s, they are not worse. In his other work “*Republic*” Plato develops the idea that likemen, women are capable of ruling the country. Plato believes in women’s mental abilities, if they attain the same knowledge as men.

As for Aristotle, it is surprising that this highly intelligent person has an erroneous view on a gender issue. Aristotle is sure that woman lacks something, in his opinion, a woman is an “*imperfect (incomplete) man*”. It would not be a great trouble if his view remained as his own one, but, unfortunately, in the Middle Ages just the view of Aristotle and not that of Plato greatly influenced the formation of the view on women’s intellectual abilities. Just from him the Middle Ages inherited an erroneous view on women. Similar view cannot be found in the Bible. The fact that Rustaveli shared Plato’s view on gender issue in the epoch when Aristotle’s “anti-feminism” was dominant, is very noteworthy.

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By what features should a wise person be characterized according in Rustaveli’s opinion?

As it is said in the poem, a wise person should possess many valuable features. This time I’ll discuss only a few ones.

I have spoken about one feature above: due to a great joy on neither should lose one’s mind so that to forget the unreliability of life, nor should one be depressed by misfortune.

Next:

It is noteworthy that Rustaveli’s wisdom is based on the unity of theory and practice, which is difficult to be managed by the majority of people (for example, as the German-American philosopher

Herbert Marcuse [1898-1979] asserts, “*there is no ground on which theory and practice, thinking and action meets each other* (“*Esgibtkeinen Boden, auf dem Theorie und Praxis, Denken und Handeln zusammenkommen*”). – Marcuse 2005: 15). In the poem it is underlined several times that in the life a man should abolish the opposition between theory and practice – theory should be put into practice.

In the letter written by Avtandil before escaping to rescue his friend, here minds Rostevan of well-known concepts accepted by wise people:

“A wise man cannot abandon his beloved friend.  
I venture to remind thee of the teaching of a certain  
discourse made by Plato: 'Falsehood and two-facedness  
injure the body and the soul'” (Wardrop 1966: 180).

Philosophers teach us so, but the knowledge of wise people’s concepts is one thing, and putting this knowledge in operation, in practice - is another one. That is why Avtandil addresses the suzerain with these words: “*What shall avail me the wisdom of philosophers, if I do not practise it*”<sup>\*</sup> (Goethe expresses the same opinion in “*Wilhelm Meister*”: “*Knowledge is not sufficient – we should be able to use [it]*”) („*Es ist nicht genug zu wissen, man muss auch anwenden*“). – Goethe 1981: 484).

Not only the knowledge of wise people’s teaching, but also putting it into practice, to abolish the opposition between theory and practice is so important for the author of the poem that he repeats the same opinion via the same character at another place; namely, when meeting Taniel, Avtandil says:

“Empty and vain is all learning if one does not heed to wisdom.  
What use is the wealth you possess if you keep it concealed in coffer?”  
(Urushadze 1986:125).

The problem that is raised here and, and what is more important, is solved rightly, is still very urgent.

In 1793, Immanuel Kant wrote a polemic work “*On the Old Saw: That may be right in theory, but it won't work in practice*” in which the philosopher advocates the unity of theory and practice.

Recently deceased German scholar Heiner Müller-Merbach wrote in the article “*Theory and practice - friends or enemies?*” published in 2010:

“*To express disrespect [to each other] the one uses the word ‘theorist’, the others – ‘practitioner’.* Apparently, it was so 200 years ago too, when Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) wrote a famous essay “*On the Old Saw: That may be right in theory, but it won't work in practice*”. Kant makes both sides - haters of practitioners and haters of theorists look into mirror to see how senselessness is their one-sided viewpoint. The theory is not “*anti-practice*”, is not more sublime than practice, is not a retreat from practice”. (Müller-Merbach 2010: 34).

Georgian poet of the 12<sup>th</sup> century has the same opinion.

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It is very noteworthy that Rustaveli’s wisdom implies the dialectical attitude towards events (under the dialectical attitude towards events we understand **the overcoming of the inertia of formal logic in thinking and action**).

For example, the author of “*The knight in the panther’s skin*” observes the operation of principle of negativity with great interest. “*According to Hegel, dialectical thinking is a way of thinking, for which the principle of negativity has as fundamental power and is as real as the principle of positivity*”. (Diemer 1976: 17).

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<sup>\*</sup> Available English translations of this line („არა ვიქ, ცოდნა რას მარტებს ფილოსოფოსთა ბრძნობისა“) are incorrect. This is my translation (L. B.).

This world outline, which opposes so called “common sense” (due to what it is so rare in the history of mankind) inspires the whole poem, and often is expressed via paradoxical aphorisms:

*“What thou givest away is thine; what thou keepest is lost”* (Wardrop 1966: 31), *“How should God save the one if He cause not the other to perish?”* (Wardrop 1966: 82), *“Who then can harvest joy who hath not first travailed with woe?”* (Wardrop 1966: 197), etc.

Fundamental role of principle of negativity is clearly and artistically explained in the parable of a rose:

*”Hey asked the rose: 'Who made thee so lovely in form and face ? I marvel why thou art thorny, why finding thee is pain!' It said: 'Thou findest the sweet with the bitter; whatever costs dear is better; when the lovely is cheapened it is no longer worth even dried fruit”*(Wardrop 1966: 197).

Here a strong impression is made by an apology of thorn – with its meaning a thorn is substantially equal to rose, but, of course, with aminus meaning. The wisdoms of those parables are of dialectic nature. They are based on the law of the interpenetration of opposites, which is not understandable from the formal logic viewpoint, but is a result of deep understanding of the universe and reflects the reality better than the “common sense”.

Observation of the poem's author on the negative impact of a positive stressor is linked to consistent and profound dialectical thinking - when one is giving extremely joyful information to another person. This is clearly reflected in two aphorisms, which we meet in the episode when Avtandil tells Tariel about finding Nestan.

Avtandil conducted himself recklessly – he lost patience, instantly informed his friend about finding Nestan and showed him an item sent by Tariel's beloved woman - a piece of the veil, which at some time Tariel had sent her via Asmat. This impatience almost caused a fatal effect: due to too much joy Tariel fainted. Avtandil realized what a disastrous mistake he had made and cursed himself because of it:

*”He scratches his face; blood flows from his cheeks while gazing at (Tariel). “What I have done neither madman nor fool hath done. Why did T in my haste pour water on a fire difficult to quench!”*(Wardrop 1966: 295).

And the self-critical Avtandil says a noteworthy thing:

***“The heart struck hastily by exceeding joy cannot bear it”***(Wardrop 1966: 295).

Having sprinkled blood of the lion killed by Tariel, Avtandil revived his friend.

(This episode is deeply analyzed by Tamaz Vasadze:

*“Hurriedly showing of Nestan's letter and veil by Avtandil makes Tariel lose his consciousness. The author shows how strong is a man's irrational origin: Avtandil, such a cautious, restrained, intelligent, who appeals Tariel to reason, is power less before emotional impulse – to give hurriedly good information to a friend (...).*

*Irrationality of the “heart” is clearly manifested in the Tariel's state – distress cannot kill him but joy can kill him. Rustaveli perceives a man as a riddle, a paradoxical creature, who can be tormented even by happiness (...). This is due to the complexity of the human psyche (...). The author speaks about the paradox of human nature: “Winter makes the roses fade, their leaves fall; the ardor of the summer sun burns them, they bemoan the drought; but upon them nightingales complain with lovely voice; heat consumes, frost freezes; the wounds hurt them in either case”*(Wardrop 1966: 296) (...).

*Life tested severely Avtandil once more – it made him face inexhaustible difficulties of the human’s life again. Via the relation with Taniel he comprehends human being’s deep and important features. At the same time, Avtandil perceives himself from an unexpected angle, continues the process of introspection. A reader also perceives this seemingly perfect character differently - he is not free from the ordinary weakness, which does not disgrace him, but makes him more likeable, more charming” – Vasadze 2011: 367-368).*

Here is an extract from the book “*Stress without distress*” by the outstanding Canadian endocrinologist, one of the greatest 20th-century researchers, creator of the theory of stress Hans Selye:

*“Stress is the nonspecific response of the body to any demand made upon it. (...)*

*From the point of view of its stress-producing or stressor activity, it is immaterial whether the agent or situation we face is pleasant or unpleasant; all that counts is the intensity of the demand for readjustment or adaptation” (Selye 1974: 27, 28-29).*

To clarify this view Selye brings such example:

*“The mother who is suddenly told that her only son died in battle suffers a terrible mental shock; if years later it turns out that the news was false and the son unexpectedly walks into her room alive and well, she experiences extreme joy. The specific results of the two events, sorrow and joy, are completely different, in fact, opposite to each other, yet their stressor effect – the nonspecific demand to readjust herself to an entirely new situation – may be the same” (Selye 1974: 29).*

One of the merits of Hans Selye’s theory is that via it many physiological processes have been perceived from a new aspect, it shed light on many unclear issues.

H. Selye’s greatest discovery is that the human body equally reacts to both positive and negative emotions (“*Stress is the nonspecific response of the body to any demand made upon it*” means just that), in particular, in all cases adaptation is necessary; for that a part of vital energy is spent, which will later never be restored. By that H. Selye found “one common denominator” for various human emotions, which is of great practical value in medicine.

This epochal discovery had not been accepted for a long time. H. Selye writes:

*“It has taken medicine a long time to accept the existence of such a stereotyped response. It did not seem logical that different tasks, in fact any task, should require the same response” (Selye 1974: 29).*

Rustaveli is perfectly aware of all that.

The above quoted observation - “*The heart struck hastily by exceeding joy cannot bear it*” (Wardrop 1966: 295)-is followed after three-strophes by the aphorism confirming this view:

***“Heat consumes, frost freezes; the wounds hurt them in either case”*** (Wardrop 1966: 296).

In Selye’s terminology „*The wounds hurt them in either case*” may be explained as “*nonspecific (stereotypical) response of an organism to the demands made by opposing factors*”. Contextually, in this aphorism “heat” metaphorically expresses great joy, “frost” - great sorrow. Those are opposing feelings, but their stress related impact-a non-specific response for adapting to a new situation –is the same.

This aphorism figuratively tells us what Hans Selye has said in other words:

*“...anything, pleasant or unpleasant, that speeds up the intensity of life, causes a temporary increase in stress, the wear and tear exerted upon the body. A painful blow and a passionate kiss can be equally stressful“ (Selye 1976: 137).*

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