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SOTERIOLOGICAL MOTIVES FOR THE HEROES' ACTIVITY IN A POST-APOCALYPTIC SOCIETY: A PHILOSOPHICAL AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Kovtun N.

Doctor of Sciences (Philosophy), Professor, Head of the Department of Philosophy and Politology, Zhytomyr Ivan Franko State University, Zhytomyr, Ukraine

Vitiuk I.

PhD in Philosophy, docent, associate professor of the department of Journalism and Philosophical Studies, Zhytomyr Polytechnic State University, Zhytomyr, Ukraine

Polishchuk O.

Doctor of Sciences (Philosophy), Professor of the Department of Fine Arts and Design, Zhytomyr Ivan Franko State University, Zhytomyr, Ukraine
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Abstract

The article analyzes the soteriological motives of the cultural hero-savior in contemporary digital practices, particularly in the post-apocalyptic genre of popular cinema. It is emphasized that despite the secularization of the post-apocalyptic genre, the characteristics of the hero-savior's activities in post-apocalyptic society, aimed at salvation, preservation, and creation, endow him with certain divine traits.

Keywords: salvation, post-apocalyptic films, hero-savior, god-man.

Introduction.

The complex and contradictory processes in the socio-economic, geopolitical, religious, and value spheres of the world in the 21st century inevitably cause an increase in anxiety and uncertainty about the future in the individual and social consciousness. This explains the high level of interest in apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic narratives in cultural practices, particularly in cinema, which actively uses the scenario of human life after a global catastrophe. The image of a post-apocalyptic world in contemporary cinema fits not so much into the paradigm of religious prophecies as it does into the natural consequences of human technological activity.

The issue of reflection on post-apocalyptic motifs in contemporary cinema has been addressed in a number of studies. In particular, British researchers Aston J. and Wallis J. analyzed the differences between apocalyptic films of the last quarter of the 20th century and films of the 21st century. They note the difference between apocalyptic cinema of the last quarter of the 20th century and films of the 21st century. They note a shift towards greater pessimism, as disasters are depicted as inevitable [1]. Meanwhile, American researcher Prince S. in his study of apocalyptic cinema, "*Apocalypse Cinema*", explores this genre as a cultural phenomenon that reflects the deep social, political, and existential fears of society. However, he notes that despite the diversity of post-apocalyptic films, they are all connected in one way or another to religious tradition, which manifests itself in the use of motifs of punishment, salvation, and renewal [2].

Another American researcher, James Berger, in his work "*After the End: Representations of Post-apocalypse*" seeks the sources of apocalyptic models in artistic practices in real events of the past (for example, the Holocaust). He also points to the cultural obsession with the end of the world and what happens after it; he notes the formation at the end of the 20th century of a

kind of "post-apocalyptic feeling," which manifests itself in the awareness of catastrophe as something that has already been experienced and nourishes interest in the sociocultural space in the themes of survival and the construction of a new society [3].

At the same time, Conrad Ostwalt, in his book "*The End All Around Us: Apocalyptic Texts and Popular Culture*" [4] focuses on the idea of the "secularization" of the apocalypse, when responsibility for the destruction of the world is placed on humans rather than God (for example, in the films "*Waterworld*" (1995) and "*Twelve Monkeys*" (1995)). He points to the symbolic significance of the post-apocalyptic narrative as an opportunity to comprehend the chaotic state of the modern world and give it meaning; hope for salvation and rebirth after disaster. In his article "*The apocalypse is not the end: The construction of memory and identity in post-apocalyptic narratives*", Manuel Machado emphasizes the importance of preserving memory as a tool for resisting chaos and preserving identity [5].

The issues of salvation and survival in a post-apocalyptic world are explored by Brazilian researcher Jose Mauricio Saldanha Alvarez through the prism of the possibility of self-organization of a new social community. However, in post-apocalyptic cinema scenarios, the motif of the hero-savior remains strong, rooted in the biblical motif of the Messiah who will come to his people and save them. Moreover, the savior is not someone who was born for this mission, but rather fulfills it by coincidence, because he is capable of doing so in a post-apocalyptic world. For example, Eli ("*The Book of Eli*" (2010)) is the one who preserves memory and can recreate history to form a new identity, and his blindness is a metaphor for faith [6]. Robert Neville ("*I Am Legend*" (2007)) sacrifices himself to save humanity, which gives us a reference to the biblical Jesus Christ. In general, despite the considerable interest of researchers in post-apocalyptic issues in contemporary

cinema, the image of the hero-savior in a post-apocalyptic environment and its connection with soteriological religious narratives remains insufficiently studied.

The aim of the article is to examine the soteriological motives of the hero-savior in a post-apocalyptic world using popular cinema as an example; to reveal the peculiarities of social and natural transformation of a person in a post-apocalyptic world, which allows them to realize themselves as a hero-savior for a fundamentally new human social community.

Main Text. If we compare apocalyptic films of the end of the last century, in particular “*Armageddon*” (1998), “*Independence Day*” (1996), “*Deep Impact*” (1998), and the apocalyptic films of the XXI century), we can clearly distinguish two main differences between them. First, threats of a cosmic, extraterrestrial, non-human nature are mostly replaced by threats that are entirely terrestrial and more likely to happen, such as global problems (“*The Day After Tomorrow*” (2004)), pandemics (“*Contagion*” (2011), “*12 monkeys*” (2015)), global catastrophes with further human degradation (“*Wayward Pines*” (2015-2017)), nuclear war / radiation / destruction of human life on earth (“*The 100*” (2014-2020)). We suppose this feature indicates a shift in human comprehension of the eschatological perspectives of mankind as much “closer” than they considered before, i.e. those ones that are potentially possible in our everyday life, but not only as a far vague threat from the outer space. Along with the desacralization of eschatological expectations we can observe human's awareness of their responsibility for their role in creating such threats, as in these apocalyptic scenarios the factor of chance is almost eliminated. The second feature of these scenarios is rather a frequent absence of a hero-savior, a messiah or a group of professionals who can avert a future eschatological catastrophe. In this regard, it is advisable to admit the reduction of expectations for a happy ending for humanity and an extremely pessimistic assessment of the prospects of humanity for survival in cinematic practice of the XXI century. The worldview of the XXI century man becomes more eschatological than in previous epochs, and the apocalyptic worldview acquires a mass character at the level of individual and social consciousness nowadays and is no longer directly associated with religion.

The world after a global catastrophe is often seen as localized within the city, and thus, the city appears not only as the last refuge for humanity, a kind of ark, but also as the world as a whole. A person in such a city is not only saved, but also limited, forced to obey the new rules and rescuers. Often the comprehension of one's own existence in the new city-world results in the actualization of the biblical motive of rebellion against God. Thus, in the film “*Dark City*” (Alex Proyas, 1998), the gods are creatures from another planet, destroyed as a result of their activities and man-made disasters. Their power over people-puppets is almost limitless; they do not destroy people physically, but seek to manipulate their reality and consciousness in an artificially created city in Earth orbit. According to the script of the film, the gods literally create a new world

for people every day, shuffling their consciousness, implanting the consciousness of one person to another, and so on indefinitely. This is happening over and over again until people finally forget who they are. Therefore, a person's real life in the Dark City lasts only one day. Every day, each person, individual, personality *dies* and wakes up next day being *another person* to live another day of *another's life* and *die* again. Thus, virtually the entire plot of the “*Dark City*” scenario is based on the eschatological mythology of death and the coming resurrection of man.

The salvation of the post-apocalyptic fallen city-harlot, and in a broader sense the city-center of the world, lies in the plane of the coming of the hero-savior, the messiah. This is how Jesus Christ entering Jerusalem is perceived in the biblical tradition. The coming of the messiah embodies the beginning of a brand new stage in the renewal of the universe. This act of the new creation is accompanied by the victory of the light deity over darkness, gloom, storm clouds, the embodiment of which is the serpent-dragon, the personification of the dark chaos and evil. The idea of Messiah-Savior's coming is based on the eschatological motive of the marriage of the heavenly Lamb to Jerusalem. However, in some sources it is interpreted as a metaphor for the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple. However, in the New Testament, “the marriage of the Lamb to the ‘heavenly Jerusalem’ symbolizes the triumph of the new world over the old one.” [7, p. 231]. In this sense, the image of the mother or bride of the Messiah-Savior is the embodiment of the chosen people. In addition, the Son of God in this interpretation personalizes the unity of human and divine origins embodiment.

The soteriology of a post-apocalyptic city is realized in the motives of the relationship between man and God, and the image of God-man. The scenario of human-god relations is close to human understanding of such relations in polytheistic religions: man lives to serve the gods (to make sacrifices, maintain fire on the altars in their temples); man's destiny is determined by the gods. In “*The Time Machine*” (S. Wells, USA, 2002), based on the novel by Herbert Wells, the Morlocks demand human sacrifices and arbitrarily dispose of the lives of the Eloi; the Morlocks are the Eloi's fate, verdict, the inevitability of their imminent death, their deep fear and at the same time their destiny. The Eloi's sense of life is to be the food for the Morlocks. In the post-apocalyptic world of “*The Time Machine*”, there are two conditional spaces: the *upper world* of the Eloi and the *lower world* of the technologic city of the Morlocks. Every day, the light-bearing, at first sight heavenly world of the Eloi is attacked by chthonic monsters from the lower dark world. The life of the Eloi can end every day, there are no middle-aged and elderly people among them, because they are literally food for the inhabitants of the lower city.

However, this is evolution that turns people into bloodthirsty monsters-gods Morlocks after a man-made catastrophe (explosion on the Moon). The people of the post-apocalyptic world turn into beings of two kinds: the mighty Morlocks – gods and the disenfranchised Eloi people. However, among the *gods* there are *higher* gods-morlocks, a caste of rulers – *telepaths*, who can

be equated with the supreme deities. Their evolving capabilities, physical strength, as well as technologies they own leave the Eloi no chance for a dignified life. The only one divine ability they lack is immortality.

In this world, the protagonist Alexander Hartdegen, who gets from the 19th century into the distant future, appears as the messiah, hero-liberator. His human nature, the lack of excessive physical strength, makes him related to the Eloi. However, at the same time, he is the bearer of a more technologically advanced civilization's knowledge, who has an invaluable invention – the time machine, and therefore he acquires in the new world the characteristics of a being of divine nature.

Hartdegen's victory over the Morlocks largely represents the motif of the victory of the second-generation gods over the first-generation gods (such as the victory of the Olympian gods Zeus over the Titans in ancient Greek mythology), which usually symbolize forces of nature or fate. At the same time, the liberation of the Eloi from the Morlocks' tyranny contains the motive of an existential challenge for them – the loss of the sense of their existence and the need to acquire a new meaning in life in the free world already. The death of the Morlocks-gods in some way devalues human existence. Therefore, in the new post-apocalyptic world, the role of Alexander Hartdegen is to be the hero-civilizer; whose function is also to set new worldviews for the existence of the Eloi new generations.

So if in "*The Time Machine*" fate is represented as a sentence to the Eloi, their inevitability and necessity, in "*Dark City*" fate is seen as a force that rules over people and gods. One of the main storylines in "*Dark City*" – the search for a cure for death, is revealed through the binary opposition in the system of interaction of humans and gods, for it turns out that alien gods, like humans, are mortal. Gods of the Dark City are not immortal by nature, like not immortal are gods in many polytheistic pantheons (the gods of ancient Greece gain immortality by consuming nectar and ragweed). In addition, the path of the alien gods of the Dark City to their death is much shorter than that of humans, as their civilization is doomed to extinction and they are its last representatives. Moreover, *people* are the resource that can help the alien *gods* to delay their death. By repeating every day each person's life in different variations, the alien gods repeat a kind of circle of samsara. Nevertheless, the gods do this not for the sake of human perfection, but to find recipes for how to become like humans so that a species that is already doomed to extinction could survive. The very nature of the alien gods makes them alien and inherently hostile to man and this hostility is their instinct for self-preservation. The *gods* strive to become *humans* in order to be viable.

This artificial circle of samsara is interrupted by Murdoch, who in fact not only does not succumb to the delusion and suggestion of the gods, but also shows his *divine abilities* in the process of reconfiguring the world of the Dark City. On one hand, his nature is *similar to the divine*, because he has abilities of the gods. On the other hand, his *human nature* gives him an advantage over alien gods: having their abilities, he is also deprived of their weak points. His revolt against the

gods is not only the revolt of a man who seeks the meaning of life; it is the revolt of a hero-liberator who seeks to avoid the predestination of divine fate, predestination not only for him but also for others.

To create a new post-apocalyptic reality, it is important to use in popular films of the digital society the symbolism of the dichotomous opposition of *light* and *darkness* (which is used even in the title of "*Dark City*"). The cinematic tradition of using the motif of darkness in the symbolism of death-life, being-non-being is related to the biblical tradition. The inhabitants of the Dark City are dead at night; they are in the state of their pre-existence as human beings. And after the end of night they, by the gods' grace, receive existence that does not fully correspond to life. Thus, the existence of man in the *Dark City* is *not real*, but temporary, because alien gods – gods of chaos also cannot be real gods. In fact, they are the bearers of darkness, the personification of the chthonic forces of nature hostile to man. In the world of the *Dark City*, a person also does not live, they sleep. Their dream is like death, because every day they wake up someone else. The darkness of the Dark City is the realm of the gods hostile to man, and therefore it must be destroyed. Thus, the apocalyptic battle of Murdoch and the alien gods appears as a battle of the forces of light against the chthonic forces of darkness.

In "*The Time Machine*" the Morlocks appear to be such bearers of darkness. They not only live underground, where sunlight does not reach, but also go hunting for the Eloi with the onset of darkness. For the Eloi darkness means death. And the Morlocks, the inhabitants of the *dark* underworld, are the bearers of *darkness* that bring *death*. Alexander Hartdegen acts as a hero-liberator partially due to the fact that he has a light-bearing time machine. He frees the Eloi from the chthonic Morlock gods' tyranny with the help of powerful light-bearing time machine explosion that destroys the dark lower city. *The light god* defeats *the dark gods*, which gives people hope for a dignified life. He at the same time is a savior-civilizer, as he knows ancient language, the language that gives the Eloi access to the sacred knowledge of the past.

The last apocalyptic battle in "*Dark City*", which reflects the myth of the end of the world, takes place between the hero-liberator Murdoch and *the alien gods*. The end of the world comes when the borders of the Dark City are ruined and fall, because the whole world, as it turned out, was the Dark City, behind the walls of which there was *nothing* but boundless outer space. Therefore, the destruction of the borders of the Dark City by the hero-liberator Murdoch is a key stage in the process of the *birth of a new god, god-creator*, who creates the world *out of nothing*. The symbol of the new world, the world of people, becomes light, and that causes biblical allusions: "darkness was upon the face of the deep... and there was light" [8]. After the walls fall, the sun rises upon the dark city as a symbol of hope for the new humanity. Simultaneously with the destruction of the walls, the digital bank of memories the rulers of the dark city owned was destroyed, and that gave people freedom of will as an attributive essential feature of their human nature.

The last of the alien gods before his death asks Murdoch a question, whether people need that. In response, the new ruler of the Dark City, *the hero-civilizer* Murdoch, decides to take risks and gives people freedom of will expression. As a result, that opens wide horizons for the creation of a new just world for people. And because of the presence of the light-bearing God in the new world, the concept of darkness loses the connotations of death, acquiring the meaning of life, which is consonant with the motif of darkness in Psalm 139: *darkness as light* (Psalm 139: 12), *darkness as womb* (Ps. 139:13), i.e. man is born for life. Only the presence of God distinguishes the *darkness-death* from the *darkness-space for life* [9, pp. 569-570]. Sutton L. notes that in the meta-narrative the motif of darkness of the "realm of underworld" is formed during the exile of the Jewish people, who, while in Babylon, "needs to find their identity and meaning", just like the inhabitants of the Dark City do [9, pp. 556-257]. As the last representatives of the vanished human civilization in the space colony of the Dark City, people were exiles, captives of self-proclaimed alien gods, and with the advent of a new god, merciful and loving, they inherit the world. Gods who punish and manipulate, demanding service in the form of playing a new role every day, give way to a patron god who loves and sympathizes. Moreover, in this we can see a clear parallel with the Commandments of Bliss in their eschatological comprehension.

In addition to biblical eschatological motifs in the concept of the bank of memories, as well as in the memory of god-Murdoch, where he draws inspiration for creating a new world, Plato's thesis about the existence of *the world of ideas*, the One in which there are prototypes (archetypes) of all things, phenomena that are embodied by emanation in various material worlds, is realized. At the same time, the destruction of the digital bank of memories during the apocalyptic battle between *the Dark City* and *the New World* correlates with the Christian idea of the destruction of sins, which cleanses man and makes him fit to live in the New Jerusalem, in this case – the New World.

The cultural hero of the "*Matrix*" trilogy, Neo belongs to two worlds at once: the real world (which turns out to be illusory) and the digital world of the matrix. His goal is to save humanity, wake people from sleep in digital prisons to real life, in which they will have freedom to express their will and decide their own destiny. His failure in the second film, "*The Matrix Reloaded*" (2003), illustrates the concept of problematic realized eschatology [10] and at the same time can be regarded the evidence of a pessimistic assessment of the prospects of mankind.

The post-apocalyptic city as a realm of terror is also shown in "*The Book of Eli*" (2010). This is not even a city, but just a settlement. But Carnegie, the warlord who rules it, calls it *the city which he built*. For him, it is a whole state in which people are subordinate to him and dependent on him. Like any other warlord he has an army – gangs of bikers engaged in robbery on the roads. In addition, he is missing only one thing to control the people of his city-state – the ideology that the Bible lost by humankind can give him. For Carnegie, the Bible is a weapon aimed at the hearts of the

people, which will let him build cities and rule in them, forcing everyone to voluntarily do whatever he needs. In such a post-apocalyptic world, the hero is Eli, the keeper of the sacred book, who has been carrying it for 30 years and reading it along the way. The meaning of his life is to take the book to the west and give it where it is needed. Carnegie seeks to obtain the Bible at all costs, unaware that Eli is blind and that the book is in Braille. Once in Carnegie's hands, the Bible does not give him power over people, but also destroys his kingdom. Residents of the city, as well as his ex army of bikers understand that he is seriously wounded and no longer has power over them.

In contrast to the city of terror, Eli finds his last destination in a fortified city-center of cultural heritage of humankind on Alcatraz Island. That is where cultural hero Eli was carrying the Bible to. By dictating the *New King James Version* he fulfills his mission to preserve the greatest value, which will further enable the spiritual revival of mankind.

Conclusions.

According to the cinematic traditions of modernity, the *soteriological motif of activities of gods (heroes)* is realized in the image of the Savior (God, Hero, Messiah), who must save humankind from death in the final destruction of the apocalyptic world as an embodiment of the Bible city-harlot of Babylon. It is the main character of the film of eschatological issue who is to repeat the archetypical motif of the Savior-Christ's entrance in Jerusalem. Messiah-Savior must defeat dark chthonic forces of destruction as he is an embodiment of the victory of a light deity over the age-old darkness, gloom, chaos, populated by chthonic monsters. The fight of a hero (god) of contemporary popular film on post-apocalyptic issue against gods-aliens, gods-morlocks, scientists who seized power, is an uprising of the hero-liberator, who is trying to avoid insurmountable divine predestination, fate not only for himself, but also for other people.

However, the desire of the hero-savior, the Messiah to overcome the consequences of apocalypse and build a new world (the world of New Jerusalem) is not always successful. In a number of eschatological scenarios about (post)apocalyptic city there is a motif of dehumanization and the extreme moral decline of mankind, accompanied by immense inhuman cruelty due to social degradation or genetic mutations ("*The Book of Eli*", "*The Time Machine*", "*Hostile*", "*The Purge*", "*Wayward Pines*"). In such world, justice is substituted by lynching sanctified by the gods or authorities. Moreover, the measure of justice is a degree of sinfulness and cruelty of a person themselves.

In addition to social dehumanization in the (post)-apocalyptic city-world under the influence of mutations human nature can undergo irreversible changes after which man is out of the limits of humanity and humanness. The very natural need seems to push man outside the existence and the very nature of the post-apocalyptic world gets unfavorable to physical survival of man. Instead of destructive Homo Sapiens Sapiens a new biological species evolves, new civilization, which is consonant with natural, technological, or digital realities of the future arises.

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