

Musil's moral perfectionism : from authenticity to social transformation

Is the self the very agent of social transformation or might a certain social state be necessary in order to transform the individuals? Such a question should appear to exceed the preoccupations of an “apolitical” man, as Musil likes to call himself. But it is not the case, since Musil's attempt to conceive a dynamic ethics freed from moral norms and based on self reliance might be considered as moral perfectionism with social implications concerning the “polis”. We do know the influence of such authors like Emerson, Maeterlinck and Nietzsche on Musil and his personal aspiration to reconcile on the one hand, the precision of a mathematical rationality and on the other hand, the importance of feelings and subjectivity.

First, Musil's aversion against conformism seems to be linked to his willing to reconsider the culture of authenticity. In the novel, most of the characters which are representative of this culture are satirical targets. The satirical deflationist efficacy does not aim at evacuating the issue of the self and moral concerns, but it leads to deal with the topic of authenticity in a more “authentic way”, in other words, with more precision and less enthusiasm. The challenge becomes to be truthful to oneself and the literary technique of satire appears as a kind of personal exercise in order to sober up moral thoughts,

Second, moral perfectionism is the matrix of the several utopias. As Stanley Cavell wrote in his *Carus Lectures*, moral perfectionism is often expressed in a literary form instead of a philosophical treatise. Musil's resort to literature is a way to take philosophers at their words and to test philosophical “cities of words” in fictional concrete and ordinary situations. In this perspective, I shall argue that Musil wished to have a large popular audience and hoped that his novel could have an impact on social reality and open to individual and social transformation.

This should be the last point: the individual moral transformation should be sufficient to transform all the society. But the collective experiences which happen in the real world are nothing else than war! So, how could we change the social order so that he becomes fairer? Is the authenticity of each individual enough? Or is this transformation of the individual already conditioned by a social state? In this perspective, Musil confronts two utopias: the utopia of significant life and the utopia of inductive mentality.