

Jaroslav Čelko and his role in the development of scientific atheism as secular humanism in Slovakia

Lukáš Švaňa¹

Abstract

The post-war generation of Marxist Slovak intelligentsia was formed from people who had experience with the war and this experience in the fight against fascism, together with the pre-war social situation, were the main reasons of their inclinations towards the theory of socialism and at the same time caused their sharp criticism of the Church and its ideas. Jaroslav Čelko can also be included in the generation of these authors, and this paper describes and explores his ideas and their influence on the development of secular humanism during the existence of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and after its disintegration. At the same time, the aim of the paper is to evaluate the influences and connections between the ideas of scientific atheism (including examples of the works of Jaroslav Čelko) and secular humanism in Slovakia.

Keywords: Jaroslav Čelko, scientific atheism, secular humanism, socialist humanism, Marxism

Introduction

Scientific atheism was a worldview and ideological stance that was officially promoted by communist doctrine, mostly in the former Eastern Bloc countries, because it was an integral part of the Marxist-Leninist worldview. In the vast majority of cases, it took the form of anticlericalism, i.e. the rejection of the interference of religion in the civil and political life of man, and often even a fierce and violent persecution of all religions. Religion is regarded by scientific atheism as “an inevitable product of an antagonistic society, a product of man’s exploitation by man, a product of socio-economic and spiritual oppression” (Okulov et al., 1976, p. 7). In the early days of scientific atheism, it was important to construct a philosophical critique of religion, building on Marx’s rejection of Hegel’s ideas about the interconnection between philosophy and religion, which, according to Hegel, were different forms of the same quest and endeavour. Religion, according to Marx, brings only an illusory form of happiness because it induces a state of mind in people in which they can endure their suffering and the misery caused by the capitalist economic system (Marx, 1844). It is the emancipation of man from religion that is the essential meaning of the Marxist-Leninist worldview.

The essential idea of scientific atheism is to show that religious conceptions are untenable, and it proves this by exposing its illusory ideas about the world, about man, about God, about the immortality of the human soul, etc., as these ideas are an unshakable part of almost every religion. In contrast to religion, scientific atheism describes man as an autonomous, free, and active being, and this is related to its aspirations to be a humanistic position. It brings about the removal of illusions and improves man’s life to such an extent that no forms of escape (including religion) will be necessary. Tibor Halečka writes that “unlike other historical and contemporary forms of atheism, Marxism-Leninism understood religion not only as a product of man, but consistently as a social phenomenon with its social, especially social-class, sources of origin” (Halečka, 1974, p. 3). Institutionally, scientific atheism was the domain of various institutes and departments.

The representatives of Marxist philosophy and ethics in Slovakia did not intend to create a coherent traditional philosophical-ethical system, because, inspired by the classical authors of Marxism-Leninism, they realised that it was more important to create a scientific foundation about the laws of society than to devote themselves to the creation of artificial philosophical-ethical systems and the analysis of ethical principles and theses. However, it cannot be said that

¹ University of Prešov (Slovakia); lukas.svana@unipo.sk; ORCID: 0000-0002-0906-2879

they rejected ethics, because it had roots in the very foundations of Marxism and its materialist conception of history and its interpretation of the laws of nature and society. This article should prove that there are such identifiable ethical inquiries in the works of Jaroslav Čelko, despite the assumption that we do not consider Jaroslav Čelko to be a full time ethicist, but rather a philosopher and humanist. On the other hand, this article will analyse Čelko's contribution to the development of the secular social environment as well as his inclination to humanist ideas on the basis of a socialist society and its constantly declared, though not always realised, ideas of humanism such as equality, justice and solidarity.

In the writings of many authors of the period, one can see the determination and efforts to contribute to the building of a socialist and communist society that would be able to develop human potential to its fullness, which is directly linked to the humanistic, moral, and social development of man and his abilities. This aim was to fulfil the fundamental goal of socialism through the socialist moral goal, socialist moral values, and socialist moral norms. Therefore, these concepts and their content and formal definition became of paramount importance in the works of Jaroslav Čelko as well. At the same time, contemporary authors were aware that the education of a person to devotion to the socialist model of society cannot be carried out only through moral imperatives, but as a mutually conditioned system of individual moral aspects (ideals, norms, values...), which will lead him to the knowledge of which actions are right and which are wrong.

In 1960, the *Department of scientific atheism* was established at the Philosophical Institute of the Slovak Academy of Sciences and since the management of the Philosophical Institute took a negative and disapproving attitude towards the existence of this department, the department ceased to exist in 1967. Four years later, there was an independent Institute of scientific atheism, the central focus of whose work was the investigation of the place and function of religion and its transcendence in socialist society, with published monographs and studies focusing on the Slovak socio-political environment. For several years, Jaroslav Čelko was the director of the institute, and his publications were mainly devoted to questions of the relationship between church and society, criticism of the church and its relationship to the younger generations, but he also paid attention to the subject of war and the position taken by the Christian religion towards wars.

Čelko's publishing activity was particularly active in the 1960s and 1970s. One of his earliest monographs is *Spoločnosť, mládež a náboženstvo* [*Society, youth and religion*], which is a very sharp critique of religious conditions and the nature of religion as such, focusing on its, in the author's opinion, harmful effect on the younger generations. In the introduction to the book, he wrote, "Religion does not help man, it does not make his life easier, but more difficult" (Čelko, 1962b, p. 5). The socialist ideology of youth education was nurtured by the idea that it cannot be wrong to educate young people without religion. The Roman Catholic Church, however, has taken the opposite position, proclaiming religion to be the only possible form of interpretation of this world as well as the form of education of new generations. This incompatibility in views on how the (moral) progress of society can be achieved has become a dominant theme in many books and articles by representatives of scientific atheism, not excluding Čelko. He focused his criticism on Catholicism, but he considered other forms of religion to be the same – they do no good, are wrong, harmful, and hinder social and moral progress. Čelko over-generalized, did not offer strong arguments, and did not admit that he could be wrong. The era of the rise and consolidation of the principles of socialism did not even permit writing other than in a way that was consistent with official ideology.

Therefore, Čelko's critique of religion is too one-sided, expedient, and propagandistic. He not only aimed his strong criticism at the Roman Catholic Church, but he also found nothing good in the existence of any religion and regards it as a hindrance to the development of human societies and as an obstacle in the face of all reformist inclinations, which at that time, according

to Čelko, were mainly socialist ideas. He directly accused the Roman Catholic Church of using all kinds of unfair practices to fight communism (Čelko, 1962b, p. 75). Čelko's attitudes towards the individual Churches in Slovakia were mostly similar, which were a result of his earlier reproaches towards both the Catholic and Protestant Churches, which, in his opinion, had not sided with the progressive and democratic forces during the pre-war and WWII years. On the contrary, the publications and press organs of these Churches became a popular channel for the dissemination of anti-communist and anti-Soviet propaganda (Čelko, 1973a, pp. 3–4). After the Communist takeover in 1948, Churches, according to Čelko, suddenly became the heralds of democracy and in their publications and treatises they were trying to prove that the principle of the sovereignty of the people in a democratic state contradicts Catholic doctrine (Čelko, 1973a, p. 5). These were just one of many arguments that led Čelko to disrespect and disregard all Churches, although he often used the term *religion* mainly to refer to the Roman Catholic Church and its representatives. Čelko was not disrespectful of religious faith among people, but as a representative of scientific atheism, he often regarded the religious worldview of believers as a fundamental problem because the everyday religious consciousness of believers is an obstacle to the construction of socialism at the level of his scientific theory of Marxism-Leninism.

It is important to note, however, that the Church's activities were a reaction to socialism's plans to subjugate the Church estates and, with them, to have a direct influence on the whole of society. Perhaps it cannot be argued that the Roman Catholic Church was strongly opposed because it sought to maintain its economic position and political influence. From his position as a scientific atheist, Čelko accused it of a history full of heinous crimes aimed at gaining enormous wealth and influence. This position is directly related to its efforts to preserve socio-political orders that do not reject private ownership and either situate it in the hands of a selected few, as feudalism, or in the hands of the bourgeoisie, as capitalism. By contrast, the main aim of socialism was to eliminate private ownership and with it the invisible hand of the market and to move towards central planning and highly visible hand of the state. The elimination of private ownership was unacceptable to the Roman Catholic Church because its teaching dwells on the idea of natural law, and as such, private ownership is a natural thing, and since this is an essential idea of capitalism, the Church must defend it because it is in the Church's interest to promote capitalism (Čelko, 1962b, p. 39).²

The socialist order of society prided itself with creating ideal opportunities for the development of man, his personality, freedom, and morality. Contemporary writers overwhelmingly advocated this purposeful liberation of the masses from the influence of religion. The instrument of this liberation was precisely the atheistic or secularising processes in society, which occurred as a consequence of the removal of the old forms of morality in order to create an entirely new type of so-called communist morality. This is a form of secular morality which was supposed to be humanistic in character. This, according to the theorists of scientific atheism, lies in the fact that it should affirm both human dignity and human freedom. Without any doubts, these efforts of secularization were part of Čelko's professional life before and even after the change of regime in Czechoslovakia (later, Slovakia). His efforts for secular humanism were driven by its declared ethical and rational character providing man with individual freedom connected with his social responsibilities.

This form of secular morality was supposed to bring freedom to the masses, but today we can already critically reflect on its selective nature. If we want to guarantee freedom for the

² The relation of socialism to private ownership is also summed up by another contemporary author, Tibor Halečka, when he stated, "[T]he preservation of private ownership of the means of production means the preservation of a real basis for social and individual antagonisms, sources of social injustice, inequality of nations and races, the basis of power-political structures which are the source of aggression and wars" (Halečka, 1977, pp. 71–72). This quote relatively sums up attitudes of contemporary authors towards this issue, including Jaroslav Čelko.

masses, it is important to grant them, for example, religious freedom, and the communist regime was not able to do this in practice and had no interest in doing so.

The Roman Catholic Church has reproached socialism for the fact that, although it may bring success on the political and economic level, it has no room for the spiritual or value dimension of man, because it does not take into account his needs. On the contrary, Čelko wrote, “socialism has created the most maximal possibilities yet for the all-round development of society and each of its members” (Čelko, 1973c, p. 291). On a theoretical level, we might consider the appeal of socialism and its doctrine of scientific atheism. The problem, however, was its practical side, the negative consequences that began to emerge gradually. The reason for this may have been that socialism inconsistently dealt with the concept of human nature, which may contain equality of freedoms and rights, but not equality of rewards, which could be a manifestation of social injustice. Similarly, attempts to remove religious life and values from society were and still are manifestations of anti-humanism rather than humanism. The advocacy of scientific atheism was aggressive rather than peaceful, in the same way the attitudes of Slovak Catholicism towards scientific atheism were often aggressive, and it can be concluded that both ideological camps went beyond the level of objective and rational criticism, while at the same time abusing their position to engage in an active socio-political battle. In this respect, both camps have nothing with which to reproach each other. A return to humanist ideas would have to be an abandonment of the radical ideas of exclusivism of one and the other. The Roman Catholic Church has drawn many ideas from the encyclical of Pope Leo XIII *Rerum novarum*, in which the Church took an official position on social issues, stating that equality is not possible in a civil society, and that because the differences between people are great, the doctrine of socialism is against the nature of man, and inequality of ownership is its natural consequence (Salatňay, 1941, p. 44).

Scientific atheism was supposed to promote the idea of a classless society and worked with the central idea of the remaking of human society, which, in its view, was unjustly based on class differences and social inequality. To strive for equality is a humanist ideal, but not in the way that socialism, which enlisted the help of the doctrine of scientific atheism, sought to do. I believe, however, that in the rendering of many authors (not excluding Čelko) scientific atheism was merely the negation of religion.³ This reductionist approach may indeed produce the expected revolutionary, but short-lived and ephemeral, results. Scientific atheism has rather reduced belief in God to the level of some mythological ideas about the existence of a supernatural being overseeing human beings, and many times it has not considered other possibilities of human spirituality, because it has focused its criticism on man and his religiosity. The problem with scientific atheism was that for many authors it was merely an ideological weapon in the struggle against the Church, and the expression of humanistic ideas did not seem to play a very important role for it. Starting from Marx’s teachings, in which Marx shifted the reflection on the struggle with religion to social practice and came to the view that religion was a manifestation of man’s alienation from himself, contemporary authors took the position of so-called militant atheism, because any attempts to return to a dialogue with religion would mean a break with Marxism as the official ideology and worldview of man.

Čelko was a representative of this branch of scientific atheism and this is also proved by his other articles, where, for example, he sharply criticizes the social teachings of Catholicism. According to Čelko, they are unprogressive and perpetuate the ideas of the class division of society and thus enslave people. Čelko supports these claims with references to the encyclical *Rerum novarum*, which advocated the actual status quo, i.e., a natural class society of different

³ Marxist-Leninist atheism as a theory needed to distance itself from the past, in its view immature, forms of atheism that were merely the sheer negation of religion. Marxist-Leninist atheism is even the antithesis of such forms of atheism, because of its connection to the positive program of revolutionary-practical humanism. This positive added value was to consist in the transformation of the world-view of the people.

people, the natural consequence of which is their disparity in wealth and status (Čelko, 1973b, p. 382). In his article *Politický katolicizmus – súčasť antikomunizmu* [Political Catholicism – part of anti-communism], he sharply criticized the social doctrine of Catholicism and especially its theoretical basis in the ideas of natural law. He describes it as vulgar, demagogic, and utopian (Čelko, 1974, p. 49). Čelko held the view that it is impossible to have a dialogue with the representatives of religion because they are neither willing nor able to moderate their attitudes towards the ideology of Marxism-Leninism. He calls for a consistent and patient struggle against clericalism and clerical anti-communism because it is in the interests of the just construction of socialist society. In doing so, he is in fact committing the same ideological weaponisation of which he accuses the opposing party.

Is there any humanism in scientific atheism?

It can be assumed that the potential of scientific atheism as a non-coercive alternative to religious ideas has not been fulfilled in the vast majority of cases. Scientific atheism as a theoretical doctrine was meant to be a form of secular humanism and was also meant to be a theoretical background and reaction to so-called bourgeois humanism, which, according to the representatives of communism, had abandoned its humanist values and traditions. It is true that the Church tried in every possible way to prevent the rise of communism, as evidenced by numerous articles in *Katolícke noviny* [Catholic Newspapers], which are not left untouched by Čelko in an article in the journal *Ateizmus* [Atheism]. He thus denounces the many attacks of the Church, which, in his opinion, “served the bourgeoisie and, together with it, wanted to misuse the religion of the faithful to turn back the wheel of history” (Čelko, 1973c, p. 289).

The authors of scientific atheism also dealt with many social issues, and it can be argued that criticism of religious social teaching was a fundamental topic of their work. It is important to note that academic freedom of publication in the communist regime was severely restricted and many papers were subjected to severe censorship, with successful publications being those that were agitational and propagandistic in nature. If the consequence of the publication of such papers was a higher level of acceptance by the official party apparatus, then this fact becomes the reason why, in the vast majority of cases, authors write as the political system demanded in order for their papers and monographs to be published. The consequence may be the false appearance of humanism in papers, books, studies, etc., that have been published because they highlight only one form of worldview. Moreover, if the authors’ statements tend to be uncritical even of their own ideological premises, then doubts about the authenticity of the humanism, to which scientific atheism wanted to subscribe, are eligible.

This can also be observed in Čelko’s book *Náboženstvo, cirkvi a vojna* [Religion, churches and war], in which he focused on the issues of war and especially to the criticism of churches and their attitude towards wars. He presents a wide range of views and reflections on war, its nature, causes, and consequences. Čelko strongly criticized theologians and their erroneous interpretations and explanations of the causes of World War II, accusing them of preaching wrong theories. Many churches at that time (and many of them still hold this view today) saw the causes of wars in some “evil side” of man or in his bad qualities such as excessive ambition, selfishness, or other vices. Čelko firmly rejects such explanations and argues that although man often possesses these characteristics, no biological predetermination or conditioning is to blame (Čelko, 1962a, p. 15). His book was intended to contain a moral message of condemnation of wars as he wrote, “The struggle against war, for the preservation of peace, is the common cause of all honest and peace-loving people in the world, no matter where they live, what political movement they subscribe to, whether or not they are of any confession or not” (Čelko, 1962a, p. 138). The humanist leitmotif is precisely the appeal to reject war as a common project of all mankind, but without any proposed solutions and always against the background of a sharp criticism of capitalism and the Catholic Church, its attitudes, inaction, and the roles it played

during the First and Second World Wars. Relying on people's ability to create and organize better societies and a better world is one of the essential features of secular humanism. As a result, his publication does not go beyond a harsh critique of both religion and the Church and does not present any grasp of the issues of its own, nor are there any practical suggestions and effective tools for advancing humanist and ethical ideas in society or more broadly in the international arena. So, we might say that Čelko was a promoter of humanism in many of his works, but his views were considerably limited by the official ideological doctrine and thus he hardly went beyond its shadow that covered multiple aspects of the society at the time.

If scientific atheism was to be humanism, then it would be necessary to identify both the ideological and value dimensions that would clearly confirm such atheist character. Humanism operates with ideas that at first sight contradict the Christian worldview because it places the highest value on the human person. It is a philosophy or worldview that is based on reason and knowledge and emphasises the humanist ideal of a free, rational, and responsible human being. The ideological shortcoming of scientific atheism was its insistent and counterproductive pursuit of equality, closely intertwined with the official teachings of Marxism. The adjective "scientific" was important to atheism at the time because of the efforts of its adherents to present it as a scientific theory while at the same time establishing a relationship between scientific theories and the central ideology. Understanding scientific methods as larger versions of ideologies is characteristic of Marxism, which is dominated by the thesis that "all views about the functioning of society, including abstract theories, are conditioned and bound by the interests of large social groups, classes" (Novosád, 2014, p. 52).

Since scientific atheism was closely linked to communist ideology and thus did not represent the pursuit of objective or value-neutral knowledge, how then can it be considered humanism? Indeed, it often situated itself in the role of a humanist alternative. During its dominance, we even find it completely identified with humanism, for it prided himself with the assumption that it was precisely the victory of socialism that had succeeded in bringing true humanism among the people – into their everyday social practice. It was to free them from exploitation and bring them political freedom without the necessity of escaping into the world of illusory ideas, which were an essential element of religion. Humanism, combined with atheism, was to be a concrete form of the liberation of man and the destruction of all that bound his life and transported him into a world of abstract and unreal (religious) ideas. Atheism as humanism "is man's way to himself, to self-understanding without mystification, and represents a worldview expression of affirmation of positive human existence, its value and meaning" (Halečka, 1985, p. 43).

The original Enlightenment meaning of humanism was primarily an opposition to theism. Being positioned as an alternative does not necessarily mean that humanism rejects all ideas and forms of religion, but they fall outside of its focus. It is understood as a godless philosophy based on reason and knowledge. However, it must be impartial reason, objective knowledge combined with the recognition of human dignity and the human right to one's own worldview, which, after all, can be both religious and non-religious in nature. Failure to meet this condition makes humanism a mere pseudo-humanism, and scientific atheism seems to have been just such a "pseudo-humanism". Instead of relevant arguments and rigorous reasoning, scientific atheism, as part of totalitarian propaganda, offered only the persecution of religious people and an ingenious mechanism for destroying the human need for spirituality. The constant attacks on the Church and religious people prove that in many cases it was not arguments that were used, but rather irrational beliefs.

In his *Economic-philosophical manuscripts*, Marx defined the essence of humanism as "the total, now at last conscious and realized, within all the riches of previous development, return of man to himself as social, i.e., human man" (Marx, 2000, p. 43). Only a radical transformation of social relations can liberate man and pave the way for true humanism. In Marxism, humanism and science are dialectically united. Humanism became scientific and science became

humanized. We can think of a greater inclination of scientific atheism towards the ideas of true humanism through the reformation of Marxism in the period of the 1960s and with the efforts to reform socialism (and its Marxist philosophical basis) into a form that would be closer to man and his concerns. Doubts about the humanist nature of both Marxism and socialism were growing, and this was linked to the revelation of the crimes and the number of victims in the Soviet gulags. There was also a debate on new forms of dialogue with religion, i.e. dialogue between believers and non-believers, which was to lead gradually to the humanisation of the whole of society.⁴ This so-called *open Marxism* wanted to be open to all impulses, ideas and concepts, which, however, was incompatible with the ideological theses and ideas of the official party apparatus (Bakoš, 2002, p. 705). The social climate at that time made it possible to consider the compatibility of democratic pluralism and Marxist collectivism, which resulted in the transformation of socialism into socialism “with a human face”. According to Filová, this was a dialectical overcoming of Marxism and socialism, whereby in both politics and philosophy “the ideological premise was the negation of everything that could limit the freedom of human action and thought” (Filová, 1996, p. 704).

This period of efforts to reform Marxism and socialism can thus be seen as a period of humanization of atheism, and at the same time the processes of secularization of religion, the demands for separation of science from ideology, etc., were slowly taking place. However, all these processes were violently suppressed, although not definitively destroyed. Consequently, society finds itself in a period of ‘normalisation’ in which humanism is absolutized to the point where the proclaimed equality between people becomes the source of new differences. The confrontation between religion and atheistic socialism grew stronger, as can be observed in Čelko’s article *Spoločnosť, jej premeny vo svetle marxizmu-leninizmu a náboženstvo* [*Society, its transformations in the light of Marxism-Leninism and religion*], where he continues to write about the contradictory nature of Marxism-Leninism and other, e.g., religious, conceptions of the world, without recognizing the possibilities of their common dialogue (Čelko, 1975, p. 20). Thus, his critique remained on the level of pure negation of its ideological opponent, and he did not pursue it for more objective, apolitical, or non-ideological reflections.

Secularization processes and secular humanism in Slovakia after 1989

Jaroslav Čelko’s work significantly influenced the formation of secularism in Slovakia, as in 1989 the *Institute of scientific atheism of the Slovak academy of sciences* was dissolved and Čelko founded the civil association *Community Prometheus*, which was an association of secular humanists in Slovakia. Its official focus was to be the association of adherents of a scientific materialist worldview with an emphasis on freedom of thought, conscience, religious expression, and secular humanist beliefs. Because of these activities, Čelko became the subject of harsh criticism due to his active communist past, associated with his leadership of the *Institute of scientific atheism* as well as the publication of articles that were more offensive in nature. To a certain extent, he cannot be blamed for his harsh criticism of the Roman Catholic Church, as he also pointed out the links between it and politics during the war years in Slovakia. On the other hand, it is important to note that the object of his criticism was supposed to be the

⁴ In connection with the changes in Slovak philosophical thinking and the revival process in Marxist philosophy, Elena Filová asked in one of her articles whether it makes sense to talk about these revival processes, when we know that these movements ended up on the precipice of history. Similarly, Vladimír Bakoš asked: Was the attempt at Marxism as an open system more of a dream, an illusion, than a real possibility and did it remain this way? According to both authors, it is not important whether this reformist variant succeeded or not, but what is decisive is precisely the urgency of the way in which the problems were raised, and at the same time these processes opened up space for new impulses in the development of Slovak thought. It was also a unique opportunity to show that the absolute majority of Slovak philosophers spontaneously, voluntarily, and actively subscribed to the revival process of society and philosophy (Bakoš, 2002, p. 709; Filová, 1996, p. 704).

Church as an institutionalized form of religious faith, but many of his statements also suggest a criticism of religion itself.

Community *Prometheus* also started publishing a magazine called *Prometheus* in 2005. Čelko published several articles in the journal and his articles were a regular part of the section *Personalities of humanism*, where Čelko gradually introduced several pioneers of freethought and atheistic tendencies from history (Francis Bacon, Mikhail Vasilyevich Lomonosov, Alexander Nikolayevich Radishchev, Thomas Münzer, Karel Havlíček Borovský, etc.), and these efforts were later completed with the publication of the book *Protagonisti dejín slobodomyselnosti* [*Protagonists of the history of freethought*], where he arranged these personalities in a slogan-like order (Čelko, 2009b). Sporadically, however, one can also find short articles devoted to the issues of the relationship between the Church and the state. Čelko does not spare criticism of the church in Slovakia, which, in his opinion, is increasing excessive and unnecessary, given the decreasing numbers of people who confess to the Christian faith (Čelko, 2008, p. 17). Thus, he maintains his critical position towards the church, but this topic is no longer dominant in his texts.

Jaroslav Čelko's influence on the development of secular humanism in Slovakia was indisputable, and given that it was a strongly Catholic environment, it was not an easy task. Developing humanism and the ideas associated with it, such as the democratic principle, the principle of equality, etc., was a remarkable feat in a society statistically dominated by religious people. Humanism was regarded by Čelko as a non-theistic and ethical attitude of life. Scientific atheism and its representatives have, in many cases, seamlessly become part of these movements, societies, and clubs. However, we must also reflect on their previous activities and their uncritical advocacy of the doctrines of socialism, which did not create many possibilities for free expression of thoughts and beliefs. The purpose of this paper, however, is not to decide whether Čelko, or others, was merely an ideological minion of the socialist regime or a dedicated intellectual who was concerned with the right thing for Slovak society. It was to identify and analyse those moments in his works that would indicate his overall standpoint towards these intricate issues. In his contributions, we could find moments that were on the edge of incorrect and irrational criticism serving the propaganda purposes of socialism, but also opinions and ideas that highlighted the active forces of man and his ability to change this world for the better. Apart from various ideological contradictions and the fact that sometimes ideological interests triumphed over philosophical statements, it is necessary to realize the importance of these phenomena, which nevertheless contributed to the formation of Slovak philosophical thought.

Despite his relatively strong adherence to the dominant ideology and doctrines of communism, clearly visible and traceable in his works, Čelko played an irreplaceable part in providing Slovak society with a favourable environment for the future development of ideas of humanism. In analysing the ideas of the authors of Marxist philosophy and ethics, it is also important to point out the specifics of the political conditions of individual countries at certain points in time. The harsh processes of normalisation since August 1968 meant that Slovak philosophers, ethicists, and thinkers had little opportunity to deviate from the dogmatic interpretation of the Marxist worldview. Criticism and deviations from the dogmatism of Marxist philosophy could have meant accusations of revisionism for the authors, and many were in fact threatened with various existential risks. However, the increase of these deviations from the traditional interpretation of Marxist philosophy only foreshadowed its controversiality on many points, but especially on its basic requirement, expressed in the moral norm that any person who did not actively support communism was an intolerable enemy. However, from a historical interpretation of philosophical and ethical thought, it is important not to dismiss this theme, for it forms an integral part of our history, despite its demonstrable and oft-criticized limitations and problematic nature.

Speaking after receiving the 2009 *Ambassador of humanism* award, Čelko said, “in my occasional retrospective reflections, I find that I had the opportunity to choose a more comfortable and perhaps more profitable life pilgrimage” (Čelko, 2009a, p. 11). In spite of many accusations regarding Jaroslav Čelko’s close active collaboration with the communist apparatus, his activities contributed to the development of humanist ideas about a society that would be secularized and in which any Church would not necessarily be intertwined with the state apparatus. The social conditions during socialism in Slovakia at that time did not allow for any humanist message to be purged of ideological or propagandistic intentions and this element is evident across all of his works. Aware of these circumstances, it can be concluded that Jaroslav Čelko’s attitudes towards the topics mentioned in this paper were consistent and aimed at spreading secular humanism in its scientific-atheistic form. However, in the changing social conditions, their stridency and urgency changed. After the collapse of the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia, these ideas led to the emergence of humanist social movements. In the concrete social conditions of socialism, however, his attitudes and opinions may give the impression of expediency, but, ultimately, he did not change his convictions, which had ethical dimensions as well. His philosophical and ethical statements had social value and represent an integral part of the development of thought in the Slovak philosophical and ethical milieu. To this day, the topic of humanism is a topical issue, and in every era of its development it has been closely related to social tensions and at the same time it constantly contributes to the understanding of these phenomena in a broader historical perspective.

Acknowledgement

The paper is an output of the project KEGA 013PU-4/2022 *E-learning module of the course History of Ethical Thinking in Slovakia III (1918-1989)*.

The paper is an output of the project VEGA 1/0394/23 *Generations of Slovak Philosophy: generational and contemporary impulses in the ideological kinetics of Slovak philosophy of the 20th century*.

References

- BAKOŠ, V. (2002): Slobodu pre marxizmus alebo slobodu od marxizmu? [Freedom for Marxism or freedom from Marxism?]. In: *Filozofia*, 57(10), pp. 698–712.
- ČELKO, J. (1962a): *Náboženstvo, cirkvi a vojna* [Religion, churches and war]. Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo politickej literatúry.
- ČELKO, J. (1962b): *Spoločnosť, mládež a náboženstvo* [Society, youth and religion]. Bratislava: Smena.
- ČELKO, J. (1973a): Náboženstvo a cirkvi v predfebruárových politických zápasoch [Religion, and church in the political fights before february 1948]. In: *Ateizmus – časopis pre otázky vedeckého ateizmu*, 1(1), pp. 3–8.
- ČELKO, J. (1973b): Cirkev a triedne zápasy v rokoch 1945–1948 [The Church and class struggles in 1945–1948]. In: *Ateizmus – časopis pre otázky vedeckého ateizmu*, 1(6), pp. 377–385.
- ČELKO, J. (1973c): Slovenský klerikalizmus v službách antikomunizmu v rokoch 1945–1948 [Slovak clericalism in the service of anticomunism in 1945–1948]. In: *Ateizmus – časopis pre otázky vedeckého ateizmu*, 1(5), pp. 283–293.
- ČELKO, J. (1974): Politický katolicizmus – súčasť antikomunizmu [Political catholicism – part of anticomunism]. In: *Ateizmus – časopis pre otázky vedeckého ateizmu*, 2(1), pp. 46–54.
- ČELKO, J. (1975): Spoločnosť, jej premeny vo svetle marxizmu-leninizmu a náboženstvo [Society, its transformations in the light of Marxism-Leninism and religion]. In: *Ateizmus – časopis pre otázky vedeckého ateizmu*, 3(1), pp. 19–37.

- ČELKO, J. (2008): Stádo sa zmenšuje, pastieri pribúdajú [The herd is shrinking, the numbers of shepherds are growing]. In: *Prometheus*, 4(1), p. 17.
- ČELKO, J. (2009a): Príhovor prof. J. Čelka pro prevzatí ceny Veľvyslanec humanizmu 2009 [Speech by prof. J. Čelko for receiving the Ambassador of humanism award 2009]. In: *Prometheus*, 6(2), pp. 10–11.
- ČELKO, J. (2009b): *Protagonisti dejín slobodomyselnosti* [Protagonists of the history of freethought]. Bratislava: IRIS.
- FILOVÁ, E. (1996): Reformné procesy v marxistickej filozofii na Slovensku v šesťdesiatych rokoch [Reform processes in Marxist philosophy in Slovakia in the 1960s]. In: *Filozofia*, 51(10), pp. 679–706.
- HALEČKA, T. (1974): Zdroje religiozity a cesty jej prekonávania [Sources of religiosity and ways of overcoming it]. In: *Ateizmus – časopis pre otázky vedeckého ateizmu*, 2(1), pp. 3–24.
- HALEČKA, T. (1977): *Ateizmus, teológia a revizionizmus* [Atheism, theology and revisionism]. Bratislava: Pravda.
- HALEČKA, T. (1985): *Podstata ateizmu* [The essence of atheism]. Bratislava: Pravda.
- MARX, K. (1844): *Introduction to the critique of Hegel's philosophy of right*. [online] [Retrieved June 6] Available at: <https://www.bopsecrets.org/CF/marx-hegel.htm>
- MARX, K. (2000): *Economic and philosophic manuscripts of 1844*. [online] [Retrieved June 6] Available at: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Economic-Philosophic-Manuscripts-1844.pdf>
- NOVOSÁD, F. (2014): *Čo? Ako? Prečo? Sociálna teória v otázkach a odpovediach* [What? How? Why? Social theory in questions and answers] Bratislava: Hronka.
- OKULOV, A. F. et al. (1977): *Vedecký ateizmus* [Scientific atheism], trans. J. Čelko & P. Prusák. Bratislava: Pravda.
- SALATŇAY, M. (1941): *Sociálne encykliky Rerum novarum a Quadragesimo anno* [The social encyclicals Rerum novarum and Quadragesimo anno]. Bratislava: Sväz sociálnych a sociálno-zdravotných spolkov.