

Towards the Culture of Charm: An Analogical Study

POZNAŃ LECTURES IN PHILOSOPHY

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SINCE THE FOUNDING OF THE THE POZNAŃ SOCIETY FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF ARTS AND SCIENCES in 1857, philosophers have played an active role in the Society's scientific work, as well as in activities aimed at propagating knowledge among fellow citizens. We need only mention the first president of the Society, Count August Cieszkowski, and Karol Libelt.

Continuing in this tradition, the present leadership of the PTPN Philosophy Committee took the initiative to publish, jointly with the Faculty of Philosophy of the Adam Mickiewicz University, the series *Wykłady Poznańskie z Filozofii* [Poznań Lectures in Philosophy], the ambition of which is to restore the spirit of *res publica literaria* to our times, but in a new form: democratised and open to critical citizens who are striving for an enlightened understanding of the world around them.

When absorbed in research that seeks to deepen the current state of human knowledge, we often underestimate the importance of sharing the results with a wider circle of educated readers. We hope that the series of *Poznań Lectures in Philosophy* and the accompanying public lectures will serve as an agora for deliberations between scholars and enlightened citizens of the Republic of Poland.

Towards the Culture of Charm: An Analogical Study

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Introduction

THE INSPIRATION FOR THIS BOOK came from Oscar Wilde's (1854–1900) famous opposition between charming and tedious people. In his play *Lady Windermere's Fan. A Play About a Good Woman*, first performed in 1892, one of the characters of the play, Lord Darlington, says to Lady Windermere:

Do you know I am afraid that good people do a great deal of harm in this world. Certainly, the greatest harm they do is that they make badness of such extraordinary importance. *It is absurd to divide people into good and bad. People are either charming or tedious.* I take the side of the charming, and you, Lady Windermere, can't help belonging to them (Wilde, 12, our emphasis).

Oscar Wilde perceived this distinction not only as pertaining to people but also as a universal characteristic. In the premiere of his play, he appeared before the curtains after the third act, declaring that

the actors have given us a *charming* rendering of a *delightful* play, and your appreciation has been most intelligent (Cooper 2018).

More than half a century later, the mathematician George Pólya (1887–1985), renowned for his work in heuristics, made another interesting distinction between two attitudes toward rules: mastery and pedantry.

Pedantry and mastery are opposite attitudes toward rules. To apply a rule to the letter, rigidly, unquestioningly, in cases where it fits and in cases where it does not fit, is pedantry. [...] To apply a rule with natural ease, with judgment, noticing the cases where it fits, and without ever letting the words of the rule obscure the purpose of the action or the opportunities of the situation, is mastery (Pólya 1957: 148).

Although Pólya's distinction concerns attitudes, it can also be applied to individuals: people can be masters or pedants.¹ Pólya's distinction thus parallels Oscar Wilde's: pedants are tedious, while charming people are masters. Hence, charm is a kind of mastery.

The book aims to analyse charm from a contemporary *dialogical* perspective using *analogical* analysis. Martin Buber (1878–1965) will be our canonical philosopher of dialogue. Moreover, we also consider the contributions of Enrique Dussel (1934–2023) and Paulo Freire (1921–1997). By dialogical perspective, we mean focusing on relations, attitudes, (re)building connections and meanings between two interlocutors. At the same time, Dussel's *analectic* method

¹ It is also worth noting that Schopenhauer said that: “*Pedantry* is a form of folly. [...] the pedant, with his general maxims, almost always misses the mark in life, shows himself to be foolish, awkward, useless. In art, in which the concept is unfruitful, he produces lifeless, stiff, abortive mannerisms” (1909: 78).

will be our methodological guideline for our analogical analysis. According to Dussel, analogy makes dialogue between people possible; dialogue, at the intercultural level and from distinct ontological comprehensions of life, cannot be achieved from a univocal pretension of meaning. In this sense, our methodological approaches – the dialogical and the analogical – are intrinsically interconnected.

We believe that using this methodology, we can, on the one hand, clarify the meaning of charm, and, on the other, posit that the concept of charm (as an attitude) contributes to a better understanding of dialogical relationships in the Buberian sense.

In other words, the dialogical approach includes analogical analysis since we believe, following Dussel, that analogy is the basis of dialogue. Hence, we aim to explore what it means to be charming in various languages, what contributes to the charming style of life as understood in various cultures, and why and how charm relates to warm, heart-melting feelings, in contrast to the tediousness or pedantry that hardens it, making any dialogical, positive relation impossible. “Charm” and “charming” are considered almost old-fashioned expressions. At the same time, there is a profound nostalgia for charming experiences, exemplified by the worldwide popularity of Danish and Norwegian *Hygge*, a cultural category that encapsulates the essence of charm in everyday life.

There are many books on charm, but most focus on using it to gain power and influence or to further a personal agenda in winning over opponents. Our perspective

is very different. We follow dialogical thinking, especially as exemplified by Martin Buber's *I and Thou*, and the analogical approach as a basis of dialogue, as understood by Dussel. In this context, there is no place for winning or competing. Hence, we are particularly interested in charm as "a heart-melting phenomenon", and will therefore focus on people, the dialogical relations between them, and their artistic representations. According to Buber, all actual life is encounter and relations are made the centre of our reflection.² Let us point out that in many languages like Portuguese and French, expressions like "encantada" and "enchanté" are still used as a form of greeting.

In the first chapter, we outline our methodology, namely analogical analysis and contemporary dialogical thinking. We will also explain how we understand the opposition analogue-virtual/digital. The second chapter presents an analogical analysis of various definitions of charm in many different languages, including English, Portuguese, French, Polish, Spanish, and Chinese. In the first part, nuanced meanings and connotations of "charm" in the

² Both authors have collaborated on many occasions, including as members of the editorial committee of the Dialogical Collection, an international and interdisciplinary initiative that embraces various languages, cultures, philosophies, arts, and sciences. The collection mainly consists of ebooks with full open access. The first two volumes are available here: *Rebelión Positiva: ¿Para qué rebelarse?*, <https://www.wkn.com.pl/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/REBELIO%CC%81N-POSITIVA-%C2%BFPara-que%CC%81-rebelarse.pdf>, and *Timeliness of Analogy*, https://www.wkn.com.pl/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Timeliness_of_Analogy.pdf.

Indo-European languages are analysed. The second presents the historical etymology of the term in the Chinese language. In the third chapter, we present reflections on charming personalities and relationships from a dialogical perspective. In the first part, we discuss Joseph Epstein's book *Charm. The Elusive Enchantment* (2018). In the second part, we discuss the analogy between charm as mastery and the artistic sculpting process. The characteristics of charming spaces will be considered in the fourth chapter. We will reflect on the so-called *biophilic* scale of charming experiences, as charm is closely related to cosiness and familiarity. We will also talk about the Danish *Hygge* and The Arts and Crafts Movement.

Our proposal for future research on the *Culture of Charm* will be outlined in the fifth chapter. Firstly, we discuss charm as an ephemeral phenomenon that corresponds in a certain way to Taoist and Wabi-Sabi traditions. Secondly, we will describe the "culture of charm" as analogous to the "culture of smile" proposed by Gan-Krzywoszyńska and Leśniewski (2022). At the same time, our project will be considered as an element of Susan Sontag's *Erotics of Art* (2013) and Józef Maria Bocheński's *Handbook of Worldly Wisdom* (2020), understood as a *technology of a good life*.

* * *

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Summary

Towards the Culture of Charm: An Analogical Study

THE INSPIRATION FOR THIS BOOK came from Oscar Wilde's famous opposition between charming and tedious people, which parallels George Pólya's statement that people can be masters or pedants. Hence, charm is a kind of mastery. We are particularly interested in charm as "a heart-melting phenomenon". Therefore, we focus on people, dialogical relations, and spaces, as well as their artistic representations. The book consists of five chapters. Each chapter contains insights on charming phenomena from European and East-Asian perspectives. In the first chapter, *Methodological Preliminaries: Analogy and Dialogue*, we outline our methodology, namely analogical analysis combined with contemporary dialogical thought. We also explain how we understand the opposition between analogue and digital. The second chapter, *Definitions of Charm: An Analogical Analysis*, explores various definitions of charm in many different languages,

including English, Portuguese, French, Polish, Spanish, and Chinese. The first part analyses the nuanced meanings and connotations of “charm” in Indo-European languages. The second presents the historical etymology of the term in Chinese. The last part of this chapter contains conclusions from the analogical analyses. The third chapter, *Charming People and Relationships*, adopts a dialogical perspective on charming personalities and encounters. In the first section, we discuss Joseph Epstein’s book *Charm. The Elusive Enchantment* (2020), while in the second we discuss the analogy between charm as mastery and the artistic sculpting process. The fourth chapter, *Charming Spaces: Retro and Handmade*, considers the characteristics of charming places. The so-called *biophilic* scale of charming experiences is briefly presented, as charm is closely related to cosiness and familiarity. We also discuss the Danish *Hygge* and The Arts and Crafts Movement. Finally, the fifth chapter outlines our proposal for future research on the *Culture of Charm*. First, we discuss charm as an ephemeral phenomenon that corresponds in a certain way to Taoist and Wabi-Sabi traditions. Finally, we propose conceptualizing the “culture of charm” as analogous to the “culture of the smile” proposed by Gan-Krzywoszyńska and Leśniewski (2022). It can be understood as an element of Susan Sontag’s erotics of art and Joseph Maria Bocheński’s *Handbook of Worldly Wisdom* (2020), understood as a *technology of the good life*.

Keywords: charm, dialogue, analogy, culture, encounter.

Streszczenie

W stronę kultury wdzięku. Studium analogiczne

INSPIRACJĄ DO NAPISANIA TEJ KSIĄŻKI była analogia między dwoma podziałami ludzi: na czarujących i nudnych (Oscar Wilde) oraz na mistrzów i pedantów (George'a Pólya). Zatem wdzięk może być rozumiany jako pewien rodzaj maestrii. Interesuje nas szczególnie jej „rozbrajający” aspekt. Dlatego skupiamy się na uroczych ludziach, relacjach dialogicznych i przestrzeniach, a także na ich artystycznych przedstawieniach. Książka składa się z pięciu rozdziałów. Każdy rozdział zawiera informacje o czarujących zjawiskach z perspektywy europejskiej i wschodnioazjatyckiej. W pierwszym rozdziale *Preliminaria metodologiczne: analogia i dialog* przedstawiono analizę analogiczną w powiązaniu ze współczesną myślą dialogiczną oraz opozycję analogowy vs. cyfrowy. Rozdział drugi *Definicje wdzięku: analiza analogiczna* przedstawia definicje wdzięku m.in. w języku angielskim, portugalskim, francuskim, polskim, hiszpańskim i chińskim. W pierwszej części przeanalizowane zostały

zniuansowane znaczenia i konotacje słowa „wdzięk” w językach indoeuropejskich. W drugiej – przedstawiono etymologię tego terminu w języku chińskim. W ostatniej części tego rozdziału zawarto wnioski z analogicznych analiz. Tytuł trzeciego rozdziału: *Czarujący ludzie i relacje* wskazuje na perspektywę dialogiczną, z której omawiamy kwestię czarujących osobowości i spotkań. Odnosimy się w nim m.in. do pracy *Charm. The Elusive Enchantment* (2020) Josepha Epsteina. Następnie omawiamy analogię pomiędzy wdziękiem jako mistrzostwem a procesem rzeźbienia artystycznego. Charakterystykę uroczych miejsc omówiono w rozdziale czwartym *Czarujące przestrzenie: retro i rękodzieło*. Pokróćce przedstawiono tzw. biofilną skalę uroczych przeżyć, gdyż wdzięk jest ściśle związany z przytulnością i swojskością. Stąd też nawiązanie do duńskiego *Hygge* oraz brytyjskiego *Arts and Crafts Movement*. Nasza propozycja przyszłych badań nad „kulturą wdzięku” została zarysowana w rozdziale piątym. Wdzięk jako zjawisko efemeryczne omawiamy w kontekście tradycji taoistycznych i *wabi-sabi*. Na koniec proponujemy ujęcie „kultury wdzięku” jako analogicznej do „kultury uśmiechu” zaproponowanej przez Gan-Krzywoszyńską i Leśniewskiego (2022) oraz jako elementu erotyki sztuki w sensie przyjętym przez Susan Sontag i technologii dobrego życia z *Podręcznika mądrości tego świata* Józefa Marii Bocheńskiego.

Słowa kluczowe: wdzięk, dialog, analogia, kultura, spotkanie.

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