


## PHILOSOPHICAL SOURCES OF JOSEPH CONRAD'S ETHICAL OUTLOOK: JEAN MARIE GUYAU, ÉMILE BOUTROUX

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**Abstract:** The aim of this paper is a thorough analysis of two philosophical sources of Joseph Conrad's ethical outlook: the philosophies of Jean Marie Guyau and of Émile Boutroux. The first one, according to Maria Dąbrowska, had a strong influence on numerous aspects of Conrad's ethics. However, the analysis of *A Sketch of Morality Independent of Obligation or Sanction* proves that, after all, Guyau – among other things, with his biological-vitalistic understanding of the doctrine of duty defined as a “mild obsession” – has created a philosophical-ethical system that is in stark contrast with Conrad's views. Boutroux is a different case entirely. In his comprehension of modern life sciences and philosophy of nature, the most important issue is (this view is formed by Boutroux after Auguste Comte) to perpetuate “the laws of arbitrariness and free activity in nature.” Conrad's references to his lectures on *Natural Law in Science and Modern Philosophy* might then be revealed directly: within such sea novels as *Typhoon* and *The Shadow-Line*, as well as indirectly, through portraying – in Boutroux's language – an aspect of chance within the human “social nature” in such novels as *Nostromo*.

**Keywords:** Joseph Conrad, Jean Marie Guyau, Émile Boutroux, ethics, moral duty, “natural indeterminism”

### INTRODUCTION

When it comes to the ethical outlook of the writer, many well-established critical interpretations are available. First of all, in the footsteps of Maria Dąbrowska and her important study “Conradowskie pojęcie wierności” (Conrad's Concept of Fidelity), Zdzisław Najder emphasized the importance of the French ethicists, such as Jean Marie Guyau in the nineteenth century and Émile Boutroux, writing at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Dąbrowska cited strong evidence, indeed, that Conrad must have remained under the influence of Guyau's most important work *A Sketch of Morality Independent of Obligation or Sanction*. The Polish author quotes Guyau's words of wisdom from the end of Guyau's treatise when Guyau deeply con-

fesses in one of his last letters that he “remained a member of the crew of the cursed ship which without helmsman navigates through the Unknown.”<sup>1</sup>

## JEAN MARIE GUYAU

The text of Guyau, *Morality Independent of Obligation or Sanction*, only at first glance seems to be instructive in the analysis of Conrad-Korzeniowski’s philosophy. With each page a reader becomes sceptical about adequacy and applicability of this comparative method with regard to Conrad’s works. One might feel perplexed about the philosopher’s literary cases which serve to exemplify his thesis in the defense of such categories as “fullness” and “life intensity.”<sup>2</sup> Their spirit is Nietzschean (or pre-Nietzschean), though not tragic, making them different from Nietzsche’s works such as *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music*. To sanction the right to metaphysical risk in action, Guyau reaches for a macabre image of opening the veins of a horse before tillage. Through this suggestive metaphor of life “overcoming” death, Guyau borrows the idea of fertilizing and exsanguination:

In certain countries, if the labourer wants to fertilize his fields, he sometimes uses very energetic means: he takes his horse, opens his veins, and, whip in hand, drives him into the furrows. The bleeding horse drags himself across the field which lies under his tottering legs; the earth becomes red as he passes; each furrow drinking its share of the blood. When, exhausted, he falls down with rattling throat, he is still forced to get up again, to give the last drop of his blood to the greedy earth. At last he sinks down; he is buried in the field, which is still red; his whole life, his whole being passed to the revived earth. This sowing with blood becomes a source of wealth; the field thus fed will yield corn in abundance – a great benefit to the labourer. Things do not happen differently in the history of humanity.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, in this passage of *A Sketch of Morality* one can find phrases as if taken straight out of the ethical universe of Conrad’s *Lord Jim*, such as “there is nothing sadder than futile death.”<sup>4</sup> First, however, one should pay attention to what precedes this declaration: does it sound heroic, hence (in most cases) Conradian, or existential, hence *Schopenhauerian* and *Nietzschean*? In Guyau’s image of equine agony there is something which, subtly but inevitably, evokes the images of the pornography of death. It is a spectacular death, death in a victim’s costume, but most of all, death

<sup>1</sup> Zdzisław Najder, “O ‘filozofii’ Conrada,” in *Nad Conradem* (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1965), p. 201, and also Maria Dąbrowska, “Conradowskie pojęcie wierności,” in *Szkice o Conradzie* (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1959), p. 157.

<sup>2</sup> Both terms, despite their obvious association with the dictionary of the so-called philosophers of life, are, in Jean Marie Guyau’s philosophy, the terms taken from Herbert Spencer. Ryszard Wojdak, ‘Przedmowa,’ in Jean Marie Guyau, *Zarys moralności bez powinności i sankcji* [*A Sketch of Morality Independent of Obligation or Sanction*], trans. and foreword by Ryszard Wojdak (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1960, p. 15). All quotations from Guyau come from the English translation by Gertrude Kapteyn (London: Watts & Co., 1898) [translator’s note].

<sup>3</sup> Guyau, *Zarys moralności* [*A Sketch*], p. 191.

<sup>4</sup> Guyau, *Zarys moralności* [*A Sketch*].

defined in the philosophers' system of thought, ideologized by the far-reaching influence of Charles Darwin on Guyau. In the same way, Guyau adds, "human" martyrs died (and this adjective is needed in *A Sketch of Morality*) who "went through life disseminating life, bleeding from the pierced side as if from the source of life, and fertilized the future."<sup>5</sup>

The utilization of an *extremum* as one more unspoken, taboo, unwritten method, among "a few simple rules" is an anti-intellectual *modus operandi*. We could ascribe it to Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*. It infiltrates Guyau's ethics in some places, such as the scene of the fertilization of fields with blood: "To make humanity, this great, indolent body, progress one step, there has always been needed a shock which has crushed individuals."<sup>6</sup> The concern is that one cannot erect any barrier once the process of altering values began. In the end, when the philosopher says that "the value of life is quite variable, which may sometimes be reduced to nought – to less than nought,"<sup>7</sup> we cannot help having an impression that it would be not only easy to discount Jim's sacrificial act in Patusan, but what is more, to generalize it, make it unnecessary, interchangeable and replaceable in the moral order. One could transform this act, or constantly alter its meaning and replace it with synonyms. Finally, one could reclassify it onto other acts. Moreover, since "the value of life is variable, in the world without ethics, one can zero the life of the benefactor as well as his/her environment. One is authorized to alter morality, not only according to the ethical key, as Jim did, but also by liberating oneself entirely of any key, as Kurtz did in the heart of the Belgian Congo. This is again an expression of Guyau's Darwinism:

The problem put by Darwin on the changeability of duty does not cease, therefore, to be alarming to anyone admitting an absolute, imperative, certain, and universal good. Would the formula of duty change entirely for us if we were descendants of the bees?<sup>8</sup>

For Guyau, this is a rhetorical question, however, as in the above fragment, there is a passage that could sound as if taken from Conrad: "the conviction that one should act permeates the whole being, as far as it permeates awareness and free movements."<sup>9</sup> Especially that Guyau's example, as controversial as it is, may suggest a typically Conradian, ambiguous background of the primality of imponderabilia:

The people in Australia attribute the death of their kinsmen to a spell cast by some neighbouring tribe: they consider it, moreover, a sacred duty to avenge the death of a relative by killing a member of one of the neighbouring tribes. Dr. Landor, a magistrate in Western Australia, relates that a native employed on his farm lost one of his wives through illness. He announced to the doctor his intention to start on a journey, in order to go and kill a wife of the man belonging to a distant tribe. "I answered him that, if he committed such an act, I would put him in prison for the rest of his life." Thereupon, he did not depart but remained on the farm. But, from month to month, he wasted away; remorse consumed him. He could neither eat nor sleep: the spirit of

<sup>5</sup> Guyau, *Zarys moralności [A Sketch]*.

<sup>6</sup> Guyau, *Zarys moralności [A Sketch]*.

<sup>7</sup> Guyau, *Zarys moralności [A Sketch]*, p. 199.

<sup>8</sup> Guyau, *Zarys moralności [A Sketch]*, p. 82.

<sup>9</sup> Guyau, *Zarys moralności [A Sketch]*, p. 83.

his wife haunted him and rebuked him for his neglect. One day he disappeared. At the end of a year, he returned in perfect health; he had fulfilled his duty.<sup>10</sup>

The problem with Guyau's example is that the case of the Australian is terribly deceptive. Without context it represents a modern moral intuitionism and proves *de facto* an existence of yet another Guyau's philosophical center, the anti-Darwinian one. Anti-Darwinian, hence, perhaps closer to Conrad, one would be tempted to ask? The intriguing ambivalence fizzles away when we understand how Guyau defines the concept of mercy. Firstly, he abandons the fundamental category of virtue, and secondly, he reduces the whole idea to biological terms, utilizing such metaphors as "amplification," "expansiveness," and "fullness of life." Since on the one hand, the category of virtue does not exist in Guyau's view, and on the other, the previous notion of virtue undergoes a vitalistic revaluation, then perhaps also the previous, original notion of duty would need to be prophylactically excluded from this *quasi*-Darwinian system. In *A Sketch of Morality...* mercy needs an urge, or even a desire, making it then exist not as a virtue, but as a biological necessity, a need "awaiting" the desiring one, which is the strongest not even in its objective form, but in the moment of "giving its all" – for a biologically real desirous person and for a biological act of desire:

In reality, charity is but one with overflowing fecundity; charity is like a maternity too large to be confined within a family. The mother's breast needs life eager to empty it, the heart of the truly humane creature needs to be gentle and helpful to all. Within the benefactor himself dwells the incentive towards those who suffer.<sup>11</sup>

As an example, Conrad's notion of solidarity is a notion both metaphysical, as it is (to some degree) phantasmagorical, it however fulfills a role of a "positive phantasmagoria:" it invokes the use of symbols of a real link between the living and the dead here, on Earth, and of the *topos* of the common, meaning, jointly responsible migration of the people who uplift each other in the dark.<sup>12</sup> "Conviction of solidarity"

<sup>10</sup> Guyau, *Zarys moralności [A Sketch]*, p. 83. The story vividly resembles Bronisław Malinowski's stories from the field, however it is worth remembering that in this respect which has been shown by James Clifford ethical arguments presented by Conrad were brought to the foreground in his writing, thereby they dominated "the mimetic, tribal realism" of conflicts described by Malinowski, nevertheless commonly named as "the Conrad of Anthropology." It is astounding in all this that *Heart of Darkness* gripped the imagination of the nineteenth-century ethnographers precisely as an "anti-mimetic," literary-fictional story, but ultimately today in effect "most of the self-conscious hermeneutic ethnographers writing today get about as far as Conrad did in *Heart of Darkness*." James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Self-Fashioning: Conrad and Malinowski," trans. by Maciej Krupa, in *Postmodernizm. Antologia przekładów*, selected, edited and prefaced by Ryszard Nycz (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Baran i Suszczyński, 1997), pp. 236-268.

<sup>11</sup> Guyau, *Zarys moralności [A Sketch]*, pp. 134-135.

<sup>12</sup> "A man moving around in the dark and in a crowd of similarly moving creatures needs to be risk-taking and careful. He knows that he cannot do anything he wants – without causing greatest harm to himself or others. Those who take advantage of the dark in order to satisfy their lower instincts are like thieves who benefit from a fire or another calamity to steal. Some day I will develop these ideas – on which Guyau has allegedly already elaborated [emphasis by K. S.]." Maria Dąbrowska, "25 XII 1934. Wtorek, Boże Narodzenie," in *Dzienniki 1933-1945 [Diaries 1933-1945]*, wybór, wstęp i przypisy Tadeusz Drewnowski, vol. 2 (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1988), p. 86.

– argues Conrad – “knits together the loneliness of innumerable hearts: to the solidarity in dreams, in joy, in sorrow, in aspirations, in illusions, in hope, in fear, which binds men to each other, which binds together all humanity – the dead to the living and the living to the unborn.”<sup>13</sup>

How much different is Jean Marie Guyau's take on it, when he defines altruism as Schopenhauer's *quasi*-idea of “fecundity of will.”<sup>14</sup> Ultimately then, “the act of merely watching over the interests of others is only more superior than the act of watching our own interests only in so far as it indicates a greater moral capacity, a surplus of inward life.”<sup>15</sup> And this is what is most essential: there is no way out from the narrow, but filled with “life,” vicious circle of egocentricity present in Guyau. The ideal of commonality is portrayed here as an inept and makeshift copy of the organicist ideals of collective life and as a positivist carbon copy of social tableaux, *ergo* – it is devoid of Conrad's “spiritualization” as well as “symbolic representation” of moral life. By contrast, acts of solidarity are in Guyau unique opportunities to express vital individualities that, day by day, need to be covered up in society by various social conventions:

We want to help others, to move with our own arms the burden which humanity laboriously pushes along. One of the inferior forms of this need is ambition, which must be recognized not merely as a desire for honors and for fame, but as a thing which is also and before all else a need of action or of speech, an abundance of life under its rather coarse form of motive power, of material activity, of nervous tension.<sup>16</sup>

And it does not stop here. Guyau calls duty a sort of a “mild obsession”<sup>17</sup> and despite our awareness about an unfortunate lack of adequate literary language in his treatise, and especially problems with the choice of appropriate metaphors, we have to admit that they expose certain mental bias of the author.

Perhaps at the root of the misunderstanding that surrounds ascribing Guyau's thought to Conrad, where ultimately the alleged parallelism turns out to be an antagonism, lies in Guyau's nicknaming of his own philosophical output. For his moral philosophy is probably, in its strict sense, a philosophy of creativity usurping the apparatus of moral studies. Certain passages in his paper prove it: “We need to bring forth and impress the form of our activity in the world,”<sup>18</sup> “life is not solely nutrition,

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<sup>13</sup> *Conrad's Preface*, in Joseph Conrad, *The Nigger of the “Narcissus,”* edited with an Introduction and Notes by Cedric Watts (London: Penguin Books, 1988), p. xlviii.

<sup>14</sup> “They may say that *ennui* is, in man, a sign of superiority – of fecundity of will. The nation which has known the spleen is the most active nation.” Guyau, *Zarys moralności*, p. 132.

<sup>15</sup> Guyau, *Zarys moralności [A Sketch]*, p. 133.

<sup>16</sup> Guyau, *Zarys moralności [A Sketch]*.

<sup>17</sup> “Duty, from the point of view of the facts metaphysical notions being left on one side is a superabundance of life, which demands to exercise, to impart itself. Duty has been too much interpreted until now as the sentiment of a necessity or compulsion. It is, above all, the sentiment of a power.” Guyau, *Zarys moralności*, p. 140.

<sup>18</sup> Guyau, *Zarys moralności [A Sketch]*, p. 132.

it is production and fecundity.”<sup>19</sup> It illuminates the naïveté of Guyau’s theses in displaying in his philosophy the triumph of evil through impunity, a philosophy entirely anti-tragic, optimistic, and in no way revealing similarities with Conrad’s works such as *Heart of Darkness* or *Nostramo*, which were perhaps inspired to some degree by the reading of Thomas Hobbes’s *Leviathan*<sup>20</sup>.

## ÉMILE BOUTROUX

What Émile Boutroux wanted to uphold in a course of lectures on the notion of nature in science and social philosophy at the Sorbonne in 1892, was – as Adam Mahrburg stipulates in the foreword to the Polish edition of Boutroux’s text *Natural Law in Science and Philosophy* – “the laws of contingency and free activity in nature.”<sup>21</sup> It has its real conveyance into Conrad’s writing, which is characterized by an evolution of Boutroux’s principle starting from the Lingard trilogy and ending with *The Mirror of the Sea*. The concept of “an absolutely free nature” as the main factor constituting an indeterminist view of the world held by the protagonists of *Typhoon* and *The Shadow-Line* places the sea, ocean and island novels of Conrad in uniquely perceived Neo-Kantianism, a new school of metaphysics, from which – as Mahrburg asserts – comes Boutroux.<sup>22</sup> The Polish philosopher, however, formulates objections towards the “natural indeterminism” of the Frenchman:

I think however that as long as nature is absolutely free, then our laws of nature, contrary to the author’s assertions, would not be able to be tools of our will; then our creative initiative, having to do with unaccountable nature as undelineated in its symptoms, would need to often, if not always, crash itself on the chaos of randomness.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>19</sup> “Life is fecundity, and reciprocally – fecundity is abundance of life; that is true existence. There is a certain generosity which is inseparable from existence, without which we die, we shrivel up internally. We must put forth blossoms: morality, disinterestedness are the flowers of human life.” Guyau, *Zarys moralności [A Sketch]*, p. 134.

<sup>20</sup> “The value of Hobbes’s work – as Roman Tokarczyk attempts to explain – is based on the emphasis of the rationality of the act of creating a commonwealth. His argument for an earthly, human and rational character of this act made him a great innovator in political thought. He was one of those who ‘started to look at a commonwealth with their human eyes and derived natural laws from reason and experience, and not from theology.’” Roman Tokarczyk, *Hobbes* (Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 1987), pp. 145-146.

<sup>21</sup> Adam Mahrburg, “Przedmowa” [Foreword], in Émile Boutroux, *Pojęcie prawa przyrody w nauce i filozofii społecznej. Wykłady miane w Sorbonie w roku 1892-1893*, translated from the French by Władysław Spasowski, foreword by Adam Mahrburg (Warszawa: nakładem Księgarni P.F.E. Wende i S-ka, 1902, p. XXIX).

<sup>22</sup> “Anyway, the above-mentioned ideas place Boutroux, next to Jules Lachelier, in the lead of the so-called new school of metaphysics in France. It is considered a section of Neo-Kantianism. Under the cover of traditional school misunderstandings there is a wholesome grain of truth in those ideas. Humanism is that grain, or rather coming to realization of a need to mark a justifiable borderline between a realm of feelings that constitute values and the will that presupposes goals, and a realm of science that builds a determinist view of the world.” Mahrburg, “Przedmowa,” pp. XXX-XXXI.

<sup>23</sup> Mahrburg, “Przedmowa,” p. XXV.

Let us note that taking a strong line on the issue by Mahrburg leads to significant re-evaluations within the genre of Conrad's sea novels, for it reveals the action of an element at sea which is apparent in Conrad's land settings, namely, an element of *chance*, that is of blind luck. In this light the struggle in, for example, *The Shadow-Line* should rather be called a struggle in a very specific lottery-like situation. From among all of Conrad's characters, it is MacWhirr in *Typhoon* who seems to be the most vividly constructed character, almost to fit exactly the core of Boutroux's thought. Never before and never afterwards did Conrad (perhaps inadvertently) remain so close to the outlook of Boutroux – like in *Typhoon*. All that Mahrburg imputes to Boutroux, such as mixing up the concepts of formal, analytical and natural determination becomes compellingly authorized on the basis of creating the background of *Typhoon* by Conrad.

Let us start from the beginning. Boutroux is an opponent of the "stepwise systematization" of science. It should rather be said instead: its particular "stepwise hierarchization," as "the sciences – explains Mahrburg, referring to the views of the French philosopher – get more and more complicated through new, additional facts, but do not originate from one another."<sup>24</sup> It results in a constraint of withdrawing Kant's *a priori* analytic and synthetic propositions and replacing them with assertoric propositions whose "derivation is purely empirical, grounded in experience."<sup>25</sup> In so conducted expatiation of Boutroux:

None of the facts so added by the hierarchically classified sciences is able to be established, determined with obvious necessity from the sciences that preceded them. Each one needs to be learned through experiment, empirically and the laws combining these facts to the preceding ones, are merely relative, they are not obviously essential.<sup>26</sup>

Constant tension in Émile Boutroux between relative, as well as "scientific determinism" contingent upon empirical circumstances and "indeterministic nature," deriving from the fact that "science never is adequate (*adéquate*) when applied to reality," while "its laws always leave vast areas for undelineated, undetermined arbitrariness,"<sup>27</sup> manifests itself in Conrad's novels also in the psychological sphere. Conrad is a master of portraying an "indeterministic nature" in man. His "anthropological indeterminism" ingrained in a particular way in characterizations of Jim and Razumov<sup>28</sup> may be, in a sense, a convincing extrapolation of Boutroux's conclusions about "natural indeterminism." The most important thing here is however, as it seems, to set apart Conrad's "anthropological indeterminism," which the writer may have

<sup>24</sup> Mahrburg, "Przedmowa," p. VIII.

<sup>25</sup> "Every law says that it is so or so happens to be, but none says why it is so, nor that it certainly must be so." Mahrburg, "Przedmowa," p. VII.

<sup>26</sup> Mahrburg, "Przedmowa," p. IX.

<sup>27</sup> Mahrburg, "Przedmowa," pp. IX-X.

<sup>28</sup> Joanna Skolik, among others, wrote on the subject of the distinctively emblematic characters of Jim and Razumov, striking in the light of the entire fiction by Conrad: Joanna Skolik, "Lord Jim and Razumov – Interpretations Lost and Found under Western Eyes," *Yearbook of Conrad Studies (Poland)* 6 (2011), pp. 7-22.

really spoken indirectly for in Boutroux's philosophy, and an existentialism of Sartre's sort, to which Guyau's anthropology would lead rather unequivocally. If we were to use the notion of the soul as recommended by Boutroux, that is, the indeterministic formulation, but rooted in the classical, Cartesian metaphysics of psychophysical dualism, then we will effectively obviate, as one should believe, the risk of an existentialist "reduction" to each other of the figures of "a being endowed with a soul" and "a being endowed with a life."

Despite a general opinion that Conrad's novels represent a model of anti-psychological reaction in literature,<sup>29</sup> with Boutroux it is not necessary, as the case might be, to accept one at the cost of another – the acceptance of psychologism is, in this case, harmonized with choosing specified models of morality. For Boutroux, the issue then is not psychologism itself in literature, but an unclear, in poetic terms, classification of life:

The being that is endowed with a soul is not simply a given end, like the being that is endowed with life: it is capable of proposing an end for itself and imagining means fitted to realize it. It may propose as an end not only its own existence, but an infinite number of objects which have little or nothing to do with it. It may go so far as to propose absurd ends, such as a state of nothingness.<sup>30</sup>

*The Shadow-Line* may be some sort of parable about an indeterministic "disenchantment of the world" considered to be so far as relatively determined. On the level of social law regulation, within the social world of Conrad's novels, we also come across meaningful witnesses of the indeterministic phenomenon of the "disenchantment of society." The most meaningful representative may be the naive determinist, Nostromo, who, after the Schopenhauerian veil of Maya is removed, closely watches the exposed "indeterministic historiosocial nature" of Costaguana. Costaguana in the age of revolution only seemingly resembles the Hobbesian "war of all against all."<sup>31</sup> Indeed, Conrad read Hobbes's works, however, in his ultimate inter-

<sup>29</sup> On this subject, see, among others, Ludwik Fryde, "Conrad i kryzys powieści psychologicznej," *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* 30 (1935), pp. 587-588. Conrad rejected psychologism because it, when led to consequences, gave off a falsely clear image: all can be understood and all can be forgiven. Conrad wanted to polemicize with the so-called psychologists: nothing can be completely understood and nothing can be completely forgiven. "Overcoming in oneself psychological causality for ethical purposefulness carries for us, for our transitional age – Fryde wrote about Conrad – an educational, liberating meaning." Fryde, "Conrad i kryzys," p. 588.

<sup>30</sup> Boutroux, *Pojęcie prawa przyrody* [*Natural Law*], pp. 151-152. All quotations from Boutroux come from the translation by Fred Rothwell [*Natural Law in Science and Philosophy*. New York: MacMillan Company, 1914] [translator's note].

<sup>31</sup> "The nature of a commonwealth is characterized by violence as well, which constitutes realization of its power. Hobbes regarded citizens' concern or fear of the 'sword of the state' as a real source of the state power and of social order, a guarantee of the fulfillment of covenants and a condition of observing the laws of nature ... Violence, as defined by the philosopher in various ways (the force of compulsion, out of the hand of the sovereign, the sword of war, the sword of justice, the yoke of the state, visible power, etc.) is one of the most important elements that constitute the commonwealth." And although Thomas Hobbes assigns the vast category of a "war of every man against every man" to a pre-governmental reality of the state of nature for the sake of an idea that "moral evil as manifested by his contemporaries is,



pretation of *Leviathan*, he must have agreed with the antinaturalistic interpretation of his philosophy by Boutroux, who stated: "from Hobbes to Rousseau, then, we find society regarded as a work of art, art being clearly distinguished from nature."<sup>32</sup> Also important for the composition of *Nostramo* must have been Conrad's reading of *History of the Peloponnesian War*, especially of the first part of the first book, where:

The value of Thucydides as a historian is clearly outlined; his methodological principles are also revealed in nuce. His stance toward the historical process reflects a skill of depicting the past in its basic political, military and economic characteristics ... The historian has demonstrated above all his interpretive proficiency, ability to associate facts and draw logical conclusions from the collected and analyzed material. Due to the lack of direct evidence, and consequently because of not being able to be positively certain about the facts, he resorted to the strategy of probability (*eikos*). Sophism, closely together with law court practice of that time, developed and perfected questioning practice based on that method (*eikadzein*).<sup>33</sup>

When "creating Costaguana,"<sup>34</sup> the author of *Lord Jim* should have been, as it seems, following the indeterministic sociology of Boutroux more closely: he was not attracted by Hobbes's metaphysically-created vision, but by Auguste Comte's sociological theory of society. Although, consequently, the revolution in Costaguana at a certain moment takes on a form of "the Hobbesian storyline" (not only "Thucydides' storyline"), Hobbes operates here more as a "sensational, philosophical guise" that one should not adopt easily. The image of an idiomatic social unity in *Nostramo* also appears thus to prove a potential influence of Boutroux on Conrad.

Equally symptomatic in all this is the fact that by selecting Comte as his point of reference, Boutroux polemizes with Spencer's concept of society, by which placing himself away from Jean Marie Guyau (the latter strongly influenced by Spencer). It is, I think, a fundamental and crucial matter, that, in order to seek philosophical motivation behind creating Costaguana, we follow the traces of the invaluable in

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nonetheless, something more acceptable than the evil committed by men from the pre-governmental state." The contemporary state in many aspects resembles or may resemble a natural state of an all-embracing war: as such "civil war, similarly to bad government, may lead to situations close to the state of nature," and since "civil state in its nature is artificial, generally short-lived and unstable," then "too much disorder runs the risk of dissolving back into the state of nature." Tokarczyk, *Hobbes*, pp. 139, 142, 150-151.

<sup>32</sup> Boutroux, *Pojęcie prawa przyrody [Natural Law]*, p. 156. It is also worth seeing how Boutroux presents Hobbes's beliefs, especially – to learn how he deduces from the Hobbes's system the conception of altruism (sic!): "Now, according to Hobbes, it is the property of man to be intelligent; his intellect makes an egoistic being of him: *homo homini lupus*. Hence we have war waged by all upon all. When this phenomenon happens, human reason necessarily has a conception of the general good. Then it is confronted with the problem of realizing the general good by taking, as agents, beings whose essence is egoism. Hobbes solves this problem deductively. Observation and reason have supplied the principles, the mathematical method deduces the consequences." Boutroux, *Pojęcie prawa przyrody [Natural Law]*, pp. 154-155.

<sup>33</sup> Romuald Turasiewicz, "Przedmowa" [Preface], in Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Kazimierz Kumaniecki, ed. Romuald Turasiewicz (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1991), p. XLVII. I am grateful to Professor Jolanta Dudek for pointing out the binding context of *The Peloponnesian War* for *Nostramo*.

<sup>34</sup> The term comes from Andrzej Braun, *Kreacja Costaguany. Świat południowoamerykański u Conrada* [The Creation of Costaguana. Conrad's South-American World] (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1989).

Conradian studies Boutroux, (who was inspired by David Hume, the founder of the British analytic philosophy that was represented by a friend of Joseph Conrad, Bertrand Russell). At the same time, we should not follow the strongly glorified Guyau, who was inspired by Darwinism, philosophy of life and Arthur Schopenhauer. Costaguana, which can be validated in Andrzej Braun's monography about the political world of *Nostromo*,<sup>35</sup> is Comte's construct at the core of its idea, and not that of Spencer's. Let us recall how Boutroux made the distinction between Comte and Spencer:

Auguste Comte was the first to clearly hit upon the idea of a sociology analogous to the rest of the sciences. He regards a social law no longer as the expression of a pious wish, but rather as the expression of impartially observed facts. Society, however, in Comte's mind, retains a nature of its own, one that is irreducible to the lower forms of being. To Herbert Spencer, on the other hand, human society is nothing but one particular instance of animal society. Still, why does Spencer uphold individualism as an end for society? Is it not that he makes synthesis follow too closely upon analysis; that he is governed by personal preferences?<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> In *Nostromo*, Conrad invents from scratch a fictional, nineteenth-century South American realm within its complementary, historical meaning. In the analytical-hermeneutical dimension, it indeed represents all that happened in the imaginary republic during the so-called "fifty years of anarchy" resulting from the "death of Simon Bolivar and the proclamation of independence, that is the year 1830." In sequences of retrospection in *Nostromo*, Conrad refers to, above all, a characteristic for the 19th-century Costaguana, historio-political "bi-period:" the age of the Federation and the age of Unionism, and also to "the drilling through" (as though) both ages the so-called Guzman's phase, of tyranny and civil war. Braun, *Kreacja Costaguany*, p. 205.

<sup>36</sup> Boutroux, *Pojęcie prawa przyrody* [*Natural Law*], p. 157.

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