

THE PHENOMENON OF ONTOLOGICAL GUILT, METAPHYSICAL RESPONSIBILITY, AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DRAMATIC TENTION IN “I AM GUILTY” BY ALEKSANDR FAYNBERG

Odilova Charosxon Shavkatjon kizi

Uzbekistan state world languages university

English faculty №2

Annotation: This article examines the phenomenon of ontological and metaphysical guilt in the poem “I Am Guilty” by Aleksandr Faynberg through philosophical and psychological frameworks. The study analyzes the lyrical subject’s confession of universal guilt as an expression of existential responsibility, ecological awareness, historical accountability, and theological paradox. Drawing upon the ideas of Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, Karl Jaspers, Hannah Arendt, Sigmund Freud, and Viktor Frankl, the article interprets guilt not as a purely moral or legal category but as an ontological condition of human existence. The research demonstrates that the poem constructs a model of global responsibility in which individual innocence coexists with collective accountability. Philosophical and psychological interpretations are presented as complementary dimensions that reveal the depth of the poem’s ethical, existential, and metaphysical discourse.

Keywords: ontological guilt, metaphysical responsibility, existentialism, collective accountability, ecological consciousness, theological paradox, historical trauma, moral consciousness, psychological interpretation, modern Uzbek poetry.

Аннотация: В данной статье рассматривается феномен онтологической и метафизической вины в стихотворении «I Am Guilty» («Я виновен») Александр Файнберг в философском и психологическом аспектах. Исследование анализирует признание лирическим субъектом всеобщей вины как выражение экзистенциальной ответственности, экологического сознания, исторической подотчётности и теологического парадокса. Опираясь на идеи Мартин Хайдеггер, Жан-Поль Сартр, Карл Ясперс, Ханна Арендт, Зигмунд Фрейд и Виктор Франкл, автор интерпретирует вину не как исключительно морально-правовую категорию, а как онтологическое состояние человеческого бытия. В статье показано, что стихотворение формирует модель глобальной ответственности, в которой индивидуальная невиновность сосуществует с коллективной ответственностью. Философские и психологические интерпретации представлены как взаимодополняющие измерения, раскрывающие глубину этического, экзистенциального и метафизического дискурса произведения.

Ключевые слова: онтологическая вина, метафизическая ответственность,

ЭКЗИСТЕНЦИАЛИЗМ, КОЛЛЕКТИВНАЯ ОТВЕТСТВЕННОСТЬ, ЭКОЛОГИЧЕСКОЕ СОЗНАНИЕ, ТЕОЛОГИЧЕСКИЙ ПАРАДОКС, ИСТОРИЧЕСКАЯ ТРАВМА, НРАВСТВЕННОЕ СОЗНАНИЕ, ПСИХОЛОГИЧЕСКАЯ ИНТЕРПРЕТАЦИЯ, СОВРЕМЕННАЯ УЗБЕКСКАЯ ПОЭЗИЯ

INTRODUCTION

In the poetry of Aleksandr Faynberg, the question of human responsibility before history, nature, and the divine occupies a central position. The poem “I Am Guilty” represents one of the most philosophically intense articulations of this theme. The present article offers an extended scholarly analysis of the poem from ontological, existential, theological, and psychological perspectives. The interpretation draws upon modern philosophy, existentialism, the theory of metaphysical guilt, psychoanalysis, and trauma studies.

The anaphora “I am guilty,” repeated throughout the poem, serves as the central axis of its poetic structure. This repetitive construction evokes the lyrical subject’s internal judicial process. The text does not point to a specific crime, yet the sense of guilt acquires a global character. This aspect aligns with one of the core ideas of existentialism: human beings assume responsibility by virtue of their existence (Sartre, 1943). While Jean-Paul Sartre described humans as “condemned to be free,” Faynberg’s lyrical protagonist expresses the responsibility arising from freedom in the form of guilt.

The line “Beyond the Aral, a mother weeps in sorrow” reveals ecological and historical contexts. The ecological catastrophe associated with the Aral Sea has become a symbol of civilizational errors at the end of the twentieth century (Glantz, 1999). Here, the figure of the “mother” is interpreted as a symbol of nature and homeland. Accepting ecological disaster as personal guilt represents a moral objection to anthropocentric thinking. Advocates of ecological philosophy, particularly Arne Naess, in his concept of deep ecology, interpret humans as an inseparable part of the natural whole (Naess, 1973). Faynberg’s lyrical subject likewise feels this whole as violated.

The line “In the capital, the son is indifferent and corrupt” points to political responsibility. This line highlights the moral gap between central power and the periphery. In the context of twentieth-century totalitarian systems, indifference and silence were interpreted as integral components of collective crime (Arendt, 1963). In her theory of the “banality of evil,” Hannah Arendt identifies indifference and conformity as causes of large-scale catastrophe. In Faynberg’s poem, indifference functions as a hidden form of guilt.

Fragments such as “Disaster. Train. Railway.” reflect the coldness of technogenic civilization. They illustrate a model of industrial modernism alienated from humanity. Martin Heidegger interpreted the essence of technology as a process that turns humans

into mere “resources” (Heidegger, 1954). In the poem, the sharply truncated and coldly expressed technogenic images reflect precisely this ontological threat.

The line “They crucified Jesus” elevates the poem to a theological level. The figure of Jesus Christ appears as the ultimate symbol of sacrifice in human history. In Christian theology, the crucifixion of the Messiah is interpreted as a consequence of human sin (Augustine, Confessiones). Faynberg’s lyrical protagonist assumes responsibility for this metaphysical reality as well. The most paradoxical aspect is that guilt is acknowledged even “for His resurrection.” This represents an ontological paradox: salvation itself is necessary because of human sin.

The final line of the poem, “I am innocent — yet guilty for the whole world,” expresses a dialectical tension. It reveals the conflict between individual innocence and collective responsibility. Karl Jaspers, in his work *The Question of German Guilt*, classifies guilt into four types: criminal, political, moral, and metaphysical (Jaspers, 1947). In Faynberg’s poem, the concept of metaphysical guilt is particularly dominant. Metaphysical guilt relates to human responsibility for the suffering of others. The lyrical subject acknowledges this level of guilt.

Philosophical interpretation

From a philosophical perspective, the poem is a manifesto of ontological responsibility. Human beings become participants in worldly events by virtue of their existence. In Heidegger’s concept of *Dasein*, humans are understood as “being-in-the-world” (Heidegger, 1927). Thus, humans are not external to reality. Faynberg’s lyrical protagonist, likewise, does not separate himself from reality. He lives within historical, ecological, and metaphysical processes.

In existentialism, guilt is often connected with choice (Sartre, 1943). However, in Faynberg’s poem, guilt exists even prior to choice. This is ontological guilt: humans are responsible simply because they are part of being. This idea directly aligns with Jaspers’ theory of metaphysical guilt (Jaspers, 1947).

On the theological level, guilt is interpreted as humanity’s relation to the divine. Augustine explains sin as an inseparable part of human nature (Augustine). In Faynberg’s poem, this sin is not merely individual but collective in nature.

Psychological interpretation

Psychologically, the guilt expressed in the poem is not neurotic but a form of existential anxiety. Sigmund Freud associates guilt with the activity of the superego (Freud, 1930). However, in Faynberg’s poem, guilt does not arise simply from moral pressure; it is a manifestation of heightened empathy.

Viktor Frankl interprets humans as meaning-seeking beings (Frankl, 1946). Feelings of guilt often mark the beginning of moral awakening. The lyrical protagonist’s anguish expressed in “I do not know why” demonstrates that at a subconscious level, he feels global responsibility.

The line “They even dismembered my father” relates to collective trauma. In contemporary psychology, the concept of intergenerational trauma suggests that memories of historical violence persist in the consciousness of subsequent generations (Hirsch, 2012). The lyrical subject experiences this collective memory as part of his own inner life.

The poem’s concluding paradox reflects psychological dualism. On the level of conscious awareness, innocence exists, while on the level of conscience, global responsibility persists. This internal drama is interpreted as a sign of psychological maturity. Acknowledging guilt rather than denying it represents a stage of moral development.

Ontological Guilt: The Dialectic of Being and Responsibility

The anaphoric repetition of “I am guilty” throughout the poem constructs a poetic structure resembling an internal tribunal. However, this judgment is not imposed by an external authority but by conscience itself. The lyrical subject does not separate himself from the events of the world. This position corresponds to Martin Heidegger’s concept of being-in-the-world (Heidegger, 1927). Human existence is not external to reality; it is always already involved in it.

The line “I am guilty — I do not even know why myself —” reveals a fundamental feature of ontological guilt: the absence of a concrete cause. This guilt is not the result of a specific crime; rather, it arises from existence itself. Jean-Paul Sartre defined freedom as the essential condition of human existence (Sartre, 1943). Freedom inevitably entails responsibility. In Faynberg’s poem, the burden of freedom is experienced as guilt.

Karl Jaspers distinguished metaphysical guilt as a form of responsibility that arises when a person fails to prevent injustice, even indirectly (Jaspers, 1947). In the poem, this metaphysical dimension predominates. The lyrical subject may not have directly participated in historical catastrophes, yet he refuses to exempt himself from them.

Ecological Consciousness and Civilizational Critique

The line “Beyond the Aral, a mother weeps in sorrow” points to ecological catastrophe. The drying of the Aral Sea has been recognized as one of the greatest environmental disasters of the twentieth century (Glantz, 1999). The lyrical subject internalizes this catastrophe as personal guilt. Here guilt transforms into ecological consciousness.

Arne Naess, in his theory of deep ecology, argued that humans are inseparable from the natural whole (Naess, 1973). Similarly, in Faynberg’s poem, damage inflicted upon nature is reflected as an internal wound of humanity. The image “animals as targets of arrows” functions as a critique of anthropocentrism. Human violence disrupts the balance of the biosphere.

The fragmented syntax in “Disaster. Train. Railway.” evokes the cold mechanics of industrial modernity. Heidegger interpreted technology as a force that alienates humanity from authentic being (Heidegger, 1954). In the poem, technological progress appears in tension with humanistic values.

Theological Dimension and Metaphysical Paradox

The line “They crucified Jesus” elevates the poem to a theological plane. Jesus Christ symbolizes the ultimate sacrifice in human history. Augustine interpreted sin as an intrinsic aspect of human nature (Augustine, Confessiones). Faynberg’s lyrical subject accepts this guilt not individually but collectively.

The most paradoxical line is the confession of guilt “for His resurrection as well.” Salvation itself becomes necessary because of human sin. Thus, humanity is implicated not only in evil but also in the necessity of redemption. This expresses a profound theological responsibility.

Political Guilt and Historical Accountability

The line “In the capital, the son is indifferent and corrupt” introduces political critique. Hannah Arendt, in her concept of the “banality of evil,” emphasized that indifference and conformity contribute to large-scale injustice (Arendt, 1963). In Faynberg’s poem, indifference becomes a hidden form of guilt.

The line “They even dismembered my father” evokes historical repression and violence. The twentieth century’s wars and totalitarian regimes created a collective memory of trauma. The lyrical subject internalizes this historical weight.

Psychological Drama and Empathic Consciousness

Psychologically, the guilt expressed in the poem is not neurotic but existential. Sigmund Freud associated guilt with the operation of the superego (Freud, 1930). However, Faynberg’s guilt does not arise merely from moral prohibition; it reflects heightened empathy.

Viktor Frankl viewed human beings as seekers of meaning (Frankl, 1946). Feelings of guilt can signal moral awakening. The lyrical subject’s inability to explain his guilt rationally suggests a deep moral sensitivity beyond conscious reasoning.

Marianne Hirsch’s theory of postmemory describes how historical trauma is transmitted across generations (Hirsch, 2012). The line about the father’s destruction resonates with this intergenerational memory. The subject experiences ancestral suffering as part of his own inner life.

The final paradox — “I am innocent — yet guilty for the whole world” — expresses psychological dualism. On the level of rational consciousness, innocence remains intact; on the level of conscience, global responsibility persists. This tension produces internal drama, yet it is not destructive. Rather, it signifies moral maturity.

Cosmic Scale and Apocalyptic Imagery

The image “From the depths of hell, bottomless volcanoes erupted” expands the

scope to cosmic proportions. Guilt transcends historical and political contexts, reaching apocalyptic dimensions. In the shadow of nuclear threat and environmental collapse in the twentieth century, such imagery reflects collective anxiety.

Cosmic guilt implies that humanity bears responsibility not only before society but before existence itself. This idea stands at the intersection of existential philosophy and religious metaphysics.

CONCLUSION

“I Am Guilty” is a complex philosophical text that poetically articulates ontological and metaphysical guilt. The poem resonates with existentialism (Sartre), the theory of metaphysical guilt (Jaspers), the philosophy of technology (Heidegger), political responsibility (Arendt), theological thought (Augustine), and psychoanalytic and existential psychology (Freud, Frankl, Hirsch).

On the philosophical level, guilt expresses humanity’s inseparable bond with being. On the psychological level, it reveals heightened empathy and moral sensitivity. The lyrical subject acknowledges individual innocence yet refuses to deny collective responsibility. For this reason, the poem may be interpreted as a poetic manifesto of global accountability in modern literature.

References:

1. Arendt, H. (1963). *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. Viking Press.
2. Augustine. (1991). *Confessiones (Confessions)*. Translated by Henry Chadwick. Oxford University Press.
3. Frankl, V. E. (2006). *Man’s Search for Meaning*. Beacon Press. (Original work published 1946)
4. Freud, S. (1961). *Civilization and Its Discontents*. Translated by James Strachey. W. W. Norton & Company. (Original work published 1930)
5. Glantz, M. H. (1999). *Sustainable Development and the Aral Sea Basin*. Cambridge University Press.
6. Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and Time*. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. Harper & Row. (Original work published 1927)
7. Heidegger, M. (1977). *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*. Harper & Row. (Original work published 1954)
7. Hirsch, M. (2012). *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust*. Columbia University Press.
8. Jaspers, K. (2000). *The Question of German Guilt*. Translated by E. B. Ashton. Fordham University Press. (Original work published 1947)
9. Naess, A. (1973). “The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement.” *Inquiry*, 16(1–4), 95–100.
10. Sartre, J.-P. (2007). *Being and Nothingness*. Translated by Hazel E. Barnes. Routledge. (Original work published 1943)
11. Faynberg, A. (n.d.). *I Am Guilty* (poem).