

PHILOSOPHICAL REASON MEDIATING IN THE CONTEXTS OF THE RECURRENCE OF SOCIO-CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

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Abstract: *In researching the knowledge and practice of human subjects, which are part of a historical path, we will note some limitations of classical atomistic methodologies, whether rationalist or empiricist. Such methodologies blur – by focusing on the relationship between the particular and the general – a more fruitful path, namely, aiming at the concrete totality, focusing on individuals, proceeding from part to whole and reciprocally. At the same time, an excessive cognitive optimism masks the impossibility, for man, to reach an absolutely valid knowledge of the concrete, as a result of the ontological situation of the subject: respectively, of the fact that the human individual is himself part of everything, which determines the meaning of particular human events and deeds.*

Keywords: *Knowledge, Socio-Cultural Differences, Established Human Reality, Morality, Fate*

In a world of Heraclitus, of rapid change, aiming at all relations between individuals and between human communities, the search, especially through philosophy, as well as through religious reflection, for mediating bridges and structuring meanings and ideals for the variety of human aspirations and projects it appears as a pressing commandment of the times in which we live. In terms of spiritual-discursive projection, M. Foucault highlighted – in a related perspective – how “under an apparent veneration of discourse... lies, in our civilization, the fear of a great proliferation of discourse; an anguish towards everything that can be outlined here as violent, as dangerous, as disorder”. (*L'ordre du discours*, Gallimard, Paris, 1971, p. 52)

In researching the knowledge and practice of human subjects, which are part of a historical path, we will note some limitations of classical atomistic methodologies, whether rationalist or empiricist. Such methodologies blur – by focusing on the relationship between the particular and the

general – a more fruitful path, namely, aiming at the concrete totality, focusing on individuals, proceeding from part to whole and reciprocally. At the same time, an excessive cognitive optimism masks the impossibility, for man, to reach an absolutely valid knowledge of the concrete, as a result of the ontological situation of the subject: respectively, of the fact that the human individual is himself part of everything, which determines the meaning of particular human events and deeds.

In the more precise knowledge of the concrete individual, of its meanings, it is not possible to establish prime principles, somewhat absolute evidence, because the object of the research itself is multiple and contradictory. That very object will make the attempts at description partially valid, limited, even invalid at the same time; any starting point or principle of thought will need, here, to be completed by its opposite. The great thinkers – including Pascal and Kant – did not reduce the contradictory, somewhat paradoxical, character of human life only to the realm of behaviour, morals, and faith (correlated with so-called practical philosophy). There is no autonomy in the authentic human life of the theoretical, respectively of the practical, contrary to some classical rationalist or empiricist postulates. The attempt to understand the individual man or another established human reality, on a purely theoretical level, will therefore appear to be true and false at the same time. As L. Goldman notes, it will be true “insofar as it finds certain actual relationships between data, but also false, insofar as it necessarily separates the objective aspect of these facts from the all-encompassing action, from their becoming, and their trends, and of values, respectively” (*Le Dieu caché*, Gallimard, Paris, 1959, p. 279). In order to aim at the concrete totality of the human world, we need a synthesis of the theoretical and the practical, in the absence of which we move away from the truth and the meanings of depth. Pascal remarked, in the same sense, that “we have neither truth nor good, except in part and mixed with evil and false” (*Pensées*, fragment 385, in the Brunschwig edition). And M. Foucault, in *Hermeneutics of the subject* (Polirom, Iași, 2004, p.299) considers that the human subject, through exercises of spirituality, must gradually transform its way of being, in order to have access to the truth.

Unlike Descartes, for whom it was enough for the subject to be what he is, in order to have (through knowledge) access to the truth, Foucault emphasizes “self-concern” and will postulate the need not only for knowledge-based information, especially external to oneself (*savoir de connaissance*), but also for knowledge based on spirituality (*savoir de spiritualité*). Leveraging the ideas of the Stoics, Foucault correlates the

logos with the ethos, through the vision developed in the last part of his life. Overcoming atomistic philosophical-epistemological programs, whether rationalist or empiricist, by focusing on complex part-whole relationships, will also mean a change in the overall image of man. In addition to the two generally accepted orders, that of the sensible and that of the intelligible, corresponding to the two human faculties (sensibility and intellect), modern philosophical thought has introduced a third; the latter assures man the possibility and reality of the synthesis of opposites, in a broad sense. More narrowly, it also ensures the synthesis of the two previously admitted faculties: sensitivity and intellect. This third faculty, called by Pascal heart or charity, and by Kant and Hegel, reason, brings together, from the perspective of competence related to individual performance, the theoretical and the practical.

In many ways, it intersects with what Foucault calls spirituality-based knowledge. A central function of that reason is the design and realization of a synthesis of opposites, a synthesis that gives meaning to both individual human life and creation, and to broader historical processes. In the new perspective, there can be no pure intellectual truth, since any true knowledge inevitably presupposes the diversity of behavioural, extra-conceptual actions; at the same time, in man, active accommodation with the external world is not only realized outside consciousness, but also in and through it.

Returning to the analysis of the complexity and rapidity of socio-cultural changes in today's world, it is necessary to call for a mediating philosophical vision, within that complexity, to guide, even implicitly, individuals in the turbulent landscape of their kaleidoscopic life. The different visions of the world: Platonism, classical rationalism, empiricism, pragmatism, the dialectical vision tending to synthesis, are established not as empirical realities, but as great conceptualizations, which guide us, among others, in the study and understanding of genius thinkers or artists. The great literary and – more broadly – artistic works were elaborated as expressions of broader visions of the world, thus proving the persistent strength and combustion of these visions. Such a view of the world – which is more of a phenomenon of collective consciousness involving difficult gestation – rises to a maximum of conceptual and sensitive clarity, precisely in the spirit of genius thinkers and artists.

The fact that philosophies or literary-artistic creations are possible, which retain their value beyond the place and time where they were born (ancient Greek tragedy, Plato's dialogues, the work of Dante or Shakespeare, etc.), is explained precisely by the fact that they express,

inevitably, the historical situation, transposed on the plane of the great fundamental problems, which man's relations with other people or with the universe pose; and the number of coherent human answers to this set of problems, being limited, by the very structure of the human person, each of these great coherent answers can be correlated with several historical situations, some even opposite. (See L. Goldman, *cited work*, pp. 30-31) It can be considered that the elaboration of a typology of world visions is a main task of the historian of philosophy (artistically, of the art historian), which would correlate with the philosophical anthropology; that task would be similar to the elaboration of the great systems of physical and cosmological theories, being the crowning of a series of partial studies, which, in turn, the respective typology will shed light on and specify.

Referring to the current state of history, as a discipline and to its discourse, M. Foucault will emphasize the event and the series of events. He will argue that, for postmodern historians, the fundamental notions he works with are no longer those of consciousness (correlated with freedom) and continuity (correlated with the idea of causality), but precisely those of *event* and *series of events*. The latter will, of course, be correlated with the ideas of *chance*, *risk*, *discontinuity*, *transformation through the opposition of opposites*. Without being properties of material bodies, events consist in the relation, coexistence, cutting, accumulation, selection of material elements; such a philosophy of events would advance in a somewhat paradoxical direction, namely that of a type of materialism of the incorporeal (see Foucault, *L'ordre du discours*, p. 60). Thus, the discourse of many historians of the more recent period no longer seeks to understand events through a game of causes and effects, in an informal unity, of a great becoming, vaguely homogeneous or clearly hierarchical; through their cognitive-discursive approach they would establish series of events, various series, often divergent, but also intersected; which allows to circumscribe the location of the event, the limits of its variations, its conditions of occurrence.

For example, the history of science will make, instead of a superficial chronicle of discoveries or descriptions of external influences on (innovative) scientific ideas, a serial reconstruction, as a "coherent and transformable set of theoretical models and conceptual tools." (*Ibidem*, p. 74) There is, to a large extent, an analogy here with the vision of Th. Kuhn on the emergence of research paradigms and their irreversible change.

Extending the approach from science and its history to culture in the broadest sense (as an objectified spirit), cultural anthropology research has shown that, since human cultures are highly context-dependent systems, it

is almost impossible to treat a culture appropriately only from within, or only from the outside, without reference to another culture. In this sense, human subjects with a background in two or more cultures (including multilingualism) are favoured in their investigations of various cultural events and situations.

In a study of *Rationality and Cultural Difference*, R. Rorty raises some controversial axiological and philosophical issues. Thus, he asks himself, According to what criteria do we prioritize different cultures and choose one or the other, as being superior? Is the dependence on context, for the subjects who ask such questions, surmountable, in the sense of a high standard of objectivity? Are there more effective ways to do this, philosophically and scientifically, artistically or religiously? In order to obtain the most accurate answers possible, Rorty will propose a hierarchy of culture, as well as of human rationality, on three levels of construction and interaction. Type 1 culture is aimed at a set of shared habits of action that allow members of a community (e.g., a village, a Buddhist monastery, or a company with production or sales objectives, etc.) to get along well with each other and with the environment. Type 2 culture would mean high culture, which is acquired and developed through systematic education; it involves the ability to convey abstract ideas, to cultivate scientific, artistic, philosophical values, and functions as a characteristic of members of society, possessing a higher degree of wealth and freedom of assertion. Type 3 culture would aim at the field of values and ideals centred on overcoming the subhuman, of the oppressive baseness and irrationality, through universal-human aspirations, such as freedom, tolerance, and justice. Partially covering types 1 and 2, type 3 will synthesize a bunch of values, especially moral-practical ones, that all people with a certain education are able to recognize, respect and promote.

A theoretical-practical tension in terms of the dynamics of types of culture could be formulated as follows: any entity that needs a long time to develop and consolidate (as is the case of type 1 culture, but also of a species of living beings) deserves to be cultivated and preserved; on the other hand, there is the practical need to diminish, even to remove, certain (sub)types of cultures, such as that of the big mafia clans or of some sects that propagate the extermination of that sect and even of other people. In even more complex situations, such as the relationship between the science-and-technology culture of the West and that of the Orient, focused mainly on religions, the criteria of ranking and choice are problematic and often contested. The secular humanism of the modern West has been blamed for promoting a non-self-critical culture, which, while proud of its

well-being and tolerance, is committed to destroying many opportunities for cultural difference. Philosophical-ethical analyzes can bring clarifications in addressing and diminishing such cultural issues and conflicts. To the question: which of the activities of type 2 culture are in the best position to mediate between type 1 cultures, so as to promote type 3 culture, involving freedom and tolerance, while avoiding violent clashes, Rorty proposed the following direction, for an appropriate answer. It is about the special contribution of some great creators – especially novelists – who have lived in their own lives, tensions between different languages and cultures.

During their own creation and their own work, they had to find concrete ways – not just theoretical ones – to combine, for example, the culture of the modern West with one or more non-Western cultures. Such creators include Salman Rushdi, Ismail Kadare, Mircea Eliade, Mario Vargas Llosa and, of course, many others. In this way, we can find foundations for intercultural mediation and creative constructions of the future. In the open direction of such great creators, as an alternative to sterile conflicts and domination, the same Rorty puts his imagination to work to discover innovative ways forward. “I suspect that the real work of a global multicultural quasi-utopia will be done by people who, in the next few centuries, will unravel each type 1 culture into a multitude of delicate components, and then weave these yarns, along with equally delicate yarns, from other crops; thus promoting the kind of diversity in unity, characteristic of high values. The resulting tapestry will be, with good luck (including, we believe, the avoidance of war and the irreversible degradation of the environment and the human being), something we can hardly imagine now.” (*Truth and progress, Philosophical Essays III*, Polirom Publishing House, Iași, 2005, p.49)

Possible creative solutions to the problem of complex, constructive relations between the various national cultures, in the age of globalization, are also offered by some works of P. Ricoeur. Starting from the translations from one language of one culture to that of another, Ricoeur proposes as a model of the close interference between cultures precisely the paradigm of translation; which is all the more significant as we lack models of integration that take into account both the cultural identity of Europe and the otherness of the participating national cultures. At the basis of the translation paradigm is the possibility of translating, postulated as a somewhat a priori condition of communication; namely, in the form of the principle of universal translatability. Then, at a practical-empirical level, the paradigm presupposes the presence of bilingual translators, as mediators, which also implies

ensuring the assimilation of at least two living languages, through the education system, especially. From a spiritual point of view itself, the translation paradigm demands “the extension of the spirit of translation, to the relations between the cultures themselves, respectively to the contents of meaning, conveyed by translation. This requires translators from culture to culture (cultural bilinguals), able to accompany this operation of universal mental transfer of the other culture, in full respect of the customs, basic beliefs, major beliefs, in short, all its sense landmarks” (*About translation*, Polirom Publishing House, Iași, 2005, p. 49). In other words, “to truly live with the other, so that you can then guide him to yourself, through a qualified approach of linguistic hospitality” (*Idem*).

The tasks of a good translator – as a mediator – do not consist, according to Ricoeur, in the ascent from word to phrase, to text, then to the whole of a culture, but in a reverse approach; impregnated with vast readings of the spirituality of a culture, the translator descends to the text, to the phrase and to the word (see *ibidem*, p. 115).

Ricoeur’s application of the translation paradigm addresses religious conflicts. The French thinker will also support, in the direction of intercultural rapprochement, especially in Europe, the use in conflict resolution, along with the model of translation, another model, called forgiveness. And the application of this model is based on the specifics of faith; the latter does not refer to privileged, isolated sentences, nor even a doctrinal body (as a chain of sentences), but to the so-called *packages of meaning*. For example, a convinced Catholic will freely adhere to such a package of meaning, which includes, among other things: a tradition identified by a valuable reputation, an authority, a wide spread, and a reputedly beneficial influence.

In order to overcome the conflicts between denominations (for example: Catholicism – Orthodoxy), according to the mentioned models, it is necessary to carry out two hermeneutic tasks. The first requires us to be able to understand in a nuanced way how a certain point of the conflict has been reached. And the second will ask us to move beyond the point of conflict, putting into practice the two complementary paradigms (models): translation and forgiveness. Therefore, the rules governing the transfer of meaning from one linguistic ensemble to another will therefore apply to those distinct *packages of meaning*, aiming at opposable denominations. The translation model offers not only rules and techniques, but also a spirit of translation, which consists in the meeting of two intentional manifestations: that of moving in the universe of meaning of the foreign language (or confession) and that of appropriately receiving the other’s speech, in the

universe of meaning of the host language (respectively of the opposable confession).

In order to avoid, at least in part, the danger of “betrayal”, translation (especially in the absence of a standard canonical text, which harmonizes the foreign text with its translation, in our language) requires an ever-resumed work of retranslation, as and multiple interpretive exercises, in which “the hospitality of language” is realized. We will inevitably encounter some inconsistencies of residual meanings, due to the finite comprehension of the linguistic-cultural heritage. At this level of inconsistencies, Ricoeur proposes to complete the translation model by appealing to the forgiveness model. This encouraging model, addressed, for example, to denominational reading and interpreting communities, will proclaim, according to Ricoeur, that: “there is more meaning than you think in the very things you say with conviction; and the surplus of meaning can be said elsewhere, by others rather than by yourself” (*Ibidem*, p. 109).

Translation – considered a paradigm of the development of cultures – is essentially a mediation between the plurality of cultures, on the one hand, and the characteristic of *rational unity of humanity*, on the other. Without such mediation, we would live exclusively in a world that would embody the Tower of Babel, a world dominated only by global dispersal and confusion. That is why, as Ricoeur will point out, translation in the general sense is “a paradigm for all exchanges; not only from language to language, but also from culture to culture, thus facilitating the opening to *concrete universals*, not to an abstract universal, detached from history ” (*Ibidem*, p. 130).