

Nr. 30/2023

# HERMENEIA

Journal of Hermeneutics, Art Theory and Criticism

Topic: Research Articles

Editura Fundației Academice AXIS  
IAȘI, 2023

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CLARIVATE ANALYTICS (Emerging Sources Citation Index)  
ERIH PLUS (open access)  
EBSCO (institutional access required)  
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**ISSN print: 1453-9047**

**ISSN online: 2069-8291**

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Petru BEJAN \*

## Ștefan Afloroaei and a different way of doing philosophy

**Abstract:** Although distributed in the contents of several books, some published after 1990, others recently, the philosophical reasons addressed by Professor Ștefan Afloroaei have – without distinction – constancy, coherence, and continuity. In front of the huge doxographic repertoire on display, the critical reader or possible exegete could be dismayed; the nature of the issue, the flexibility of the argumentation, the density and diversity of information, the freshness of his language arouse interest and invite an in-depth reading. In fact, the author activates another way of doing philosophy, both in terms of speculative content and the form in which he puts on his ideas. We find in his books a rare pleasure of "deconstructions" and revisions. The "commonplaces", the ideas, and theories inertially accepted, the theses apparently unchallenged are especially targeted.

**Keywords:** hermeneutic philosophy, metaphysics, deconstruction, edification, negative reason, specificity, meaning of life, sense of beauty.

1. *Speculative deconstructions and re-significations.* Ștefan Afloroaei deliberately distanced himself from the canonical, school philosophy, allegedly "scientific", rigorous, and sententious. The "spirit" of philosophy has been corrupted over time by its own inadequacies and excesses, including the loud display of the soteriological claim that "philosophy can save the world." "By its very nature, philosophy means a lack of measurement, it means thinking against the usual way of thinking, simply going against the grain. Philosophy, when it really does not divest itself entirely of what it means, pushes a certain matter to one of its limits. It is always tested by abuse and violence" (Afloroaei 1997, 27).

In a chapter dedicated to the "situation of philosophy today", the author reinforces this idea: "Philosophy is either radical or it is not at all" (Afloroaei 1997, 157). The "critical" role of philosophy is decisive; it observes the world's precarities and vulnerabilities, rhizomatically multiplying her inquiries without hoping to achieve sharp and definitive resolutions. If it additionally proposes ways of personal "edification" or becomes a "way of life", philosophy proves to be "practical", useful, offering formulas for balance or even existential "fulfilment".

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2. *The temptation of the limit and the negative.* In Ștefan Afloroaei's writings, you find a predilection to approach unconventional subjects, to explore aporetic paths or, with a scent of paradox, to grope rather those "dead ends" of thinking located in the regime of the negative (negative transcendence, non-being, negative reason, non-rational rationality, the upside-down world, nothingness, evil, madness, the devil, the evil genius, the absurd, failure, nonsense, the abyss...), as he will do in *Ipostaze ale rațiunii negative* (1991). Many of the reasons approached in this book explore the limits of reason, the places where it encounters insurmountable epistemic obstacles. The demand for a differently oriented look, which invigorates philosophical reflection, is explicitly formulated, either in short discursive samples. "We feel the need to look at things and the world differently... We seek to a certain extent to think differently, to follow a different interpretation in facing the other"(Afloroaei, 1999, 17), or even in book titles (Afloroaei, 2013).

*Întâmplare și destin*, the book published in 1993, vividly evokes, in the footsteps of Hegel, the "tremendous power of the negative", from which it emerges that philosophy has systematically ignored the nocturnal, contradictory, and dilemmatic side of being (Afloroaei 1993, 12). Negativity functions either as destruction or as necessary subversion within existence, as a principle of alterity and difference, as a dissolution of time, "determining the existent in its very being" (Afloroaei 1994, 15). Although with an important weight in the economy of what they are, the postures of *No* and negation have rarely received the attention and consideration they deserve. In this generous thematic circumscription, metaphysics, hermeneutics, phenomenology will find ample opportunities for practice.

3. *Philosophy as a "fable"*. The style practiced by Ștefan Afloroaei is narrative or literary. Such an option seems supported by at least two references: Descartes and Nietzsche. Descartes conceives his *Discourse* as a "history" or a "fable", therefore, things are described in the most pleasant way (Afloroaei 1991, 29sq.). "Fable" is narration, construction of an epic style; actually, it converts abstract concepts into familiar, immediately accessible images and words. In this way, a personalized stylistic regime is outlined, rather circumscribed to the philosophical essay, in which the writing distances itself from the sobriety and austerity of the rigorous treatise. Descartes had resorted to "image-ideas", to metaphors that also facilitate argumentation and understanding. The body, for example, is described as a machine or a watch whose parts are perfectly assembled and joined; soul and body are in the same relation as "shipman to ship."

In turn, Nietzsche describes the history of philosophy as a "speculative anecdote". His writings depict philosophy as "epic or prose with initiations and intrigues, temptations and duels, paths through the forest, events and

characters (Idea, Reason, Ego, Will...). It is a formula that has, as we realize, a plastic, visual side, a philosophy of something that can ultimately be seen and told... In other words, this philosophy remakes, for the use of the many, the episode of incarnation, in philosophical variant" (Afloroaei 1994, 28). The attachment of the Iasian philosopher to Nietzsche is visible not necessarily in terms of style or discursive construction, but especially in terms of his working perspective or courageous manner of deconstructing "ready-made" ideas and deep-rooted prejudices.

In Ștefan Afloroaei's writings, the themes and motifs addressed are distributed rhizomatically; his writings have the allure of a friendly labyrinth where the pleasure of "losing" or wandering seems to be the only justification. In the expository logics of the philosopher, the recourse to images and imagination returns frequently, leaving the impression that ideas are "seen", are "shown" in their dynamics to the attentive viewer. The subjectivity of one who perceives things with sensitivity and discernment is essential. "Fable" tells the story of the world, of man and of the self. The world is like a "stage", a "theatre" – hence the "dramatic" or "dramaturgical" meaning of the happenings in the spirit world, populated with sets, actors, directors, characters, roles, staging, lines, exchanges of "defeated" and subtly decoded looks.

Most of the time, the author brings to attention the figure of the "other", the spectator or viewer, "the third", indispensable in the construction of the argument. Who is this? *Another one* apparently coming "from outside" and perceived as "stranger", the one who voluntarily insinuates himself into the "game" of ideas, justifying and tensioning the drama (Afloroaei 1991, 92). The stranger must not always be sought too far. Rather, the author uses a discursive strategy of Socratic-Platonic inspiration, through which the truth is obtained either from the exchange of lines between the characters, or through confessional availability or self-dialogue. "Basically, it is necessary to make room for the stranger in our perception and judgement, at least as much as we can. Man has this fantastic possibility of doubling himself, he can see himself both as judge and defendant, self-possessed and no less a stranger to himself... If we have the power to judge ourselves as if we were precisely strangers to ourselves, we would get a different picture of what we really are" (Afloroaei 1994, 8).

Universal knowledge and self-knowledge imply and condition each other. "Circularity" is also valid when we seek to understand worlds, cultures and mentalities different from those we are used to: "If we were not able to perceive – and, at the same time, take into account – what is stranger to us, another way of thinking or another historical world than the one we live in, then we would not understand what is happening to us" (Afloroaei 2001, 126). In such a speculative perspective, the Iasian

philosopher succeeds in balancing, inspiredly, the concept and the metaphor, the idea and the image, giving the speech a personal, distinctive imprint.

4. *Plasticity and "visibility" of ideas.* One of the distinctive notes of the writing practiced by Ștefan Afloroaei is the inspired graft between concept and image. The narrative plan is not separated from the visual one. The author frequently resorts to examples, parables, symbols, to lead the reader into an area of familiar representations. The role of the image is to simplify and clarify things. "When you look at an image, a certain understanding is at work from the very beginning. In a way it is prior, but this does not mean that the way of seeing and what you see are self-evident... It is just that the human mind knows how to endlessly complicate some states of affairs" (Afloroaei 2013, 25). Mental images, visual projections, representations, even "visions" occur frequently in the thinking dynamics, often facilitating understanding. "In order to be accepted or rejected, the idea of meaning must first be 'seen', intuitively captured, no matter how difficult this sometimes appears. Is it not precisely that such images make the idea more intelligible?" (Afloroaei 2021, 78).

In a study entitled *Idei și imagini speculative* (Afloroaei 2008, 175), the author believes that "at bottom, the questions or ideas we call metaphysical are never abstract. Their language is not purely conceptual... Thinking does not only operate with concepts, since behind them or where they prove difficult the most unexpected images and representations intervene... And some images and representations thus end up unexpectedly acquiring an exceptional speculative character" (Afloroaei 2008, 252). For example Hegel, in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, spoke of the "great carpet of universal history" spread before us, in which ideas are the "warp" and human passions the "weft", referring to universal history as discourse ("texture" of history), but also to the history of discourse as such, in which "the occultation and decryption of the writing appear as operations that cannot be separated" (Afloroaei 1991, 228).

The same idea is nuanced in *Despre simțul vieții*, where he believes that "images remain indispensable to the human mind, both for their intuitive, sensitive character and for their unusual 'dynamic' and inventiveness. Their play is deeply ambiguous, they simultaneously manage to clarify and obscure, to reveal and conceal, to liberate and subjugate" (Afloroaei 2021, 73). Life, for example, can be "viewed" – metaphorically speaking – as a writing, path, book, journey, labyrinth... An entire tradition, from Plato onwards, seeks to "visualize" and "dramatize" ideas, "humanizing" the philosophical discourse, transforming it most of the time into something intelligible, attractive, and pleasant.

5. *Excesses of philosophy*. Many of Ștefan Afloroaei's writings explore the possibility of "something new" around philosophical speculation. Formulated by Constantin Noica in his youth writings, this demand is assumed with caution, especially aiming at avoiding explanatory schemes and templates that parasitize or sabotage free thinking, the actual "life" of ideas, but also, possibly, finding alternative routes to those used in excess. Hence the constant preoccupation with interpreting and understanding the meaning of events that we know or experience directly.

After the end of the Second World War, the ideological enslavement of philosophy in many Eastern European countries had monstrous effects; among other things, its instrumentalization in directions that diverted attention from the old, original meanings, but also from the reasons that justified its presence or usefulness in public discourse. Philosophical education suffered, as did the correct or reasonable perception of speculative effort, often denounced as "gratuitous" or "suspicious". With the ushering in of a new era of democracy and freedom, moderate optimism has replaced both the skepticism and fatalism of many about the chances of renewal.

For philosophers, the 1990s created an opportunity to resettle the discipline of free thought and critical exercise in its natural bedrock. The recovery of the true meanings of the philosophical discourse, hidden for several decades by ideological attrition, was considered a priority. In a study entitled *Cenzura în spațiul filosofiei*, Ștefan Afloroaei considers Marxism as "the first form of ideology in our modern history that banned any free form of philosophy" (Afloroaei 2002, 264). The single, totalitarian interpretation, imposed on others under the pressure of force, constitutes the model of censorship as *Diktat*. Sometimes, paradoxically, the censorship of philosophy was done "with the help of philosophy itself". We are talking about the philosophy enslaved, obedient and complicit with the various political regimes, the "philosophy that enters the service of power". The precarious status given to philosophy among the forms of culture demanded a different positioning. Hence the approaches to investigate the new possibilities.

What separates philosophy from its own nature and inherent ends? The author first identifies and denounces the main "excesses of philosophy". Among these, the assumption of a too broad perspective, which involves doing general philosophy ("To be a professor of philosophy, not an ordinary disillusioned teacher, but one who embodies the scholastic technique of this discipline, with a scholarly air and with academic authority, an institute-professor, a living, speaking textbook, to be a professor of philosophy and not to do general philosophy seems to many of us as a real contradiction in terms") (Afloroaei 1997, 28). On the other hand, the



orientation of philosophy towards soteriological ends, its transformation into an affected, pathetic discourse, proposing vague solutions of salvation or deliverance, seems excessive ("Many of those who speak of the wisdom of philosophy and its power to elevate they are only resuming a common place, old since forever, tedious and boring, whose Greek meaning, in the pre-Socratic case, has become for us timeless and superfluous") (Afloroaei 1997, 29). Such an intention is imposed where "the concept is weak enough", giving way to exalted or triumphalist perceptions and interpretations. Such misappropriations and interpretations have actually altered and made philosophy vulnerable.

6. *Philosophy as a way of life*. Is there a form of philosophy that the Iasian professor would consider closer to his expectations, or that he privileges it in an explicit way? A possible answer can be found in his study *Condiția discipolatului în filosofie*. Here, Ștefan Afloroaei notes that certain historical intervals, such as the Hellenistic centuries, as well as those of patristic thinking, then the romantic interval and the one in which a more extensive *Lebensphilosophie* is practiced, can be invoked in favor of a "practical" way of doing philosophy. It would be the periods when it seeks to build, to privilege those experiences that bring an increase in self-understanding, but also of the world of which man is a part. "Through its fundamental intentionality, philosophy tries to initiate into a certain way of life. Doing philosophy is equated, in certain eras, to engaging in a paideic or even initiatory scenario. It is when philosophy is recognized as a form of life that it finds a secure embodiment, a living, personal body: the struggle for an idea is in many ways like the struggle for existence" (Afloroaei 1997, 142).

But there are several ways of doing philosophy. Sometimes history and geography determine distinct formulas for practicing philosophical speculation. The differences can be seen, for example, at the level of some cultural spaces, where particularities are determined by certain prior data, suppositions and prejudices crystallized in the form of distinct traditions and mentalities. For the Western way of philosophizing, three names seem "emblematic": "Three names seem to me emblematic of the Western way of doing philosophy: Descartes, Kant, Husserl. With each of them, philosophy was constantly related to the sciences, especially to the mathematicians... Or the ideal proposed by these sciences is what was called in Latin *mathesis universalis*. Later, through Leibniz and Wolf, it determines itself as a *scientia universalis*" (Afloroaei 1997, 16). Hence a predisposition of Western philosophy for logics and formalism, supported by a cult of method and rigorously applied discipline, a model that is not evident in Eastern Europe either.

7. *Identity and Differences.* The research of alterity and difference is also possible at the level of "paradigms" configured with certain evidence. Ștefan Afloroaei considered as absolutely justified research on analyzing the possibility of identifying a "specificity" of philosophy in Eastern Europe and possibly on describing its distinctive "signs" in the economy of a venerable tradition, inaugurated by the Greeks, continued in Byzantium, and spread in other directions. The Iasian philosopher seeks to demonstrate the existence of an "Eastern" way of doing philosophy. Considered a necessary "convention", the term as such is used with some ambiguity. From the start, it excludes a strictly regional perception, which would equate it to what we call an Oriental or Balkan space. On the other hand, it does not seem to have a strictly geographical circumscription, as the East of Europe is a spatial reality of wider extension, completely inhomogeneous from a political, linguistic, mental, cultural, and religious point of view. "The East indicates a border zone of European man, that interworld that has always moved to one side or another" (Afloroaei 1997, 10). In fact, the Eastern space would be one of transition, but coming with other historical and mental data, more familiar to the Orthodox world. "In this space, Greek culture preserved a certain symbolic prevalence, later in its Byzantine version. Here, the religious experience of man is dominated by patristic thinking and the direct, mystical experience of the fact of creation... The man of this space mainly cultivates another kind of philosophical experience..." (Afloroaei 1997, 17).

Here, since the beginning of the first Christian millennium (the XI<sup>th</sup>-XIII<sup>th</sup> centuries), authors such as Michael Psellos, John Italus, Soterichos Panteugenos, Nichifor Blemmydes, then Gregory Palamas, Nicholas Kabasilas, Teofil Coridaleu, Meletius of Arta, Nicodemus the Hagiorite, etc. would have been noted. Here, the XVIII<sup>th</sup> century imposed illustrious figures of thinkers, such as Dimitrie Cantemir, Samuil Micu, Eufrosin Poteca, Ion Heliade Rădulescu, who contributed to the formation of a distinct profile of local culture.

Following closely the logics of the arguments, we might think that Ștefan Afloroaei finds himself or sympathizes with what he considers to be "space" and "Eastern spirit". Precisely in this part of the world, "the relationship of philosophy with the research of history and with the situation of man as such is seriously privileged", research designed and delimited a little differently than in the Western space, without that rigor capable of bringing it into analogy with the natural sciences. Here, philosophy is no longer understood as a technique or as a method, but rather as a reflection on the self-edification of man. Its speech relies on the moral or anagogical meaning of the statement, on its edifying meaning. The paradigm of thought to which philosophy seeks access is no longer a deductive or analytical-

experimental one, but a comprehensive one. Not by chance, a significant place will be claimed here by *meditation* as such or, with an approximate term, free reflection... like the meditation practiced by the Stoics... It has a preliminary, preparatory character, and it is exactly in this sense that we think it should be seen as a distinct philosophical exercise. Everything happens as if late Stoicism, defeated in its competition with Christian theology and metaphysics of Aristotelian inspiration, will take its revenge through the meditation of some Eastern European authors. We might think that within the Eastern space practical philosophy dominates, and not the theoretical one... *But things are not like that at all... (sine nomine P.B.)* (Afloroaei 1997, 20).

If we were to schematize and simplify things, it could be said that in the West, philosophy appears as a "technique" of the concept, and in the East as "meditation", as *praeparatio*, encouraging a passionate discourse, associated with an equally personal therapeutic and human history. But this delimitation, the author believes, *turns out to be false from one point on (sine nomine P.B.)*: "to the extent that there are differences, they do not possess any kind of purity, since they do not separate the two ways of doing philosophy. But they are found, although uneven, in both areas of spirituality" (Afloroaei 1997, 21). "The metaphysics of this European space has never moved away... from those data regarding the historical situation of man. It thematized... the fact of the fall and of self-edification, of 'reconciliation with the world' and equally of the personal way of presence. With this new explanation, Eastern metaphysics unexpectedly comes much closer to the discourse of practical philosophy and to that of theology... Like the religious experience, the metaphysical one has a soteriological intention" (Afloroaei 1997, 21). The author activates a hermeneutics of prudence, deliberately avoiding positioning at one extreme or another. Regarding the comparative approach assumed, he speaks not about the faults of differences that irreconcilably separate two worlds or two types of cultural experiences, but about "two faces of the same experience of thinking, unceasing characteristic of the European man" (Afloroaei 1997, 20).

We can also identify "brands of Eastern thinking" in the native culture. Authors concerned with noticing the characteristic and defining elements of this space are analyzed (Blaga, Ion Petrovici, Mircea Vulcănescu, Nae Ionescu, Băncilă, Noica, Mircea Eliade, Al-George, Culiănu), attached (unevenly, it is true) to a "hermeneutics of symbolic forms", interested, among others, in the problem of the Romanian "specificity".

8. *Hermeneutic alternatives.* In several places, Ștefan Afloroaei talks about the hermeneutic stake of philosophy: "Philosophy has been and is a form of comprehension, understanding", "philosophy means comprehensive thinking, understanding of a phenomenon or an idea" (Afloroaei 1997, 204-

205). The role of the interpreter is to re-signify prior data, to look for "alternatives" to already existing resolutions. "The word 'alternative'... is used when naming possible solutions to the cruel and treacherous oppositions of the time already passed (ideological, cultural alternative...). The idea of the alternative certainly means the occurrence of something completely different. Instead, this becomes possible because straight ahead the road itself forks – and distinct paths of historical life and self-understanding alike open up. These paths only together really lead further" (Afloroaei 1999, 15).

In another study, Ștefan Afloroaei talks about the "hermeneutic transformation of philosophy", but also about the non-methodological nature of hermeneutics. "From my point of view, hermeneutics is not definitively a method, a technique in a way common to historical, anthropological, or other investigations. I do not perceive it as a method... In no case can it be placed alongside the semiotic method or the structuralist one" (Afloroaei 1997, 207). Like H.-G. Gadamer, the one from *Truth and Method*, the Iasian philosopher adheres to a "philosophical" meaning of hermeneutics: "To distinguish between philosophy and hermeneutics seems to me absolutely useless or risky. Hermeneutic philosophy and philosophical hermeneutics announce, after all, the same thing" (Afloroaei 1997, 209).

Regarding the evolutionary trends of the discipline in question, Ștefan Afloroaei distinguishes the "hermeneutics of meaning", which would have dominated the modern world until Nietzsche or Dilthey, from a "hermeneutics of the prior", of the conditions of possibility for what applies to meaning or nonsense. Or, precisely, the latter seems to characterize the Western thinking of the century in which we find ourselves (Afloroaei 1997, 208). Regarding the type of interpretation that would suit the new realities, the author seems to lean towards the "anagogic" one – as it has a "therapeutic" dimension: actually, it is the interpretation that enriches, enhances, heals, edifies, adds something new...

When exactly is interpretation in general fully validated and eventually converted into understanding? What does it mean to understand something? In a study discussing the concept of "interpretation", the author insists on its "practical" orientation: "For interpretation tends to a point which we can call happy only when what we sincerely think can pass into action, when the meaning in our mind really means skill at something, the science of doing something, in the same way that the painter really understands only at the moment when he proves that he knows how to paint... Then probably happens what Pascal really wanted in humans; to speak justly about justice, humbly about humility, and beautifully about beauty" (Afloroaei 2001,151-152). The "Pascal frontier" or "extreme point

of comprehension", as the author calls it, marks the ideal place where interpretation and understanding merge, fitting perfectly into one's assumed competence or ability.

9. *Truth and Transfiguration in Art*. In *Fabula existențială*, Ștefan Afloroaei is concerned with "What is not seen" in a painting (Afloroaei 2018, 113sq.). The object of his interpretation will be *Van Gogh's Chair*, the work of van Gogh himself, in which the absence of the character "unsettles the gaze", highlighting at the same time "the loneliness that dominates that place". "Vincent's chair, empty and without a particular setup, shows itself to a gaze that feels its own loneliness" (Afloroaei 2018, 115). The author wonders if "we can speak of a truth specific to pictorial expression, possibly narrative and literary fiction, or to musical composition. If so, what would such truth consist of? (Afloroaei 2018, 122). Is van Gogh's painting a storehouse of truth? The conclusion of the Iasian philosopher is that the truth of a painting does not appear in a single form. The truth may even be the "meaning" of the painting – if and when it exists. The idea that truth means a single attitude, the strictly epistemic one, and that it is subject to verifiable criteria should be overcome, because it disregards other ways of knowledge, such as moral, religious, metaphysical, and artistic ones. The author suggests considering "distinct meanings of the truth": self-discovery or proof (in confession or in a decisive attempt), self-representation (assuming a *persona*, a role, in a sense close to the dramaturgical one), viable meaning (of a creation or symbol).

Regarding the optimal manner of receiving a painting, Ștefan Afloroaei is on the side of an "aesthetics of transfiguration", of those encouraged by Jean-Luc Marion (in the studies on the "saturated phenomenon"), by Jean-Jacques Wunenburger (in the analysis of the image with a religious imprint), and by Arthur Danto (in the description of the "transfigured banal"). The relationship between the work and the viewer is one of mutual affectation. "In front of a pictorial image you can ask yourself, for example, what power it reveals to the viewer, what testimony it bears through itself. But you might as well not ask yourself anything. Often it is probably enough to watch silently and intently. If indeed there is to be something to see, that thing will itself meet you in so far as the eye is prepared for what is in front of it... When an image leaves the possibility of seeing what in the first instance is not seen, when, for example, it makes possible the complete re-signification of a common place, then one can speak of its truth. We could say that, in front of it, a transfiguration of what is seen takes place" (Afloroaei 2018, 127).

In fact, the Iasian philosopher assumes a rather "romantic" perspective, valid in the economy of a classical "aesthetics of beauty", one that attributes inspiration, "genius" and premeditation to the artist, "aura" and power of

seduction – to the work, the ability to penetrate the "encoded" meanings on the surface of the painting – to the public. The problem of truth in painting also caught the attention of Jacques Derrida. In a reference writing (*La vérité en peinture*), he demonstrates that there is truth in a painting in several situations: when we invoke the veracity of the subject, characters, or events; when we consider the fidelity of the representation, the "proper meaning" of the reading, the authenticity of the work; but also, when the truth is represented in one's own portrait (allegorical representations of the truth). However, contemporary artistic practices refer to completely different realities. Conceptual art, for example, explicitly aims to illustrate ideas, while minimalist art insists on showing viewers "specific objects", real objects as they are, freed from any interpretive intention, any value, and any meaning. Therefore, the ideal or idealized frameworks that make the work a possible repository of truth, accessible to the attentive and sensitive viewer, disappear. The beautiful as such fades its stake, being rather attached to an outdated aesthetics, which must be overcome in favor of other targets (concept, message, participation, attitude). At this point, the aesthetics of art and traditional metaphysics can have a slight disagreement, however without obstructing the possibility of personal interpretations.

10. *Metaphysical meaning of beauty.* In the conditions of proliferation of many aesthetic theories that announce the "death of art" or the "twilight" of beauty, Ștefan Afloroaei grants a particular interest to determine a "metaphysical" meaning of beauty. The beauty of a thing immediately offers itself to the sensibility prepared thus to recognize it. The philosopher's arguments are supported by references to Plato, the one in the *Symposium* (if in front of a beautiful thing a man is unexpectedly amazed, feeling a real earthquake of his being, he will be more trembled in front of beauty itself), but also to Borges ("beauty is a physical sensation"). But there are experiences that can be considered "beautiful" (a calculation, a formula, a word, a gesture, a judgment), without necessarily involving a physical commitment or a synthetic perception. When exactly can we talk about a "metaphysical sense of beauty"?

Attraction, seduction, amazement, transfiguration seem to be the indispensable ingredients for perceiving something as beautiful. "If I were to speak of a metaphysical sense of beauty... I would seek it first as a sense of beauty – and by no means in the form of a notion with a claim to universality. I would have in mind the sense of something paradoxical, which defies common perception and appeals beyond itself. Therefore, the sense of what, although it shows itself sensibly, is intangible as such, although it allows itself to be seen, it cannot be contained within itself" (Afloroaei 2018, 144). The desire for beauty is antinomian itself; it means attraction, i.e. subjective mood, but also seduction, given by "the power of

something beautiful which, being desired, attracts to itself", opening at the same time to a "beyond", to "beauty itself" (Afloroaei 2018, 131). The conclusion, aesthetic and metaphysical alike? Beauty, therefore, can be perceived immediately, but it is also intangible.

For Ștefan Afloroaei, philosophy is the privileged place of the Good, the Truth and Beauty, both accessible through deep reading, interpretation and understanding. Is there a cutoff point of understanding? Taking exactly the author's words, "only who can do the thing for he truly stands understands the thing to which he consents. Only who can, in one way or another, realize the good truly understands the good. Only who makes room in his mind and life for the truth understands the truth itself" (Afloroaei 2001, 152). In the numerous books, studies, articles, conferences, during his decades of teaching career, in the occasions of public engagement, but also in everyday life, the philosopher confused himself with philosophy itself, assuming it both as profession, vocation, but also as lifestyle. Paraphrasing the previous quote, we could say that philosophy is understood only by the one who practices it and assumes it in an exemplary manner. Ștefan Afloroaei confirms the possibility of a *different* way of doing philosophy, imposing his own comprehensive "frontier" – deep, attractive, seductive –, open to all temptations of exploration, interpretation and, eventually, overcoming.

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Ayna ISABABAYEVA \*

## Routine as a problem of music performance and inspiration as its hermeneutical solution

**Abstract:** Music performance involves the relationship between the performer and the text, which takes on various forms and characters throughout the work. One of the acute problems of this relationship is emotional burnout when indifference to the work takes the place of initial enthusiasm. It is generally accepted that the leading cause of this condition is routine based on the principle of repetition. How to break out of the vicious circle of routine? The repetition becomes a coil to the next level only by turning this circle into a spiral. To do this, musicians use various techniques and methods, the principle of which is searching and finding new meanings in the work.

This article discusses the problem of the routine of musical work and its solutions offered by the performers. The concept of inspiration, which is the opposite of routine, and the concept of the new, as a hermeneutic key to inspiration, are also analyzed

**Keywords:** the hermeneutics of art, hermeneutics of music, philosophy of art.

*“the word **véος** implies that the world is always in process of creation...”*  
(Plato, Ion 411e)

### Introduction

“La routine – the death of music,” Toscanini shouted at rehearsals when it seemed that the orchestra musicians were not playing their parts with enough inspiration (Antek 2021, 8). Routine and, consequently, indifference to the piece being performed is one of the main problems for musicians. Although, routine acquires its most striking features in orchestras, it is also the problem of soloists, one of whose main tasks is to eradicate the manifestations of routine from the musical work. The paradox is that the performer’s work on a piece tends to turn into a routine in itself. Endless musical exercises, etudes, necessary repetitions of complex passages and fragments – all this work leads the performer’s musical consciousness away from the performance’s very purpose – creating an artistic image of the work.

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## **Routine**

Musicians understand routine in two ways – in a broad and a narrow sense. The first type of routine is not obligatory but a frequent result of the general understanding of music as a particular system or complex of systems: “Routine signifies the acquisition of a modicum of experience and artcraft, and their application to all cases which may occur; hence, there must be an astounding number of analogous cases. Now, I like to imagine a species of art-praxis wherein each case should be a new one, an exception! How helpless and impotent would the army of practical musicians stand before it!... One longs to exclaim, ‘Avoid routine! Let each beginning be, as had none been before! Know nothing, but rather think and feel!’” (Busoni 1911, 41-42). In this sense, any musical system, whether it is the universalization of understanding of music (for example, musical semantics, etc.) or the simplification of technical performance (systems for technical improvement), carries the danger of schematization, mechanization, and the use of templates, which ultimately fetters musical performance, in the words of Busoni, “within four walls” (ibid.) and hinders its development. A “system” is identified with the routine and is perceived by the performers as something dead, contrary to the very essence of creativity – the development: “... There is no one dogmatic system that should be followed throughout life. Everything is changeable, everything is mobile, so why hold on to something unchanging and frozen... When I hear about pianists who have found a ‘system’ I constantly remember Liszt’s words: ‘A good thing is a system, but I could never find it’” (Milshtein, Konstantin Nikolaevich Igunnov 1975, 303).

Theoretical systems in performance are often questioned precisely because they interfere with the implementation of the artist’s thinking in the field of the diversity of interpretation. With the idea that interpretive work on a piece is understood as a process of development, we meet in the statements of many performers: “If a work has grown, as a tree grows...with its own constant character...it is good” (Fischer, 1951, p. 23). Fisher’s thoughts are very close to Casals’ idea that the understanding of music “cannot be static but, like life itself, must constantly grow” (Kahn, 1970, p. 104). A system in performance is almost always static. If a work is a priori felt by the performer as something alive, then any systems, standards, and schemes will be perceived as constricting elements for inspiration and improvisation.

Another type of routine is technical work, which usually includes numerous repetitions of the whole work and its parts. The purpose of these repetitions is the technical perfection of the performance, but they are precisely the routine that reduces the degree of inspiration and interpretive interest. In this sense, each performer is faced with achieving the desired

technical level and not losing the inspiration: “The most difficult thing is to combine enthusiasm and mood with the perfection of performance. Chasing one, you’ll lose the other. And you have to have both”, Svyatoslav Richter used to say (Milshtein, *Questions of the Theory and History of Performance*, vol. 1, 1983, p. 194). It is interesting that here perfection is primarily understood not as the fluency of the fingers and the technicality of the passages, but the elementary fidelity of the text’s transmission (notes, rhythm, nuances, etc.), which is precisely opposed to the inspiration. Suppose it is not possible to maintain a balance between the two. In that case most musicians prioritize the inspiration: “If I had the choice between a performer who plays with inspiration and imagination but treats the text rather arbitrarily, and another performer who is absolutely reliable in his faithfulness to the text but has no imagination and is never inspired, I would generally prefer the inspired but slovenly player” (Schnabel 1964, 217).

Both perfect knowledge of the text and technical perfection in music result from routine hard work. And in this sense, routine is always opposed to inspiration. Moreover, these states are understood as two processes incompatible with each other. Being qualitatively different, they also oppose each other in time, never, even episodically, being synchronous.

### ***Inspiration***

Inspiration is, according to the ancient Greeks, the property of a genius and one of the most necessary states for an artist. According to Plato’s *Ion*, it is the only condition for creating a real work of art. Moreover, the creativity itself, if a higher power inspires it, is also considered as an act of interpretation since the poet must interpret what the gods inspired him. Not only the creation of the work but also its performing (by a rhapsode or an aoidos) also had to be inspired. This inspiration also had to have a hermeneutical focus on the interpretation of the work as its comprehension. Socrates says: “Then you may count on this nobler title in our minds, Ion, of being a divine and not an artistic praiser of Homer” (Plato, Plato in Twelve Volumes, Vol. 9 1925., 542b), summing up the argument about the source of inspiration. This vector of philosophy of inspiration, set by the ancient Greeks and Plato himself, has not yet lost its metaphysical component, despite many thinkers trying to exclude it. Aleksandr Pushkin defined inspiration as “the disposition of the soul to the most lively acceptance of impressions, consequently to a quick understanding of concepts, which contributes to the explanation of them” (Pushkin, 1962, pp. 268-269), that can be translated from the point of view of hermeneutics as an emotional and mental ability (“disposition”) to accept the new information (“impression”) and its conceptual processing (“understanding

of concepts and explaining them”). Thus, although Pushkin understands inspiration as Plato understood it, he democratizes the concept of inspiration to a large extent, taking it out of the ancient narrow and metaphysical understanding into a wider sphere of any creative process in general, emphasizing its nature as hermeneutic even more clearly. And although Plato and Pushkin may differ in their assessment of the nature of inspiration, both thinkers agree that interpretation requires a state of inspiration. Plato’s inspiration comes from divine power (often unexpected for a poet or a rhapsode), whereas Pushkin understands this state as a product of the orientation of the soul (that is, in many respects, an artist’s choice). Thus, Plato’s vertical of creativity (God—poet—rhapsodist—listener) later loses its primary link, freeing itself from the very subject of inspiration. One can take one step further and shift the source of inspiration to the object that links all the elements in this chain – to the text. The conductor Bruno Walter expresses this idea: “I understand the inspiration as the never-ending expressive richness of interpretation, the constant change of living sensations generated in performer by musical or dramatic development” (Ed. Edelman 1962, 74). So, Walter, like many other musicians, proceeds from the idea that the artist’s inspiration originates from the material itself – the “musical and dramatic development” of the work. Thus, for the interpreter, the concept of inspiration ceases to have any metaphysical character and becomes only a matter of its relationship with the text. On the other hand, this is a rather productive idea in musical performance since it opens the potential for an endless number of text meanings and an infinity of interpretations.

The interpreter – text relationship has different properties throughout the musician’s work on the piece. In the context of inspiration and routine, stopping at the first stage of this process is necessary since it is naturally illuminated by the inspiration more than any other.

“Everything should be performed as if for the first time” (Milshtein, *Questions of the Theory and History of Performance*, vol. 1 1983, 187), said Richter. In other words, we can say that the performance, throughout its existence, must carry the mood of inspiration of the first meeting of the performer with the work. Acquaintance with the text becomes the primary impression, which, according to musicians, plays a decisive role. It can be said that the entire subsequent life of the work lies in this grain of the first meeting. In this state of inspiration, or as it is called “burning” (Amonashvili 1987, 24), the feeling of novelty is exceptionally productive. Still, at the same time, it is precarious, dulls over time, and often wholly disappears. Music teachers warn about this, as students cannot always recognize that difficult period when the state of inspiration ends and the emotion of boredom and indifference to the work appears: “It is known that the performance, even the best one, of a piece of music, fades with

time; immediacy, the freshness of performance left. We can observe something similar in students, even the best ones, if, for some reason, they play the same piece for a long time. The student then, whether he wants it or not, begins to reproduce the piece mechanically, passively, sluggishly, without initiative ... If you stop finding something new in what you are performing, life will inevitably leave the performance; there will be a scheme that will quickly bore, stop to excite. Performance will turn into something formulaic, and there is nothing worse than this for a student..." (Milshtein, Questions of the Theory and History of Performance, vol. 1 1983, 210). Milstein shows how the routine leads to the loss of inspiration, which can be returned only if "to find something new in the performed." Thus, the key to inspiration lies in the text itself. This key is the "new."

### ***The concept of the new***

The concept of inspiration is invariably associated with the concept of genius, whose distinctive feature is originality: "Foremost property of genius must be originality" (Kant 1987, 5:308), said Kant. One of the main features of originality is innovativeness as a quality of the artist's thinking and novelty as a property of the work. Both concepts include the philosophical idea of the new, an exceptionally bright impetus for the development of which was set by the sophists: "The sophists and Socrates played a huge role in creating the very type of ancient philosophy, who put in the foreground the spiritual quest of man, his constant desire for everything new" (Losev, History of Ancient Aesthetics V 2000, 377). This orientation towards the search for the new was laid down by ancient philosophy as an original and productive way of thinking.

Again, one of the dramatic examples of the confrontation between the new and the old is the paradigmatic struggle of the sophists for the right to new thinking and a new interpretation of ancient philosophical ideas. The result of this struggle was a new type of thinking. The new is ontologically connected with the process of development and progression and, as a result, acts as an antagonist of the old and the routine (and, in a sense, of traditionality). Losev says: "History is ruthless: when the truth is held together by the absence of its criticism, and morality and way of life are only habits, then this truth and this life are finished. Here always look for sophists who, destroying the old, create, in any case, something new – the translation of this truth and this way of life into the language of self-consciousness" (Losev, History of Ancient Aesthetics vol. II 2000, 49). Thus, Kant's "genius" manifests itself in this sophist, whose "originality" of thinking brings the renewal through the liberation from the shackles of routine.

And art also has its sophists, and the conflict between traditional and innovative is also dramatic here, and just as in philosophy, a genius plays a vital role in this conflict: “It is no accident that the artist comes to terms with a tension in his work between the expectations harbored by custom and the introduction of new ways of doing things” (Gadamer 1986, 10). In the concept of tradition, there is always a component of routine since the meaning of tradition lies in preserving and conserving a thought. At the same time, innovation, on the contrary, is caused by the desire to overcome the inertia of tradition. As Gadamer rightly points out, it is up to the artist to overcome this tension and conflict. The form which the struggle of opposing forces will take depends on many factors. Still, the main one is the choice of the artist, who captures the new meanings in the old, brings them to life, openly opposes traditionalism to the newness in favor of the latter, understanding the musical performance as a dialectical process, in which the old (the established routine of its performance) meets the new (its rethinking by the artist). The result of this meeting is a more or less successful recreation of the work. What is decisive here is the artistic interpretation and, in a sense, the “newness” of this interpretation.

Creativity itself is identified with the concept of “new”; creation becomes synonymous with seeking and finding the new: “The concept of ‘creativity’ contains the concept of the ‘new’” (Ed. Edelman 1962, 149). From this statement of Busoni, written in the «Selbsi-Rezension», one should not conclude that any creativity at any of its stages is inextricably linked with the new. The feeling of novelty is not a permanent state of the artist in the process of creativity. Moreover, the feeling of newness is so unpredictable in its appearance, so unsteady that this emotional state is often, just like inspiration, defined as something of a metaphysical nature, that is, as a phenomenon that does not depend on the artist. The feeling of novelty and inspiration are concepts very close to each other, interpenetrating and interdependent. Also, we can confidently say that the connection of these phenomena is, to a decisive extent, due to the hermeneutic grounds.

### ***To find a new***

It is known that the new is a strong motivating stimulus for the performer. New impressions and knowledge inspire the performance and take it to a completely different level. Moreover, performers strive to find new impressions in and outside the text. Thus, life itself becomes an inspiration for the artist. It is imperative to note the musician’s orientation towards meeting the new, the strong desire for this, the desire to recreate the first feeling of inspiration. A conscious approach is essential when a person globally seeks novelty. Casals said: “It is a rediscovery of the world

of which I have the joy of being a part. It fills me with awareness of the wonder of life, with a feeling of the incredible marvel of being a human being. The music is never the same for me, never. Each day it is something new, fantastic and unbelievable” (Kahn 1970, 8). This is a conscious psychological focus on maintaining interest in life, the basis of which is a sense of novelty. The purpose of this psychological state for the musician is the performance itself. But, even more than this general life attitude, the performance is influenced by the methods of work developed for this purpose, the main idea of which is to renew the perception of the text: “if you find something unexpected in the piece, it will come to life again” (Sokolov 1984, 48), said Igumnov. So, the work “comes to life” when the performer finds something “unexpected,” new, and hidden. Then an act of hermeneutical discovery takes place, which revives and renews the work. This process can be regulated, and the performers develop various working methods and techniques.

### ***Rediscovered text***

Most of these techniques are hermeneutical; their main goal is to refresh the perception of the text and to update the interpretation. One such way, for example, is to work from notes without an instrument. The purpose of this is, first, to eliminate the distracting physical factors of the performing process and focus all attention on the text, creating an artistic image of the work in the mind, and second, to change the scope of activity to diversify the perception of the text, thus introducing an element of novelty into the work: “Sometimes I want to just sit with the notes, not playing, to see what elements a work consists of, without bothering myself with either performance, or sound, or fingering, but to imagine only the sound of a piece... In performance, it (music) is immeasurably better than it comes out on the piano; this is the ideal that can never be achieved”, said pianist Grigory Ginzburg (Ginzburg 1984, 234).

Another way is a complete short-term or long-term cessation of any work on the text. Thus, an emotional and intellectual rest from the work is carried out. Konstantin Igumnov said: “... In order to play a piece well, you need to take a break from it for some time... Even if the work is valuable and worthwhile, it can ‘get you bored’ for a while, so you must move away. If you don’t listen to it and don’t play it, the sharpness of perception will be restored again” (Sokolov 1984, 48). Here, the goal is to deceive the routine somehow, to renew the perception, present the old as the new, and thereby return to the original feeling of inspiration. This method gives very productive results, and many musicians use it.

These techniques are based on the hermeneutic idea of return. That is, work on a piece is either stopped for some time or diversified by another

type of activity, to subsequently return to the text and cause its new perception. Thus, with each new return round, there is a more complete and deeper understanding of the work. This is the idea behind the cyclical return of the hermeneutic circle theory. However, in relation to the musical performance, it can rather be called a hermeneutic spiral, since each return initiates a new perception and interpretation: "The path of the performer can be compared with movement not in a straight line, but in a spiral. And sometimes returning to an old piece that has not been played for a long time, its rethinking can bring more joy than working on a new one" (Milshtein, *Questions of the Theory and History of Performance*, vol. 1 1983, 188).

This renewal naturally translates into a change in interpretation. This is paradoxical, but the performance of the same work by the same performer at various times can be radically different. Neuhaus said: "I remember how I heard the Liszt Sonata performed by Busoni twice in four years, and these were such different performances as if almost another person performed" (Milshtein, *Questions of the Theory and History of Performance*, vol. 1 1983, 31).

## **Conclusion**

Among the sequence of emotions, a musician experiences concerning the performed piece, two extreme ones stand out: inspiration and indifference. The fruitfulness of performing work depends on how the musician gets through these emotions. It is generally believed that inspiration cannot be controlled since it is metaphysically conditioned; a 'divine gift' is given regardless of a person's desire. Such is the centuries-old and stable tradition of this subject's understanding. It is also believed that indifference to the work, which appears with the extinction of inspiration, is an unpleasant but indispensable companion of the routine work. The passivity of such a position gives rise to many problems in performance, up to the complete unwillingness of the musician to perform the piece. However, performing practice shows that these emotional processes can be regulated, and many musicians testify to this. The performers frame this problem with the following question: how to keep the inspiration? And since the emotion of inspiration is inversely proportional to the state of the routine, this question often turns into: how to avoid the routine? The performing work suggests that there is only one answer to these questions: only searching and finding something new in the text allows you to return to the state of the initial inspiration. A new look at the text, in general, and in details, even the smallest ones, allows you to break out of the state of routine and enter a new interpretive turn of the spiral. The reverse approach to the work as a solution of purely technical problems leads only to a

routine stagnation of the thought. A constant interpretive activity must be carried out in parallel with the technical. At the same time, it is essential to perceive this work as cooperation with the text, moreover, as cooperation with its countless meanings, the disclosure of which, on the one hand, ensures the continuation of the life of the work and, on the other hand, reduces the routine factor and gives inspiration to the artist himself to continue this work.

*“If you stop finding something new in the performed, life will inevitably leave the performance” (Milshtein 1983, 210).*

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Oana Maria NAE \*

## Minimal Art and the Spatial Experience of the Light

**Abstract:** This article traces how sources of electrical the light associated with minimal sculptures leads to the expansion of the sculptural space beyond the boundaries of the object through the process of light propagation (Dan Flavin, Carl Andre) and contributes to the creation of spatial and perceptual situations specific to minimal art. The relationship between art and technology and the use of electric light in artistic installations is continued by the group of artists and engineers E.A.T. (Experiments in Arts and Technology). We will thus follow a paradigm of working with space, in which light becomes a device for transforming spatial perception and producing sensations and affects. The aesthetic experience thus created, with the help of light sources, puts the viewer in front of a complex spatial experience, paradigmatic for the art of the second half of the 20th century.

**Keywords:** Minimal Art, installation art, light, aesthetic experience, spatial art.

Minimal art appeared in 1960 as a reaction to abstract expressionism, pop art and conceptual art. Its characteristic was a formal focus on the three-dimensional artistic object, reduced to simple geometric shapes, as well as on its spatial perception. It shares with pop art the orientation towards the world of industrial production, the objects being produced mainly from industrial materials (steel, Plexiglas, glass, etc.). The British philosopher Richard Wollheim also uses this term *minimalism* to refer to some paintings and objects that have a rich conceptual, intellectual content but a poor formal content, like Marcel Duchamp's *ready-made*. (Wollheim, 1965, 26-33). The term of minimal art took hold with some difficulty. There were alternatives such as ABC art, primary structures, post-pictorial relief or literary art. (De Duve, 2003, 180).

Minimalism "attempted, first and foremost, to subvert any artistic *style* (...)". It took: "forms of an idealistically designed geometry, rather than of an intuitive self-expression. However, since its dominant period (1963-1968), it has started to resemble a style so much that critics use minimalist to categorize any painting or sculpture that is non-figurative, non-

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\*\* Article realized with the support of the Multidisciplinary Research Institute in Art – National University of Arts George Enescu Iași within the grants financed from the research funds of UNAGE for the year 2022.

referential and non-narrative, or even far from geometric." (Colpitt, 1993, 133).

Of these features, it is the term of *literal art*, as well as the *non-referential* and *non-narrative* characteristics of minimalist geometric objects, that particularly draw our attention. In terms of Norman Bryson's distinction, which we used in the previous chapters, the *literal* feature of minimal art signals a blurring of the discursive character of modern art and the return of the figurative in contemporary art. This situation is linked by Michael Fried to a special type of sensitivity, to which the material presence of the object is essential – or, as Fried calls it, its *objecthood* instead of the message. (Fried, 2000, 836-838).

If materiality has always been an essential element of the sculptural form, in modern art it nevertheless tended to be circumvented in favor of another secondary discourse – by resorting to symbols, emblems, metaphor, narration or allegory. But installing this regime of objecthood is made possible in minimal art precisely by the *literal* character of the artistic discourse or message, which allows the attention to be focused on the shape of the object instead of its significance or the iconographic program which the work would bring into play. The literal character of minimal art contributes therefore to the volatilization of the metaphor of light by eliminating the discursive aspects of artistic objects and by emphasizing their material aspects (in particular the materiality of light). Thus, the metaphor of light joins the field of aesthetic experience, understood as a perceptual, subjective and corporeal experience.

From the point of view of the viewer's experience, minimal art can be described as a type of art involving the viewer's corporal presence in front of the artwork, which is reduced to an objectual presence. It is about creating a common perceptual horizon which the viewer and the object are both part of. The object and its perception are mutually defined. Thus, despite its formal, geometric simplicity, minimalism implies Michael Fried's concept of temporality or duration of the reception experience, as opposed to the experience of modern art that had no duration but merely "presence and instantaneousness". (Colpitt, 1993, 93-94)

Not only does experiencing a work of minimal art take place over time, but it has neither beginning nor end, according to Fried. On this basis, the American critic concludes that the objects themselves are treated compositionally as if they were infinite. However, Donald Judd, an important representative of American minimal art, supported the method "one thing after another", privileging unity at the compositional level over the extension of space. What is certain is that in minimal art, the outward shape is the object, and the uniqueness of its geometrically simple outward shape ensures its artistic viability. If thus the object has no interiority, it

opens towards the outside space it is located in and towards its relationship with the viewers.

In fact, all this discussion regarding the open or closed nature of the shape of the artwork, as well as the one regarding the temporal nature of the experience of its reception, stems from the meaning of this concept. It is settled by resorting to the dialectic between the synthetic character of the visual experience of the shape and its duration at the level of its corporal synthesis. "The instantaneousness of the form (Gestalt), as Morris knew, is a central idea of minimalism. The form is perceived in its entirety at once. What happens over time is the experience: a series of perceptual states based on the relations of the viewer's body with the objects" (Colpitt, 1993, 92-93).

Michael Fried used the notion of "theatricality" to describe the at once spatial and temporal character of the experience of the object in minimal art, which focuses on the actual circumstances in which the viewer encounters the work of art. (Fried, 2000, 838). For Fried, this new artistic relationship involves creating a situation (which, by definition, encompasses the viewer) in which the object manifests its presence (often aggressively and obscurely) and asks the viewer for his attention by making him aware of its presence (often at the level of the corporal perception of the surrounding space). It could therefore be concluded that what makes minimalism a special trend are precisely its philosophical assumptions. According to Francis Colpitt, "it expresses beliefs about itself and about the subjective perception of the world based on materiality - objecthood- and the space occupied by that material and the body of the artist/viewer." (Colpitt, 1993, 133)

The participation of the audience fulfills a very important purpose in this context, while lighting functions here as a way of confronting the viewer with his own personality and physical image and, at the same time, of reading reality as a unit. It is an exercise in perception that can help understand the world and contemporary society, which by nature is fragmented. Revelations may occur through space and objects, which create an experience for each individual viewer.

Morris's minimalist sculptures from the mid-60s consisted of rigorously built geometrical objects. Usually, he arranged these objects in "situations" where "each is aware of his own body, while being aware of every piece of the work", as Iabel describe one of the pieces from the TATE collection from 1971. (Iabel, 2004) This example illustrates this idea. As the viewer walks among the four large mirror cubes, rigorously placed in the gallery, they reflect the surrounding surfaces, resulting in interaction between the gallery space and the viewer. Initially, these cubes were installed in the garden of the Tate Gallery in London for Morris's exhibition in 1971, but

later remained in the gallery where the exhibition was rearranged. (Label, 2004).

In 1965 the Greek artist Stephen Antonakos builds a cubic skeleton made of blue neon, which he simply calls - the blue box. The cube marks a spatial rupture, but at the same time tends to visually incorporate the gaps it forms. According to gestalt principles we tend to perceive the shape which is most familiar to our visual memory, and in this case our eye is trying to give materiality to the empty sides of the cube. The light contributes to this visual experience.

In his works, Daniel Buren mixes the minimalist language with the neo-conceptualist influences of the '80s. His clear intention is to put the spotlight on and to recover the importance of the artwork in contemporary creation. Buren is conducting a critical investigation into art, and his works always say something about the idea of pure art. The artist never uses an expressionist manner, and this is also visible in the work *Through the Reflecting Glass* (1983). As with other works, in this one the artist aims for a basic level of information and the interaction with the audience. In this case, the interaction involves a direct contact between the artwork and the viewer, who is invited to look for the meaning of the work himself. The work is also part of the space where it is exposed and cannot be separated from it. The surrounding space, although not part of the work, is inseparable from it if the work is to have visual consistency. (Barro, 2006, 25).

The fragmentation of the composition creates a game of reality in which the viewer has to rebuild his own reality starting from these fragments. The process can be difficult or easy, but it is certainly an exercise in reflecting on the separate parts of the daily reality in which we live, and which influences our lives.

The work 2 (*30AL*) *Seattle* by the minimalist artist Carl Andre is composed of rectangular pieces arranged in a very well calculated and very simple geometric manner. The pieces, only 5 cm thick, emphasize the horizontality of the ground and highlight the geometric play and the texture of the polished aluminum they are made of.

The relationship to Constantin Brancusi's work *Endless Column* is obvious and the artist himself stated that his only wish was to build *the Endless Column* in a horizontal position. It is in fact the same column but placed horizontally. (Barro, 2006, 32) Like other avant-garde artists (especially with reference to geometric abstractionism), Brancusi, along with Frank Stella, are the acknowledged bases of minimal language.

What is interesting here is the perception of the work. It can be seen at the same time as an entire piece, composed of smaller pieces joined together, or as a mirror (due to its well-polished aluminum surface reflecting the surrounding area) which forms a fragmented image of the surrounding world and reality, and implicitly of the light information around it.

Along with this example, the viewer can experience different perception situations. The aluminum's reflections give him the possibility of perceiving the space mediated by the presence of a fragmented mirror on the ground. This type of relation with space can also be encountered in other minimalist works such as – *Untitled*, Ángel Bados, 1991, or *Untitled*, Donald Judd, 1988.

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The beginning of 1960 marks an important moment in the artistic career of Dan Flavin, a US minimalist artist, through a series of eight works entitled *Icons*. The combination of neon, electric light bulbs and regular geometric shapes will give rise to visual formulas that bring him closer to conceptual art, precisely because of the presence of a message beyond the concrete forms of the work. It is also the first time he uses the electric light bulb and he increasingly makes use of the fluorescent tubes. These series of works also represent the link between his paintings and later light installations.

The theme from which Flavin starts is mainly related to the return to the primary conditions of an iconological representation. This was certainly part of the radical change in North American art at the beginning of the mid-century. The above-mentioned artists Donald Judd or Carl Andre wanted to achieve objective and non-illusory works of art (Thierolf, Vogt, 2009, 7) and Flavin found what was perhaps one of the most suitable materials for this new type of art – light. The contrast between the materiality of the object and the immateriality of light creates a constant tension between the artwork, seen as an object in itself, and the message that transpires beyond the physical limits of the object. The spiritual dimension is of use to Flavin here, as, along with the use of light, he draws on the entire metaphoric system that accompanies its presence and gives it its spiritual character. *Icons* make accessible the very genesis of this tension and ambiguity present in Flavin's work, the juxtaposition between light and object, between matter and message.

Flavin does not lay claim to evoking a spiritual fact, but to signaling its presence in matter. If it may be called so, it is a return to metaphor through matter, light and object. The strong contrast offered by the juxtaposition of the two types of matter gives rise not only to the antithesis but also to the idea of interdependence between the two regimes – the objectual and the luminous one. *Icon IV*, for example, combines a white square with the white light of a neon, placed at the top. It is the work that best highlights the aseptic aspect of Flavin's aesthetics. (Thierolf, Vogt, 2009, 14) The message is backed by emotional motives that make the artist dedicate the work to his brother as a funeral homage. The references to the valences of color and pure, immaculate space originate in the Asian culture, either in Chinese

culture (funeral white) or in Buddhism. The subtitle (*pure land*) confirms these references. *Icon V* is, as the artist himself said, "the result of more than ten years of research". (Thierolf, Vogt, 2009, 16) The iconoclast aspect of his works is also worth bringing up. Although the titles refer to the iconographic feature of an image, it is precisely its absence that refers to the spiritual space, which lies beyond the actual image. With Malevici as a precursor, Flavin takes up ideas of Russian Suprematism, but links them to minimalist discourse.

Dan Flavin's light installations, built of fluorescent tubes (neon's) of various shapes and colors, brings simple forms, without complications or details, in the viewer's sights. His sculptures use a minimalist language and are designed to be walked around and perceived more easily. The extension of the sculptural space outside the limits of the object through the process of light propagation is one of the fundamental aspects of his works.

For Flavin, light becomes an autonomous material suitable for creating the spatial and perceptive situations specific to minimal art. (Ferrer, 2001, 52) He will even make a distinction between the light cast by the fluorescent lamp and the lamp itself, which retains its autonomy as an object. When we look at his works, we can easily distinguish the shape of the neon, and around them is the light environment. Flavin attaches great importance to this environment, stating that "the environment guides the artist" (Flavin, 1966, 27-29).

In a review of the work *the nominal three* (1963), Joseph Kosuth places Flavin at the beginning of the end of modernism. Kosuth also notes that his works are a bridge between the art of Duchamp and that of the '60s, establishing a direct lineage to *ready-made*. Flavin's work, says Kosuth, is not a simple lamp, nor a delightful object, nor optical circus, but is what it itself is, an art object full of the responsible subjectivity of the author. (Kosuth, 1999, 18)

These works use electric light as an environment and an element of the artistic vocabulary. They are part of a living and concrete space. The use of neon brings the public closer to everyday life, to the elements of their domestic existence which they are accustomed to and come in daily contact with, but which now become an artwork, changing their functionality.

Thus, the viewer can experience a new form of interaction with his daily references. The light that propagates creates an environment around it, and the work thus takes up more space than the physical limits of the neon. The surrounding space is taken up by an aura that amplifies the work itself, creating the right environment for contemplation. Flavin's works use the third dimensionality by arranging the fluorescent tubes horizontally and vertically. One specific example is the work *Untitled (to Paul Gredinger)* from 1990 where two neon tubes are placed horizontally and perpendicularly to five vertical tubes (against the wall, two shorter, framed by three longer

ones). The work is also based on bringing the viewer closer to a spiritual space, in a conceptualist manner. It is a "contemplative meeting", where the real space is enlarged and extended by the light's reflections and its propagation power. It essentially changes the shape of space, turning it into light energy. (Kosuth, 1999, 19)

Bringing the viewer closer to a spiritual space and favoring the contemplative state is achieved starting from common, everyday objects. The space, enlarged and extended by the light's reflexing, creates for the viewer a precise illumination of the room, linked to everyday streetlights and consequently to profane lighting.

Most of Flavin's work is dedicated to friends or people who influenced him a lot. In a few cases, these are the artists who have marked his career and who are honored by the very so-called Monuments. This is the name that the homage to Vladimir Tatlin, begun in 1964, bears. In this case, the vertical fluorescent lights are placed in the shape of a pyramid recalling the Russian artist's upward spiral, *Monument for the Third International* (1919-1920). Tatlin's motto "real materials are real spaces" was relevant not only to Flavin, but to minimal art as a whole. (Colpitt, 1999, 23) The reliefs created by Tatlin between 1915-1916, placed at the meeting point of two walls, are the source of inspiration for Flavin's diagonal works, where he aims to relate two different spatial planes, as in the works *Monument on the survival of Mrs. Reppin*, of 1966, or *Green crossing green (to Piet Modrian who lacked green)*, of the same year.

One of Flavin's innovations consists in placing a neon tube at the meeting point between two walls. By doing this, the artist argued in favor of eliminating the edge that separated the two walls (and thus of the boundary between them) and the creation of a continuous space.

Dan Flavin remains one of the minimalist artists for whom the exploitation of the gallery space, the mechanism of visual perception and the use of light create unique experiences of space and matter for viewers who come into contact with his work. Light no longer plays the functional role it did in pop art, nor that of cancelling matter and shape as in conceptual art, but exists in itself, for itself and in order to create a space and an experience.

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Created in 1966, the E.A.T. group (Experiments in Arts and Technology), was based on the collaboration between the artist Robert Rauschenberg and the engineer Billy Klüver, a laser specialist, but also on organizing an event: *9 Evenings: Theatre and Engineering*, which consisted of a series of performances by artists and engineers. The group was officially launched the following year when Robert Whitman and Fred Waldhauer

joined them. A collaboration between Klüver and these artists had existed since 1960. As a scientific researcher at Bell Telephone Laboratories, he would help Jean Tinguely with the technological aspects of setting up the work *Homage to New York City*, a self-destructive kinetic sculpture. (Wardrip-Fruin, 2003, 211-212).

Ever since its establishment as an organization, E.A.T. has sought to create a platform for the close collaboration of artists with engineers, with a view to achieving common projects in which artistic sensitivity and vision would be combined with the technical skills and knowledge of the engineers. This group certainly marks a necessity that the two "camps" felt, a need for rapprochement and mutual borrowing. The integration of artists in today's increasingly technological contemporary society was limited by their ability to be connected to technological developments. Concerning engineers, there was also a trend toward more sensibility and closeness to a society that did not always understand their latest innovations. The group's interest in popularizing the collaboration relationship between technology and science is highlighted by its editing the catalogue *The Machine*, as a result of a contest organized by E.A.T. together with the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1968. The catalogue is a chronological and illustrated selection regarding the relationship between the artist and technology from Leonardo da Vinci and Albrecht Dürer to Nam June Paik and Hans Haacke.

Their first event, *9 Evenings: Theatre and Engineering*, involved artists, dancers, composers, and engineers. It tried to "stage" various situations, using the resources of science and technology. These enabled the viewer-cum-actor to observe the optical effects of holography, of communication through ultrasounds or through the sounds of their own bodies (the heartrate, for example), which were amplified and transmitted on a screen. (Ferrer, 2001, 92) Holography, laser, sounds and electronic images, light allow both the artist and the spectator to confront the technological world, a parallel world, but one which offers the possibility of diversifying materials and their force of expression in visual arts.

One of their most important projects was designing the pavilion for the 1970 Exhibition in Osaka, Japan. *Pepsi Pavilion* consisted of a huge half-sphere that contained an equally large spherical mirror within it. After entering a dark room where only moving shapes generated by laser light could be distinguished, visitors climbed a flight of stairs and reached the generous space overhead. Here, above them was a large aluminum mirror built according to an idea of Bob Whitman's. The mirror provided the image of the entire space, only upside down, and the optical effect was like that of a hologram. The spectacular effect of duplicating the gravitational planes is based on the optical projection of the space and light into the mirror. Robert Breer, the artistic director of the Pavilion, says that the



project attempts an "isolation of the senses and the creation of new relationships between them." And by animating the viewers they tried to offer them a "profound psychological experience that should make them aware of the world around them." (Breer, 2005, 323) The play of light generated by the mirror's reflective properties amplifies the participants' perceptual sensations but at the same time dissipates the room's spatial coordinates.

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*Conclusions.* Along with the other currents of the neo-avant-garde of the 60-70s, Minimal art is responsible for the development of the artistic installation environment - an environment that will impose a new spatial and compositional sensibility. This new environment is supported by a paradigm of the "open art work" in which the viewer and the artwork, as well as the artwork and the space in which it is installed, are in an interdependent relationship. As we already see in this article, such a paradigm of working with space uses both architecture and technology to ultimately produce "aesthetic experiences". Light here becomes a device for transforming spatial perception and producing sensations and affects, associated either with countering the world of consumption, or with a world in which communication and technology considerably affect the relationship of human conscience to the world and to society.

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Lorena Valeria STUPARU \*

# La mémoire, l'identité, la compréhension dans les écrits de Paul Ricœur

## Memory, identity, in the writings of Paul Ricœur

**Abstract:** This paper explores the relationship between memory, history and identity from the perspective of Ricœur's philosophical hermeneutics, in which the concept of memory integrates those of history and forgetting. This approach puts in a new light the ancient truth of the hypostasis of memory as a condition for the recognition of identity both at the individual and collective level and at the same time the contexts of human creativity. Thanks to memory, the imagination can bring faces, events, facts from the past back into the present and, in this sense, memory as a "province of the imagination" beyond its temporalizing function could play a heuristic role, namely to discover the use of memory not only by ideology as an expression of the social imaginary, intended to legitimize power, but also to recognize and build an authentic identity, to understand human being..

**Keywords:** memory, imagination, history, identity, forgetting, creation.

### 1. De la mémoire comme «province de l'imagination» à l'écriture de l'histoire personnelle et collective

La mémoire comme «province de l'imagination» tel qu'elle apparaît à travers une vénérable tradition philosophique peut être considéré comme une des idées directrices du livre de Paul Ricœur. *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*, est un travail considérable, composé de trois parties délimitées selon les critères du thème et de la méthode (phénoménologie de la mémoire, épistémologie de l'histoire, herméneutique de l'histoire), ayant comme élément commun le problème capital de la *représentation du passé* (Ricœur 2000, II).

Cette approche du problème de la mémoire comme province de l'imagination va de «l'association des idées» selon laquelle «si ces deux affections sont liées par contiguïté, évoquer l'une – donc imaginer –, c'est évoquer l'autre, donc s'en souvenir» vers la conclusion selon laquelle «la mémoire, réduite au rappel, opère ainsi dans le sillage de l'imagination» (Ricœur 2000, 5).

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Surtout la théorie platonicienne de l'*eikōn*, qui «met l'accent principal sur le phénomène de présence d'une chose absente, la référence au temps passé restant implicite» permet de comprendre, à part «la spécificité de la fonction proprement temporalisante de la mémoire», le lien entre la mémoire est l'imagination, y compris «de l'imagination dirigée vers le fantastique, la fiction, l'irréel, le possible, l'utopique, vers la réalité antérieure, l'antériorité constituant la marque temporelle par excellence de la "chose souvenue", du "souvenu" en tant que tel» (Ricœur 2000, 5).

Partant de ce «postulat» – de la mémoire qui peut être considéré au-delà de sa fonction temporalisante comme province de l'imagination –, nous explorerons quelques liens possibles entre la mémoire, l'histoire, la construction identitaire et la compréhension de l'être humain.

Concernant la notion de mémoire, une distinction familière qui vient de la langue grecque est celle entre *mnēmē* et *anamnēsis*, consacrée par le traité d'Aristote dont le titre latin est devenu familier: *De memoria et reminiscentia* (Ricœur 2004, 167).

Dans ce texte, *mnēmē* (mémoire) désigne la simple présence dans l'esprit d'une image du passé (donc un moment passif, lorsqu'une image vient ou est amenée à l'esprit par un stimulus extérieur), alors que l'*anamnēsis* est un moment actif, dans lequel la mémoire d'une image vue ou d'une expérience vécue une fois permet d'accéder au monde de la chose dans l'image ou la réalité antérieure d'une expérience. En ce sens, on peut dire que la mémoire est davantage dirigée vers la réalité extérieure précédente, tandis que la réminiscence est également dirigée vers la réalité intérieure. D'ailleurs, la mémoire interne a fait l'objet de l'œuvre de Husserl par lequel «l'école du regard intérieur atteint son apogée» et cette tradition du regard intérieur à partir d'Augustin «se construit comme une impasse vers la mémoire collective» (Ricœur 2000, 117).

Il s'agit donc de deux sujets opposés et complémentaires, à savoir, l'un platonicien, centré sur le thème de l'*eikon*, et l'autre aristotélien, thématissant la représentation de quelque chose qui a fait l'*objet d'une perception antérieure*. Le premier nous parle de la représentation présente d'une chose absente et circonscrit, de manière implicite, le problème de la mémoire dans les limites de l'imagination, et le second plaide pour l'inclusion du problème de l'image dans celui de la mémoire (Ricœur 2000, 7-8).

La mémoire comme réminiscence ou mémoire déclenchée par l'«icône» d'une chose maintenant absente, mais connue soit par l'âme (dans une existence antérieure), soit par une perception du passé récent ou lointain, filtrée dans le parcours philosophique de la reconnaissance, peut être considérée comme un processus de recomposition et de restitution similaire à l'herméneutique avec ses symboles et ses «lieux»: en tant que jugement de reconnaissance, la mémoire repose sur la fusion entre imaginaire et mémoire.

S'appuyant sur un tel fondement, non seulement l'identité personnelle peut être subjective, mais aussi l'identité collective, et la «perception intérieure» peut être non seulement celle de l'individu singulier ou d'un groupe qui se définit différemment de la façon dont il est vu par les autres, non seulement celle d'un pouvoir qui propose une idéologie légitimatrice, mais aussi de l'opposition qui veut accréditer une utopie qui délégitime.

Seule «l'idée d'une politique de la juste mémoire (...) un de thèmes civiques avoués», autrement dit la mémoire qui exerce la compréhension de la possibilité d'être (contenue dans le texte et le contexte) peut restituer l'identité authentique (soit personnelle, soit collective), propre à l'homme capable (au sens établi par Ricœur) de cette entreprise phénoménologique et herméneutique engageant la mémoire et l'interprétation : «de texte est la médiation par laquelle nous nous comprenons nous-même» (Ricœur 1986, 115); en même temps, il faut aussi «reporter au cœur même de la compréhension de soi la dialectique de l'objectivation et de la compréhension que nous avons aperçue au niveau du texte, de ses structures, de son sens et de sa référence», tenant compte du fait que «à tous les niveaux de l'analyse, la distanciation est la condition de la compréhension» (Ricœur 1986, 117).

Selon Ricœur, l'histoire est elle-même une province de la mémoire et la représentation du passé est en relation non seulement avec les documents et les interprétations scientifiques, mais aussi avec l'imagination.

Tout d'abord, l'imagination opère avec les représentations des choses et des phénomènes; des lors, il fait faire une distinction entre la fonction de l'imagination en tant qu'acte et le champ d'imaginaire où l'imagination opère.

La qualité de l'image (représentation des choses et des phénomènes) est sous-jacente non seulement à la conscience individuelle, mais aussi à l'idéologie et à l'utopie, que Ricœur considère étant «deux expressions de l'imaginaire social».

Selon Ricœur, «l'idéologie est liée à la nécessité d'un groupe social pour donner une image de soi-même, pour se représenter, dans un sens théâtral du mot, pour jouer et à mettre en scène» (Ricœur 2000, 8). En ce sens, l'idéologie et l'interprétation des images se produisent, par exemple, dans les situations collectives qui répètent les événements fondateurs, dans des cérémonies ou dans le cadre des groupes nationaux. On peut dire qu'il s'agit des «images d'un passé devenu légendaire, visions d'un présent et d'un futur définies en fonction de ce qui fut est censé avoir été» (Girardet 1986, 97-98), même si la projection de la mentalité du présent triomphant est dans le futur, et non dans un «paradis perdu, inséparable de tant de rêves entretenus par les hommes, à travers l'immensité de leur histoire» (Girardet 1986, 101), et les commémorations n'ont pas de but «l'abolition du temps

par l'imitation des archétypes et par la répétition des gestes paradigmatiques» (Eliade 1969, 49).

La perspective de l'herméneutique philosophique de Ricœur, selon laquelle le concept de mémoire intègre celui de l'histoire et celui de l'oubli, met sous un jour nouveau l'ancienne thèse de la mémoire comme condition de reconnaissance de l'identité (au niveau individuel et collectif).

## 2. L'identité, une construction de « l'homme capable »

Dans le livre *Parcours de la reconnaissance*, pour rendre possible le discours sur un « parcours de l'identité » dans l'architecture d'une future philosophie de la reconnaissance, la recherche du Ricœur commençait par l'examen de la méthode du Descartes. La définition de l'acte de juger par la capacité de distinguer entre le vrai et le faux ouvre pour les modernes « le porche royale qui donne accès à la problématique de la reconnaissance – identification » (Ricœur 2004, 46). Plus loin, dans les dernières pages de son livre sur le potentiel philosophique de la « reconnaissance », l'auteur note que « le parcours de l'identité » se déroule entre « l'identification du “quelque chose” en général, reconnu autre que tout autre, passant par l'identification de “quelqu'un”, à l'occasion de la rupture avec la conception du monde comme représentation », pour arriver à « la transition du “quelqu'un” au “soi-même”, se reconnaissant dans ses capacités » (Ricœur 2004, 360).

L'approche du Ricœur va de l'identification vers l'identité à l'aide de Kant. Le terme « reconnaissance » en tant que *recognitio*, nous rappelle Paul Ricœur, paraît pour la première fois dans le glossaire philosophique kantien doté d'une fonction spécifique dans le champ théorique (comme le Grand Robert de la langue française nous le prouve): saisir par l'esprit, par la pensée, en reliant des images, des perceptions; distinguer, identifier, connaître par la mémoire, le jugement ou l'action. On peut remarquer, continue Ricœur, dans cette définition le même style rationaliste de la philosophie critique, car « identifier » a le sens d'établir une relation d'identité entre une chose et une autre. Dans cette direction avance la recherche de Paul Ricœur, pour lequel l'identification comporte plusieurs significations secondaires. L'identification, autant que la distinction, se trouvent à l'origine de l'acte de juger. « Identifier et distinguer constitue une paire verbale indissociable. Pour identifier il faut distinguer, et c'est en distinguant qu'on identifie » (Ricœur 2004, 45). Il s'agit de l'usage « logique » des opérations de distinction et identification (détecté par Paul Ricœur dans la définition cartésienne de l'acte de juger par capacité de distinguer entre le vrai et le faux), et cet usage logique demeurera présupposé et « inclus dans l'usage existentiel (...) appliqué à des personnes relativement à elles-mêmes ou à d'autres ou prises dans leurs relations mutuelles » (Ricœur 2004, 45).

L'enquête sur la reconnaissance est intéressé par l'«herméneutique du soi» dans la mesure où celle-ci explore la dialectique entre l'identité et l'altérité à travers les formes «personnelles» du verbe «pouvoir», y compris: «pouvoir dire», «pouvoir faire», «pouvoir raconter et se raconter». Pouvoir dire, pouvoir raconter et se raconter sont des façons de faire, de construire une identité à l'aide de la mémoire, de l'action, de la faculté de jugement (traits de l'«homme capable»).

Si une politisation excessive du multiculturalisme a privilégié «une demande indéfinie, figure de “mauvais infini“» de reconnaissance affective, juridique et sociale (Ricœur 2004, 317), la réelle reconnaissance de soi qui signifie l'affirmation de l'identité personnelle survient quand «l'autodésignation du sujet parlant se produit dans des situations d'interlocution où la réflexivité se compose avec l'altérité», autrement dit lorsqu'un individu devient capable de dire, par exemple, «moi, un tel, je m'appelle Paul Ricœur», ce qui «constitue une véritable instauration concernant un sujet parlant» (Ricœur 2004, 146).

Selon Ricœur, un homme capable est celui qui, par son langage narratif spécifique, construit sa propre histoire (réelle ou plus ou moins imaginaire) telle qu'il la perçoit. En même temps, cet homme, par le langage symbolique et métaphorique de la création religieuse et artistique ou par le langage conceptuel d'une philosophie enracinée dans la phénoménologie peut construire aussi une identité personnelle.

Sous le titre «Une phénoménologie de l'homme capable», le chapitre II de la deuxième étude du livre *Parcours de la reconnaissance* traite la question de l'identité personnelle à travers l'acte de raconter, au-delà de l'identité fictive.

Ici, Ricœur montre comment se raconter soi-même devient une capacité humaine qui contribue à la construction de l'identité personnelle: «Sous la forme réflexive du “se raconter”, l'identité personnelle se projette comme identité narrative» (Ricœur 2004, 150).

Puisque la réflexion sur l'homme parlant et la réflexion sur l'homme agissant appartiennent à la fois à la problématique de l'homme capable, il s'agit d'une identité construite par le sujet, voire «inventée»: ou bien en tant qu'alternative subjective à l'identité «objective», ou bien en tant qu'identité découverte, reconnue dans l'acte de réception (lors de la lecture).

Une phénoménologie de l'homme capable retiendra de ce détour par la narratologie qu'il revient au lecteur d'intrigues et de récits de s'exercer à reconfigurer ses propres attentes (en fonction des modèles que lui offrent les intrigues engendrées par l'imagination au plan de la fiction). Une «esthétique de la réception», comme celle de H. R. Jauss, a ainsi ajouté un nouveau volet à la théorie narrative, en fonction des concepts d'écriture et de lecture. Ainsi, un lecteur peut déclarer se reconnaître dans tel personnage pris dans telle intrigue. Encore faut-il ajouter que cette appropriation peut revêtir une multitude de formes, depuis le piège de l'imitation servile,

comme chez Emma Bovary, en passant par tous les stades (fascination, suspicion, rejet, recherche de la juste distance à l'égard des modèles d'identification et de leur puissance de séduction). Apprendre à «se raconter», tel pourrait être le bénéfice de cette appropriation critique. Apprendre à se raconter, c'est aussi apprendre à se raconter autrement (Ricœur 2004, 152).

On peut donc conjecturer que l'homme capable est celui qui apprend lire non seulement pour comprendre ce que l'auteur voulait dire, mais pour se comprendre soi-même par la forme (littéraire ou conceptuelle) du texte. Cette vie «fictive» qui est la partie réelle de la vérité de la création et de la réception, est due à l'auteur et en même temps au récepteur. Grâce à cette compréhension, une histoire se révèle en même temps que l'«homme intérieur», indicible jusque-là. Il s'agit de la découverte de soi dans l'acte de lecture, plus précise de la reconnaissance de «soi-même comme un autre» (pour dire comme Ricœur) que le lecteur connaissait vaguement, mais qu'il n'avait pas vraiment rencontré.

La notion d'identité personnelle est en relation avec l'«homme intérieur», avec son essence immortelle. On sait que les personnages créés par les auteurs classiques sont immortels. Dans ce cas, l'identité d'un personnage et l'identité de l'auteur se reflètent une de l'autre, sans avoir à se remplacer. L'homme capable est celui qui peut affirmer quelque chose sur l'homme intérieur, en tant que créateur de personnages construits grâce à ses propres capacités. À son tour, le lecteur peut apprendre par l'exemple de personnage à construire ainsi sa propre histoire, sa propre identité subjective, et ne pas succomber à l'illusion d'une identité irréaliste («bovarique»).

Par la construction et par le récit de son histoire, le narrateur non seulement prend conscience de lui-même, mais il est aussi connu par d'autres gens. La «mise en histoire» peut consister dans l'acte de raconter, mais peut aussi être une «métaphore vive», de la vie du narrateur qui va avec le récit. Celui-ci peut prendre plusieurs formes – de la mythologie, en passant par l'histoire, littérature et imagerie, jusqu'à la philosophie.

La construction identitaire par le sujet narrateur implique aussi la dimension temporelle: «C'est dans cette mesure que l'identité personnelle, considérée dans la durée, peut être définie comme identité narrative», car le «soi-même réflexif» appelé par Ricœur «ipséité» se révèle aussi dans la dimension historique. Selon une herméneutique du soi, «l'idée d'identité narrative donne accès à une nouvelle approche du concept d'ipséité, qui, sans la référence à l'identité narrative, est incapable de déployer sa dialectique spécifique, celle du rapport entre deux sortes d'identité, l'identité immuable de l'idem, du même, et l'identité mobile, de l'*ipse* du soi, considérée dans sa condition historique» (Ricœur 2004, 153).

Dans le cadre de la théorie narrative, le premier terme de la dialectique de la mêmeté et de l'ipséité, à savoir «l'identité idem» pour le même individu



se présente comme «tous les traits de permanence dans le temps, depuis l'identité biologique signée par le code génétique, repérée par les empreintes digitales, à quoi s'ajoute la physionomie, la voix, la démarche, en passant par les habitudes stables ou, comme on dit, contractées, jusqu'aux marques accidentelles par quoi un individu se fait reconnaître à la façon de la grande cicatrice d'Ulysse» (Ricœur 2004, 153). En d'autres termes, « la mêmété » (ou « l'identité idem ») est le fondement ontologique de la personne, situation qui ne peut pas être modifié par l'acte de la narration.

D'autre part, il existe aussi «l'identité – *ipse* », qui relève de la «fiction de produire une multitude de variations imaginatives à la faveur desquelles les transformations du personnage tendent à rendre problématique l'identification du même», jusqu'à «la question nue: qui suis-je ?» (Ricœur 2004, 102).

On peut considérer qu'à cette question le philosophe répond d'une manière indirecte par une citation de Vladimir Jankélévitch choisie comme *motto* pour son livre *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*: «Celui qui a été, ne peut plus désormais ne pas avoir été: désormais se fait mystérieux et profondément obscur d'avoir été est son viatique pour l'éternité ». Mais aussi, quelques pages du *Parcours de la reconnaissance* nous montrent qu'il n'est pas obligatoire que ce dilemme de l'être (présenté d'une manière hamlettienne par Jankélévitch et adopté par Paul Ricœur) suggère *la disparition physique totale* (le la mort doublé de son souvenir éternel). Il peut s'agir, aussi, concernant les individus, du cas de *vieillessement*.

Reconnaître, dans ces conditions, dit Ricœur à l'aide du livre du Marcel Proust (*Le temps retrouvé*), demande un raisonnement concluant «de la simple ressemblance de certains traits à une identité de la personne» (Ricœur 2004, 102). Tout au long de sa vie, un homme effectue un parcours vers l'identité personnelle, qui ne peut être annulé par la disparition de sa jeunesse, de son éclat. L'identité de soi se conserve dans l'éternité de son âme, son essence est reconnaissable au-delà de sa perception immédiate. Le philosophe nous provoque à méditer en signalant l'observation proustienne: «Les visages sont comme des "poupées" extériorisant le Temps, le temps qui d'habitude n'est pas visible». Il est vrai, en cette situation, la reconnaissance s'avère un travail très difficile, restitué par Marcel Proust à l'aide du spectacle d'un dîner «dont toutes les invités des soirées mondaines passées réapparaissent frappés de décrépitude sous les coupes du vieillissement» (Ricœur 2004, 102).

À mon avis, l'ingéniosité de l'écrivain consiste en la transmission du sens philosophique du temps non seulement comme objet de mémoire ou comme intuition du vieillissement et de l'approche de la mort, mais aussi comme perception de «l'identité-ipséité» des individus: le temps en tant que réalité en soi n'est pas visible, mais il détient un sens parce qu'il peut être

perçu et reconnu par l'individu : «Le récit de ce dîner», dit Ricœur, «suffirait à nourrir un petit traité de la reconnaissance» (Ricœur 2004, 102).

Comme le sacré eliadien qui se montre et se cache en même temps, «le Temps, auquel l'âge confère visibilité se révèle comme agent double, de la méconnaissance et de la reconnaissance » (Ricœur 2004, 103). Il y a ici quelque chose du méconnaissable propre au jeu symbolique. Et pourtant le récit du Proust, remarque Ricœur, n'est pas seulement une « méditation désolée » (Ricœur 2004, 103). Il s'agissait, plutôt, d'une suggestion du «mystère» de la vie qui se révèle comme un spectacle dévoilé et mis en scène par l'écrivain, sous la forme du récit. Paul Ricœur lui-même, en interprétant Proust et Dostoïevski ouvre, à son tour, son propre horizon de pensée et affirme sa propre identité: il s'agit d'une philosophe appelée Paul Ricœur, celui qui, en bonne tradition gadamérienne, effectue une «fusion» entre plusieurs horizons pour approcher ce que veut dire le problème de l'identité narrative.

Le tour du problème est accompli «en évoquant une autre dialectique que celle de l'*idem* et de l'*ipse*», c'est-à-dire «la dialectique de l'identité confrontée à l'altérité », qui introduit la question de l'identité à «double versant, privé et public». Ainsi, «une histoire de vie se mêle à celle des autres » (Ricœur 2004, 155).

Par conséquent, l'identité personnelle devient une synthèse narrative entre le niveau individuel et le niveau collectif de l'identité. Le «statut de la mémoire collective au regard de la mémoire individuelle» est l'expression de «la capacité de faire mémoire» qui appartient «à tous les sujets trouvant leur expression lexicale dans l'un quelconque des pronoms personnels, toute collectivité est qualifiée à dire "nous autres", à l'occasion d'opérations particulières de remémoration», qui relèvent une identité narrative fragile (Ricœur 2004, 156). Cette fragilité est manipulée par les idéologies de pouvoir «par le biais de médiations symboliques de l'action, et principalement à la faveur des ressources de variation qu'offre le travail de configuration narrative», «de raconter autrement» et à cet égard «la tentation identitaire, consistant dans le repli de l'identité-*ipse* sur l'identité-*idem*, prospère sur ce sol miné » (Ricœur 2004, 157).

Seule la mémoire non corrompue peut restaurer la véritable identité (personnelle, ou collective) et seul l'homme capable peut faire cet exercice herméneutique et phénoménologique.

### 3. La mémoire, la compréhension, l'identité.

Dans *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli* il y a beaucoup d'autres endroits où l'identité narrative est configurée à l'aide de la mémoire en tant que «province de l'imagination».

C'est là que Ricœur montre comment on peut construire l'identité à l'aide de la mémoire de soi-même: «Ainsi la phénoménologie de la mémoire s'ouvre délibérément sur une analyse tournée vers l'objet de mémoire, le souvenir que l'on a devant l'esprit; elle traverse ensuite le stade de la quête du souvenir, de l'anamnèse, du rappel; on passe enfin de la mémoire donnée et exercée à la mémoire réfléchie, à la mémoire de soi-même» (Ricœur 2000, II).

La problématique commune qui préoccupe à la fois la phénoménologie de la mémoire, l'épistémologie de l'histoire et l'herméneutique de la condition historique est «celle de la représentation du passé»; Ricœur signale, en même temps, que «la question égologique - quoi que signifie *ego* - doit venir après la question intentionnelle, laquelle est impérativement celle de la corrélation entre acte («noèse») et corrélat visé («noème»)). Au-delà de l'étape historiographique de la relation au passé, ce qui intéresse particulièrement le philosophe est «une phénoménologie du souvenir, moment objectal de la mémoire» (Ricœur 2000, 3).

En utilisant l'expression de Paul Ricœur, on peut dire que se souvenir devient un «pouvoir» de «l'homme capable».

D'un certain point de vue, l'homme est capable par excellence d'être phénoménologue. L'historien est le professionnel du souvenir de soi-même, dans un sens générique (à travers les souvenirs des autres). La représentation de l'historien effectuée par Henri-Irénée Marrou, par exemple, se rapproche de vision de l'identité personnelle en tant qu'identité narrative dont la dimension historique est implicite. L'engagement de l'historien, du point de vue de Ricœur, implique aussi «la dimension d'intersubjectivité de la connaissance historique en tant que province de la connaissance d'autrui» (Ricœur 2000, 438) et à cet égard «l'ouvrage parallèle de Henri-Irénée Marrou, *De la connaissance historique*, constituait (...) l'unique tentative de réflexion sur l'histoire risquée par un historien de métier» (Ricœur 2000, 439).

Selon Marrou, l'historien est un homme capable de réfléchir sur les conditions subjectives de compréhension et de rencontrer autrui comme soi-même, de trouver «la sympathie» par l'*epokhè*: «L'historien nous est apparu comme l'homme qui par l'*epokhè* sait sortir de soi pour s'avancer à la rencontre d'autrui. On peut donner un nom à cette vertu, elle s'appelle la sympathie» (Marrou 1954, 92).

Comme Ricœur, Marrou définit la compréhension en tant que «dialectique du Même avec l'Autre» et en outre celle-là «suppose l'existence d'une large base de communion fraternelle entre sujet et objet, entre historien (...) et l'homme qui se révèle à travers le document», ce qui implique une «disposition d'esprit qui nous rend connaturels à autrui, nous permet de ressentir ses passions, de repenser ses idées sous la lumière même où il les vit, en un mot de communier avec l'autre» (Marrou 1954, 93). Plus

que de la sympathie, «entre l'historien et son objet c'est une amitié qui doit se nouer, si l'historien veut comprendre, car, selon la belle formule de saint Augustin, "on ne peut connaître personne sinon par l'amitié"» (Marrou 1954, 93).

Une telle conception sur la sympathie et l'amitié embrasse l'identité personnelle grâce à la définition de l'histoire comme «conquête de la connaissance authentique, de la vérité sur le passé, et d'abord ses documents, dans leur être réel» (Marrou 1954, 94). Pour Marrou, conception que Péguy, par exemple, se faisait d'une amitié appuyée sur la perception d'une identité fictive de l'autre était contestable: «Il aimait chez ses amis l'image idéale qu'il en caressait, quitte à les rejeter lorsqu'il s'apercevait un jour qu'ils n'incarnaient pas, ou pas assez, l'archétype dont il leur avait confié le rôle. Une passion sincère n'abolit pas le sens du réel: je me réjouis en un sens de découvrir même les limites, même les défauts de celui que j'aime, parce que ce contact, parfois brutal, avec l'existant me confirme sa réalité, son altérité essentielle: puisqu'il n'est pas confondu avec mon rêve, c'est donc qu'il n'est pas le fruit d'une illusion complaisante; à qui sait aimer, cette expérience de l'autre, cette sortie de soi permettra de surmonter toute désillusion» (Marrou 1954, 94).

Donc l'historien, selon Marrou, est d'abord celui qui interroge les documents et «son art naît comme herméneutique. Il continue comme compréhension, laquelle est pour l'essentiel interprétation de signes. Il vise à la "rencontre de l'autre"» (Ricœur 2000, 497).

On peut constater que cette compréhension de l'autre en soi-même définit l'identité morale de l'homme capable, autant sa composante personnelle, que celle communautaire. C'est ce que signale aussi Hayden White, analysant *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli* (qu'il considère comme «Ricœur's summa»): «His aim had been to show, after the manner of Kant, how history – demeaned by positivists, existentialists, analytical philosophers, and skeptics in general – was not only possible, but was also necessary to a properly human conception of our humanity, our identities as both individuals and members of communities, and our roles as good citizens of the polities to which we belonged» (White 2007, 233).

Il s'agit d'une approche husserlienne qui permet à Ricœur de formuler le problème de l'identité personnelle et l'identité collective de cette manière: «Si l'on dit trop vite que le sujet de la mémoire est le moi à la première personne du singulier, la notion de mémoire collective ne peut faire figure que de concept analogique, voire de corps étranger dans la phénoménologie de la mémoire. Si l'on veut éviter de se laisser enfermer dans une inutile aporie, alors il faut tenir en suspens la question de l'attribution à quelqu'un – et donc à toutes les personnes grammaticales – de l'acte de se souvenir, et commencer par la question «quoi?»» (Ricœur 2000, II).

Tout comme que dans *Parcours de la reconnaissance*, «la phénoménologie de la mémoire ici propose se structurer autour de deux questions: de quoi y a-t-il souvenir ? de qui est la mémoire?» et dans le même temps «se voit confrontée d'entrée de jeu a une redoutable aporie que le langage ordinaire cautionne: la présence en laquelle semble consister la représentation du passé paraît bien être celle d'une image» (Ricœur 2000, 5).

Dans cette image on reconnaît l'identité personnelle. Toutefois, une telle identité imaginé sélectionne seulement les composants convenables de l'image de soi, à savoir celles qui correspondent à une images pour le moins supportable que nous faisons sur nous-mêmes.

Il est possible, certes, nous nous percevions différemment que les autres qui nous voient, que nous conservons uniquement ce que nous considérons important. Même si l'identité subjective est vraie, elle doit être confrontée à l'image que les autres ont de nous (qu'elle soit bonne ou mauvaise).

Pour récapituler: selon Ricœur, l'homme capable peut dire, faire, raconter des histoires et se reconnaître soi-même (ici réside la possibilité de construire une identité personnelle). Mais chacun possède ses propres perceptions et souvenirs, dont certains sont difficiles à accepter. On peut constater qu'un homme capable est celui qui résiste à ses propres souvenirs douloureux et désagréable et les accepte avec réalisme (étant une partie de son identité). Et pourtant, dans ce jeu de mémoire et d'histoire, il est besoin d'un «oublie créatif» pour guérir la mélancolie existentielle fondamentale de la personne humaine, comme Hayden points, à partir de Ricœur: «We can immediately see, however, that 'the historical condition' indicates an existential situation in which human beings are caught in a complex interplay of the three modes (...) of temporality: present, future, and past, in which conventional historical knowledge (the history of the historians) has the function of obscuring and repressing recognition of that 'being towards death' which is the ultimate cause of human anxiety, melancholy, and despair and the principal impediment to the achievement of the kind of love that would make creative 'forgiveness' (of oneself as well as of others) possible» (White 2007, 237).

Ici, le thème du pardon s'inscrit dans le cadre de la notion de mémoire, dans la mesure où le pardon renvoie à des événements et périodes historiques tragiques, qui ont laissé des traces profondes dans la conscience des victimes ou de leurs descendants. Le pouvoir transformateur du pardon au niveau individuel est bien connu dans le christianisme, mais Ricœur se demande s'il est également valable au niveau collectif, puisque le pardon ne peut pas être demandé directement aux victimes. Sans éluder les aspects éthiques, il écrit : «En un sens, le pardon fait couple avec l'oubli: n'est-il pas une sorte d'oubli heureux ? Plus fondamentalement encore, n'est-il pas la figure d'une mémoire réconciliée? Certes. (...) D'une part, le pardon fait référence à la culpabilité et à la punition; or l'ensemble de nos analyses a

élué cette problématique. Le problème de la mémoire a été fondamentalement celui de la fidélité au passé; or la culpabilité apparaît comme une composante supplémentaire au regard de la reconnaissance des images du passé. Il n'en va pas autrement avec l'histoire: son enjeu aura été la vérité dans son rapport critique à la fidélité de la mémoire; certes, on n'aura pas pu ne pas évoquer les grands crimes du XX-ème siècle (...). Mais la difficulté est précisément d'exercer le jugement historique dans un esprit d'impartialité sous le signe de la condamnation morale.» (Ricœur 2000, 375).

L'oubli est créateur, non seulement en ce qu'il libère l'esprit de l'abus de la mémoire, de son excès stérile, et permet de nouvelles expériences (d'autres connaissances, d'autres souvenirs et mémoires renouvelés). Dans l'extension de la mémoire en tant que mine d'images mise en œuvre par l'imagination, l'oubli est créateur au sens éthique et religieux.. Ainsi, le sens proprement chrétienne du pardon apparaît comme une sorte de réponse au devoir de mémoire, consistant d'un *devoir d'oublier*, pour *pardonner*. L'œuvre de Paul Ricœur *Amour et justice* est un plaidoyer à cet égard. Si la mémoire créatrice à l'aide de l'imagination peut parfois servir les idéologies, l'oubli créateur, au niveau de l'histoire collective, signifie la libération de toute idéologie.

En fait, le problème de l'identité personnelle en tant qu'identité narrative peut être considérée comme une possible réponse à la question: «Qu'est-ce que les gens pensent d'eux-mêmes?». Comment se rapportent-ils à l'aventure de leur propre conscience ?

Selon Ricœur, cette «aventure» va «du souvenir à la mémoire réfléchie en passant par la réminiscence» (Ricœur 2000, 4) et fait partie de la «pragmatique» de construction de l'identité, caractéristique de l'homme doué de la capacité à faire quelque chose avec sa propre mémoire, autant en termes de recherche et de retour nostalgique à soi-même, que dans le sens de décryptage de mystère de la vie qui éveillent la curiosité sur sa jeunesse, comme le montre Hayden White : «The younger Ricœur (...) existentialistically believed that human being was a mystery, human existence a paradox» (White 2007, 236).

L'identité personnelle ne consiste donc pas seulement dans la conscience du «je suis moi-même, et si je suis, il n'y a pas un autre moi-même dans le même temps et sous le même rapport», mais aussi dans le point de vue des autres sur «la même chose» qui se «contient» lui-même d'une manière à la fois transparente et mystérieuse. Au cours des petites histoires personnelles et surtout de la grande histoire collective, certaines caractéristiques des êtres humains et des communautés dans lesquelles ils évoluent perdent le sens initiale ou acquièrent des connotations différentes, et par conséquent, les identités et les conceptions sur l'identité changent.

Bref, selon Ricœur, la chute dans l'histoire signifie que chaque individu et chaque collectivité doivent construire leur propre identité tout en tenant le

fil du récit, sachant que «l'interprétation s'avère (...) avoir même ampleur que le projet de vérité. Cette considération justifie sa place au terme du parcours réflexif» (Ricœur 2000, 388).

## **Conclusion**

Ce texte a exploré la relation entre mémoire, histoire et identité selon la perspective de Ricœur, pour qui le concept de mémoire intègre ceux d'histoire et d'oubli.

Grâce à la mémoire, l'imagination peut ramener dans le présent des événements du passé et, en ce sens, la mémoire (en tant que «province de l'imagination»), pourrait jouer un rôle heuristique, *i.e.* identifier l'usage idéologique, légitimateur du pouvoir, mais aussi construire une identité authentique, afin de comprendre l'être humain.

Dire qu'on ne pas oublié un fait passé, cela revient à en témoigner. L'histoire racontée fait entrer dans le présent un temps qui ne se trouve que dans la mémoire, un temps sans lequel l'identité personnelle ou collective serait perdue. Pour cette raison, on peut soutenir, avec Greisch (2011, 36), que l'œuvre de Ricœur est «une herméneutique philosophique de l'espérance».

## **Références**

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## Max Stirner's Pure Egoism and Involuntary Egoism in Dostoevsky's Works

**Abstract:** Nineteenth-century European philosophical ideas were largely known to Russian intellectuals. A significant example in this sense is the reception of Max Stirner's radical conceptions by the great thinker Fyodor Dostoevsky. The German philosopher, theorist of egoism, seemed to be expected by the Russian writer because he could provide an explanatory framework for the manifestations of many characters in the society of the "age of progress". Dostoevsky knew Stirner's major work, *The Ego and Its Own*, from a young age, when he attended the Petrashevsky Circle. In his first great novel, *The Insulted and Injured*, the Russian author presented a purely Stirnerian character, Prince Valkovsky. And during his maturity, Dostoevsky created particularly complex characters, which nuanced much of the type of egoism theorized by Stirner. This article presents two categories of characters, included in the Stirnerian classification of "pure egoism" and "involuntary egoism". Only a few of these characters can be called Stirnerian, so we can say that Stirner's influence on Dostoevsky was limited and exercised only during the Russian writer's youth. Starting from Stirner's radical conception of egoism, Dostoevsky showed, on the one hand, the possible consequences of practicing egoism, and, on the other hand, the possible solutions for overcoming the fixation on one's self. For the latter case, Emmanuel Levinas could be a good example, because he conceived his philosophy, for the most part, starting from *The Brothers Karamazov* and reached conclusions opposed to those of Max Stirner. Most of the European ideas were received, in the second half of the nineteenth century, only partially by Russian thinkers, giving them, in addition, features specific to the Slavic environment in which they were circulating.

**Keywords:** pure egoism, involuntary egoism, everything is lawful, unique, nothing, interest, ideal, oneness, Max Stirner, Dostoevsky.

### Max Stirner, a forgotten and rediscovered philosopher

In the 1897 preface to the first book dedicated to the life and work of Max Stirner, John Henry Mackay reproaches the Germans for having completely forgotten one of their most daring philosophers: "the Germans have so long and so completely forgotten their boldest and most consequent thinker, that they have lost any right to the gift of his life" (Mackey 2005, viii). An Englishman would thus rediscover and "resuscitate"

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(Lévy 1905, 9) the one whom Lange, in *Histoire du Matérialisme*, would consider to be the author of the “most exaggerated known books” (Lévy 1905, 13), *The Ego and Its Own*.

In the autumn of 1844, Johann Kaspar Schmidt (1806-1856), a former student of Hegel and a member of the anarchist circle *The Free*, published the book *The Ego and Its Own*, under the pseudonym Max Stirner. The book was a surprise to his acquaintances, who knew only hearsay that the discreet member of the circle of left-wing Hegelians was preparing a volume. At that time censorship considered the book “too absurd” to be dangerous and gave its approval for publication. At first, Stirner’s volume caused some stir, due to the radical ideas he proposed. “The youth especially, as was said, eagerly seized the daring deed” (Mackey 2005, 128). Stirner had dared not only to criticize accepted concepts “from all eternity” - such as justice, duty, and morality - but even to nullify them. “Curiously, however, Stirner found among his admirers no real followers [Anhänger]. Basically, there was no one there who could grasp the real significance of his work to its full extent” (Mackey 2005, 131).

Stirner believes that there is nothing above oneself. Starting from Hegel’s pantheism, he arrives at the uniqueness of the ego and the continuous progress of the individual. Stirner’s egoism has a “democratic” character because it applies to everyone and not just to an elite as Nietzsche would later consider. The individual’s desire for independence leads to the denial of any moral rule and the rejection of any traditionalist attitude. From Christianity, Stirner adopts the revolt against nature and society, but condemns the Church, because he thought that it turned believers into slaves.

David Halbrook has considered Max Stirner “the unacknowledged prophet of today's fashionable culture” (Holbrook 1977, 382), because he foresaw the transformation of the European culture into a nihilist one, by denying the Christian values, the authority of the state and traditional morals. According to the German philosopher, the essence of man is based on nothing - Stirner’s book *The Ego and its Own* begins and ends with these words: “All things are nothing to me”. But his nihilism is different from anarchism, as well as from existentialism, because it focuses on egoism. He reduces the world and all other people to simple objects of consumption: “For me, no one is a person to be respected, not even the fellowman, but solely, like other beings, an object in which I take an interest or else do not, an interesting or uninteresting object, a usable or unusable person” (Stirner 1995, 274). Thus, “we can hear in every phrase of Stirner’s the attitude to life of today’s cultural nihilist” (Holbrook 1977, 382).

Immediately after the publication of *The Ego and its Own* in 1845 Stirner’s philosophy made some noise in Europe and begun to be known and discussed, even by the Russian intellectuals. For example, Dostoevsky

knows Stirner's book quite early on and makes use of it in his literary writings. Of course, Dostoevsky's deep Christianity and his Christocentric conception of man led him to an attitude contrary to Stirner's.

Dostoevsky uses Stirnerian egocentrism in describing his characters to show the consequences of egoism taken to the extreme, but also to suggest possible ways of freeing oneself from its "tyranny". A century later, the great French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas will become deeply marked by Dostoevsky's conceptions and will develop a philosophical vision opposite to that of Max Stirner. "When Levinas speaks about our essential asymmetrical relation to the other, he frequently quotes the famous statement of Alyosha Karamazov: «Everyone is guilty in front of everyone else, and me more than others»" (Bernstein 2004, 257). For Levinas, the Other cannot be considered simply a means to achieve one's end but is an opportunity for personal fulfilment by establishing a harmonious relationship with him. Levinas founded his philosophy on "the thesis that each and every human being has an infinite responsibility to the «other»" (Blumenfeld 2018, 98), an idea he took from *The Brothers Karamazov*. In this way, Levinas gives a Dostoevskian response to Stirner's individualistic challenges, so one can read Dostoevsky from Levinas to Stirner, from *Totality and Infinity* to *The Ego and Its Own*.

### **Dostoevsky and Max Stirner**

In the spring of 1847, Dostoevsky met Mikhail Butashevich-Petrashevsky and began to frequent his circle of friends (Frank 1976, 244). Petrashevsky was a cultivated Russian nobleman with European views, often hostile to the Petersburg authorities. An enthusiastic Fourierist, Petrashevsky invited his friends, beginning in 1840, for discussions in a "circle" concerned with philosophical and cultural topics in general, starting with the recent, "forbidden" books he had in his rich library.

The young Dostoevsky thus had the opportunity to enrich his philosophical culture by participating in debates about recently published European books and articles. Often, one of the participants prepared, based on the readings, a paper that he presented to others, followed by heated discussions and debates. They were discussing "absolutely about everything, though the balance was tilted, without any doubt, in favour of social theories" (Frank 1976, 246). As he later stated in his deposition to the commission of inquiry after his arrest, Dostoevsky presented only three times a speech to the circle: once about literature, in a dispute with Petrashevsky about Krylov; and twice "about personality and egoism" (Frank 1976, 250). The last two speeches were, no doubt, determined by reading Max Stirner's book, *The Ego and Its Own*. Stirner was already known to Dostoevsky from his discussions with Belinsky (Frank 1976, 188).

Stirner's narrow view of egoism had been extended by Belinsky, who considered that "egoistical interests are identical with that of mankind as a whole" (Frank 1976, 188). As a matter of fact, the theme of egoism was widely discussed at that time. Herzen, for example, was arguing about the essential side of egoism, without which the "vital principle" of man ("the salt of his personality") would have been eradicated (Frank 1976, 233). Dostoevsky had a similar vision and asserted a "necessary egoism" as a manifestation of human dignity (Frank 1976, 233). According to Joseph Frank, we find this "necessary egoism" in many of the characters in Dostoevsky's youthful works: from Pokrovsky, Devushkin, or Emelyan Ilyich – in *Poor Folk* and *An Honest Thief* – to Golyatkyin, in *The Double*. Correspondingly, the lack of "necessary egoism" leads to neurotic disorders, as in the case of Prokharchin, in *Mr. Prokharchin*, or that of Vasya Shumkov, in *A Weak Heart* (Frank 1976, 233). But all these characters cannot be considered "Stirnerian": we find in them a "Russian vision" of egoism, which the young Dostoevsky had borrowed from Belinsky or Herzen. Only in Dostoevsky's first novel, *The Insulted and Injured*, do we meet the first "Stirnerian" character, Prince Valkovsky, who asserts a fierce egoism, by no means "necessary". Valkovsky is the first "malefic" character in Dostoevsky's series of negative characters, who become repulsive through his egoism and cynicism. He appears to Ivan Petrovitch as "some sort of reptile, some huge spider which I felt an intense desire to crush" (Dostoevsky 1915, 238).

Stirner distinguishes between the "pure egoist", who absolutizes his person, and the "involuntary egoist", who recognizes something superior outside of himself. We will analyze, in this article, some of Dostoevsky's characters that fall somewhat into this classification, and we will try to see to what extent they can be called "Stirnerian". In other words, we will seek to see to what degree Dostoevsky's creation is dependent on Max Stirner's philosophical conceptions. Among the "pure egoists," we will stop at Valkovsky, Underground man, Stavrogin, and Fyodor Karamazov. And among the "involuntary egoists", at Raskolnikov, Grand Inquisitor, Kirilov, and Ivan Karamazov.

### **Pure egoism**

Stirner's plea for egoism starts from his opinion that the spiritual world is the result of those who believe in an "another world", apart from the sensual world. The egoist is the one who "will dissolve the spirit into its *nothing*" and "does his will as an absolute I" (Stirner 1995, 66). There is only this world that we see, and in it reigns egoism, from one end to the other. Mankind uses individuals and nations only for its self-interest, so Stirner rhetorically asks: "Is not mankind's – a purely egoistic cause?"

(Stirner 1995, 6). God himself, conceived as an “all in all”, is preoccupied only with his interest: “His cause is – a purely egoistic cause” (Stirner 1995, 6).

This is why the German philosopher naturally declares his exclusive concern for his person: “My concern is neither the divine nor the human, not the true, good, just, free, etc., but solely what is *mine* [*das Meinige*], and it is not a general one, but is – *unique* [*einzig*], as I am unique. Nothing is more to me than myself!” (Stirner 1995, 6). At the suggestion of his friend, Bruno Bauer, Stirner considers this radical view of the world as a “new discovery”, that brings to an end Feuerbach’s idea that man is the supreme being and the only God of man.

Stirner rejects the idea that the self can be viewed as a person because it does not have general features – as Jacob Blumenfeld rightfully remarks (Blumenfeld 2018, 56). To believe in generalities means to theologize, “to import essences behind things, to act like the adolescent *Cristian* who trust in spirits” (Blumenfeld 2018, 56). Stirner rejects the absolutization of universals because they express only parts of the truth – which only the uniqueness of individuals can contain. Hence, from this stems Stirner’s rejection of Christianity, especially the traditional, person-centred one. Also, his rejection of liberalism has the same origins. In his sense the self is unique even if it has similarities with others: “My flesh is not their flesh, my mind is not their mind. If you bring them under the generalities «flesh, mind», those are your *thoughts*, which have nothing to do with *my* flesh, *my* mind” (Stirner 1995, 124). R.W.K. Paterson considers that Stirner applied the method of Hegelian dialectic when presenting the stages of human life: the child – realist; the young man – idealist; the adult – egoist (Paterson 1971, 40). In childhood, we discover the world starting from the laws of nature, which we experience and acquire an earthly attitude. Youth brings forth a heavenly vision, “an intellectual position” (Stirner 1995, 15), and an inclination towards abstract, absolute ideas: the search for an ideal. But maturity frees us from these “illusions” and “takes the world as it is” (Stirner 1995, 16). The ideal is replaced by interest. The mature person is an egoist pursuing “total satisfaction, a satisfaction of the whole chap, a *selfish* [*eigennütziges*] interests” (Stirner 1995, 16). The transition from youth to maturity, from ideal to interest, is considered by Stirner progress, because the mature is a man “defined”, a “practical” person. So, we have these three stages: the child – with unintellectual interests, the young – with intellectual ones (ideals), and the adult – with egoistical interests.

Dostoevsky often returns, throughout his work, to the difference between people guided by ideals and those driven by interests. However, his vision is a “traditional” one, which Stirner had rejected. The Russian thinker considers practical, egoist people, driven only by their self-interest, as a sign

of human decay, certainly not of progress. Thus, he chooses his positive characters from those who have an ideal. Valkovsky, Svidrigailov, Stavrogin can fascinate as great egoists, but they have something dark and morbid in them. Myshkin, Alyosha Karamazov, and Zosima are prone to forget about themselves, are open to others and have something bright and soothing in them. According to Stirner's framework, we should consider "mature" only the former and the latter, remaining in their youth, not yet ripe.

The pure egoism to which Stirner refers consists in the rejection of any external or internal constraints, the refusal to submit to any authority outside of oneself and to any moral imperatives. The state is an enemy of the egoist: "We two, the state and I, are enemies. I, the egoist, have not at heart the welfare of this «human society». I sacrifice nothing to it, I only utilize it" (Stirner 1995, 161). The people to which the egoist belongs tie him down and demand sacrifice: "Every people, every state, is unjust toward the egoist" (Stirner 1995, 192). The weaker the people, the easier for the individual to rise: "The people are dead. – Up with me!" (Stirner 1995, 193). The family is hostile to the egoist: "If the family is sacred, then nobody who belongs to it may secede from it" (Stirner 1995, 193). The family "ranks as the sacred whose despotism is tenfold more grievous because it makes a racket in my conscience" (Stirner 1995, 81). The church, in turn, uses an artificial construct, the result of thoughts and ideas, which ended in a world of ghosts and spooks, which it sanctified. But "everything sacred is a tie, a fetter" (Stirner 1995, 192). Morality presupposes obligations and duties, a ruthless master of the egoist: "The spirit of morality and legality holds him a prisoner; a rigid, unbending master" (Stirner 1995, 60). For the egoist, all these constraints are the result of the people's illusions, of their "sacralization". The proof is the fact that those who cannot have such illusions, children, and animals, are not restricted by them: "State, emperor, church, God, morality, order, are such thoughts or spirits that exist only for the mind. A merely living being, an animal, cares as little for them as a child" (Stirner 1995, 65). The egoist rejects all these external constraints, not in the name of freedom, but because of his egoistic interests.

In Dostoevsky, Underground man especially expresses this kind of "egoistic interests". He does not even question the general interests, which he has already rejected through his isolation from society but refers only to individual ones. Of these, he is particularly concerned with a "most advantageous advantage", which goes beyond the usually recognized advantages: "prosperity, wealth, freedom, peace – and so on, and so on" (Dostoevsky 1951a, 142). Underground man starts from the observation that: "a man's advantage, *sometimes*, not only may but even must, consist in his desiring in certain cases what is harmful to himself and not advantageous" (Dostoevsky 1951a, 142). Of course, such an advantage has not been included in the lists of the statisticians who measure the people's

“standard of living” and as Underground man also recognizes, it cannot appear on that list. Struggling to find it, Underground man finds it precisely in this type of “egoistic interests” and defines it as follows: “One’s own free unfettered choice, one’s own caprice – however wild it may be, one’s own fancy worked up at times to frenzy – is that most advantageous advantage which we have overlooked, which comes under no classification and against which all systems and theories are continually being shattered to atoms” (Dostoevsky 1951a, 146). More concisely: “What man wants is simply *independent* choice, whatever that independence may cost and wherever it may lead” (Dostoevsky 1951a, 146).

Without “theorizing” this type of extreme egoism, several other Dostoevsky's characters practice it, leading it, in certain situations, to extreme consequences. We will stop here at three other such characters: Valkovsky, Stavrogin, and Fyodor Karamazov.

Valkovsky regards life as something that must be used commercially, in order to delight his own person: “Life is a commercial transaction, don't waste your money, but kindly play for your entertainment, and you will be doing your whole duty to your neighbour” (Dostoevsky 1915, 246). Valkovsky refuses any action which does not benefit himself: “I will never give up what’s to my advantage for anyone” (Dostoevsky 1915, 249).

We have seen that for Stirner the relationship with the other is based on utility. The world must be “consumed” to satiate the egoist hunger: “I consume it to quiet the hunger of my egoism” (Stirner 1995, 263); and the other is a simple “food”: “For me you are nothing but - my food, even as I too am fed upon and turned to use by you” (Stirner 1995, 263).

Valkovsky deliberately practices immorality, from the debauchery in which he lives to the cynicism with which he uses his son, Alyosha, to reach his goals. For him, morality is only a social convention, “invented simply for the sake of comfort” (Dostoevsky 1915, 242). If greater advantages can be obtained by immoral means, then these means are the most appropriate to be used. But Valkovsky is not satisfied only with these delights; he also increases them by shocking those around him, in a way that he finds exciting: just like that Parisian man – about whom he relates with satisfaction to Ivan Petrovitch – who was going out naked on the streets of the city, covered only with a wide cloak, which he unfolded in front of a lone passer-by, to show his nakedness and to cause shock, Valkovsky also likes to wear the “mask” of a well-bred man, elegant, polite and generous, and suddenly he takes off this “mask” and show his true looks: egoistic, cynical, mocking. Significant in this regard is the memorable scene in the restaurant, from *The Insulted and Injured*, when he speaks seemingly very friendly to Ivan Petrovich, posing as a generous gentleman, and suddenly he tells: “I’m revengeful and malicious” (Dostoevsky 1915, 249). In fact, all the nice words of a “well-bred” man which he had been used until then were

nothing but mockery and contempt: "I really did want to spit upon the whole business and to spit upon it before your eyes, too" (Dostoevsky 1915, 249). His interlocutor – whom he had called, all evening while they were together at the table, "my poet" and "my young friend" – tells him that he had guessed his thoughts: "You have not considered me as a human being" (Dostoevsky 1915, 251). For Valkovsky, there are no "human beings", but only individuals whom he can use to reach his egoist goals, and finally discard them with contempt.

Stavrogin has, in *The Devils*, the same disdain for the others. He lives in debauchery, although he does not love depravity, both because of his excessive sensuality, but also to defy convenience. In order to overcome any "limit", he marries a poor cripple, unsound of mind, for the sake of the "contrast" between a "perfect" young man like him and an insignificant being like her. Back in the town where his mother lived, he behaves impeccably, but suddenly he does strange and defiant acts: at the club, he grabs old Gaganov – who used to say: "No, sir, they won't lead me by the nose!" (Dostoevsky 1972, 58) – by the nose and drags him across the room; at home to Liputin – who had a young wife and was very jealous – Stavrogin kisses his wife in front of everyone, and then says to the stunned husband only "Don't be angry" (Dostoevsky 1972, 61). When called by the governor Ivan Osipovich, – a close friend of the Stavrogin family – to explain the scandal at the club with Gaganov, he bites the ear of the old statesman, then simulates madness crises, although many suspect him of playing theatre and making fun of everyone. Similar to Valkovsky, Stavrogin likes to wear a mask – under which he looks like a man from "the good world", with impeccable behaviour – which he will suddenly take off revealing his frightening egoism. Maria Timofeyevna, his crippled and half-mad wife, but with a pure soul, guesses his true character best – which surprises Stavrogin, who disregards her. She compares him to Grishka Otrepyev, the impostor who claimed to be the son of the tsar, to ascend the throne of Russia. The one she had believed to be when he married her, "a bright falcon and a prince", suddenly appears to her as "an owl and a shopkeeper" (Dostoevsky 1972, 283). This double identity is a constant of Stavrogin and it gives him a special egoistic delight. Shatov also critiques him for it: while Stavrogin had suggested atheistic ideas to Kirilov, he had held sermons to Kirilov on the messianic mission of the Russian people. In short, Stavrogin's egoism manifests itself in this way: to speak detachedly about the most contrary things and even to live in the most contrary conditions. His last words, written before committing suicide, express succinctly his whole "egoistic belief": "No one is to blame. I did it myself" (Dostoevsky 1972, 668). In his boundless pride, he could not have conceived that someone else could ever determine him to hang himself.

The fourth “pure egoist” that we have set out to analyse here, Fyodor Karamazov, also ends with a violent death. But he is too overwhelmed by debauchery to commit suicide and he ends up being murdered by one of his four sons. In the old Karamazov we are shown the immorality of the egoist taken to the extreme: he lives only for his pleasures, being proud that he has nothing holy. He finds special delight in mocking what is sacred to others: he tramples on the icon in front of which his second wife, the mother of Ivan and Alyosha, used to pray; he behaves like a jester in the convent where his son Alyosha lived; he offends the monks there, judging them by criteria that he has invented. Fyodor Karamazov does not need a mask, he feels a special pleasure to show himself in all his ugliness, defying, mocking, and dirtying everything. He had conceived the fourth son, the epileptic Smerdyakov, with the madwoman Lizaveta Smerdyastchaya, on the side of a ditch on a dark night. He boasts about his debauchery and tries to buy the fiancée of his elder son, Grushenka. When he asks the abbot Zosima, more as mockery, what he should do to gain “eternal life”, the old monk answers that he is smart enough to know what to do: not to drink, not to chatter, to give up the bodily passions and the money-hunger. Then the abbot summarizes all this to something that Fyodor Karamazov wouldn’t have thought about: to stop lying, neither to others, nor, especially, to himself, explaining to him: “The man who lies to himself and listens to his own lie comes to such a pass that he cannot distinguish the truth within him, or around him, and so loses all respect for himself and for others” (Dostoevsky 1925, 42). Without respect, no one can love, and without love, everyone becomes possessed by passions and bodily temptations. Therefore, everything starts with lying. This idea is reiterated by Dostoevsky in *The Dream of a Ridiculous Man*, where a “ladder of evil” is presented, which has as its first step the lie. The people of Happy Island had lived in peace and harmony with themselves and with nature until they learned to lie: “They learned to lie, grew fond of lying, and discovered the charm of falsehood” (Dostoevsky 1951b, 242). The lie dissipated their love, which failed in sensuality; this led to jealousy and then to cruelty. Innocent people like children, whom the Ridiculous Man had found on the island, gradually became accustomed to all forms of evil, until they were led to crave the suffering rooted in evil: “They thirsted for suffering and said that truth could only be attained through suffering” (Dostoevsky 1951b, 243). This inevitably led to a lack of capacity to love the others and an exclusive concern with one’s own self, therefore an egoism of the type of Fyodor Karamazov: “Everyone began to love himself better than anyone else, and indeed they could not do otherwise” (Dostoevsky 1951b, 244).

### **Involuntary Egoism**



In addition to this “pure egoism”, there is – based on Max Stirner – an “involuntary egoism”, specific to the one who “is looking after his own and yet does not count himself as the highest being, who serves only himself and at the same time always thinks he is serving a higher being” (Stirner 1995, 37). What is above the involuntary egoist is only a pretext to lie to himself that he is sacrificing for a greater cause. However, the involuntary egoist is a slave to his own illusions and cannot really be called an egoist, who has an “almighty ego” (Stirner 1995, 149). The involuntary egoist only provokes “the phenomenon of *cheated* egoism, where I satisfy not myself, but one of my desires” (Stirner 1995, 149). This type of unconscious egoism is not the true egoism that Stirner preaches: “you are egoists, and you are not, since you renounce egoism” (Stirner 1995, 149).

Raskolnikov is such an “involuntary egoist.” On the one hand, he has an ideal, he fights for a higher idea: to do good to all humankind and sacrifice himself for it, as “superior people” have done in the past, the great spirits who changed the course of history. On the other hand, he is only an unconscious egoist seeking to prove to himself that he is more than a common person, but that he can overcome through his own powers the marginal condition in which he finds himself. Raskolnikov is not honest with himself, he does not admit that he only follows his own interest, but he uses grand ideas to hide his “cheap egoism”. Dostoevsky’s great merit is that he shows the possible consequences of such an involuntary egoism. Raskolnikov goes from generosity to egoism: he gives his last money to help those in need, he enters a burning house to save a child, and he helps selflessly. But an idea begins to haunt him: is he a superior man, one of the few chosen to help humanity, and is he allowed to kill someone who would stand in the way of his great achievements? His involuntary egoism begins when he aims to verify “in practice” this idea: that is when he starts viewing himself as “the chosen one” and begins to think exclusively of himself, although he permanently talks about “the greater purpose”.

The Grand Inquisitor is another example of an “involuntary egoist”, who makes an “ideal” of freeing people from the weight of freedom. He sees in Christ – the one who laid the freedom at the foundation of his teaching – a usurper of the order of this world. But the ordinary man is too weak to bear the “burden” of freedom; he needs food, miracles (entertainment), and power. In the name of freedom Christ had rejected all three on the “Mount of Temptation”. But only a few, the “chosen” ones (and the Grand Inquisitor counts himself as one) can take up the difficult task of freedom. The ordinary man wants to be happy here on earth, by satisfying his own needs. In their name, rather than that of freedom, he rebels against any external constraint. By his idolatrous nature man seeks someone before whom to worship and to whom to offer the burden of one’s own freedom: “Man is tormented by no greater anxiety than to find

someone quickly to whom he can hand over that gift of freedom with which the ill-fated creature is born” (Dostoevsky 1925, 279). Freedom is seductive but brings with it a lot of suffering, claims the Grand Inquisitor. The freeman must decide for himself what is good and what is bad. If he insists on the path of free thought, he can get into insoluble and torturous situations, which lead to only three options: to destroy himself (the proud rebel); to destroy others (the weak rebel); to become the slave of the strong (the weak and unhappy) (Dostoevsky 1925, 284). Those in the first two categories reach nihilism and anarchism; the last category is conformists, subjects to authority, the inhabitants of the “swarm”. Unlike them, the Grand Inquisitor is part of the category of “involuntary egoists”, one of the “chosen”, the only ones who can bear the burden of freedom. He is amongst those who say that they want the happiness of the weak ones, but who seek only to satiate their egoistic thirst for power and for dominating.

Kirilov is also an “involuntary egoist” who aims to free people from the fear of death. He rejects all morality and “is in favour of the latest principle of general destruction for the sake of the ultimate good” (Dostoevsky 1972, 106). Stepan Verkhovensky describes him as one of those people who “supposent la nature et la société humaine autres que Dieu ne les a faites et qu’elles ne sont réellement” (Dostoevsky 1972, 132). Kirilov not only rethinks the human condition but also wants to shift its foundation. He is one of those who want to replace the truth with the knowledge of the truth – which Dostoevsky mentions in *Notes from Underground* and *The Dream of a Ridiculous Man*. Man can be happy, Kirilov argues, if he becomes aware of this happiness: “Man is unhappy because he doesn’t know that he’s happy” (Dostoevsky 1972, 243). The world, for Kirilov, is “the best of all possible worlds”, so that everything that happens around us is good, whether it brings suffering or not. To be happy, we just need to be aware of this “universal harmony”: “All’s good – all. It is good for all those who know that’s good” (Dostoevsky 1972, 244). Hence, a total detachment from everything and an exclusive preoccupation with oneself: the world does not need to be changed, but only accepted as it is; all attention must be focused on one’s person, where the source of truth and happiness lies. Man must overcome himself, and his greatest weakness is the fear of death – when he overcomes it, he will be completely free: “Full freedom will come only when it makes no difference whether to live or not to live. That’s the goal for everybody” (Dostoevsky 1972, 125). He will become a “new man”, proud and happy, “to whom it won’t matter if he lives or not” (Dostoevsky 1972, 126). Kirilov calls such man a “man-god”, who will replace God-man who was before him. Man’s victory over suffering and death will renew everything: “Then there will be a new life, a new man, everything will be new” (Dostoevsky 1972, 126). The earth and man will also transform physically, and all things and feelings will change. So, everything is in man’s

victory over himself, and this is proven by his capacity to commit suicide rationally and consciously: proof of overcoming the fear of suffering and death. Kirilov commits suicide in this way and believes that with this act begins the great change of the world. In fact, all this mystical-nihilistic delirium of Kirilov stems from his extreme egoism, from his will to power, from his desire to prove to everyone that he is the “Man-god” and outside of him there is no other power who could defeat him.

Ivan Karamazov has the same pride and will to power. Ivan was trained, like Kirilov, at the school of positivist natural sciences, and he has a rationalist-atheist worldview. For his brother Alyosha, who observes him with love and concern, Ivan appears to be preoccupied with something very important. The family reunion in the cell of the abbot Zosima, from the beginning of the novel *Brothers Karamazov*, shows us the first revelation of Ivan’s turmoil. He approaches a religious issue, the love for others, starting from the results of modern science and concludes that no law of nature would force him to love “his neighbour”.

The love for others comes from the faith in the immortality of the soul. Without this belief, nothing can stop man to be immoral and “everything would be lawful, even cannibalism” (Dostoevsky 1925, 71). The moral laws of nature must be changed for those who believe neither in God nor in immortality, and another maxim should be put in their place: “egoism, even crime, must become not only lawful but even recognized as the inevitable, the most rational, even honourable outcome of his position” (Dostoevsky 1925, 71). Ivan takes up Stirner’s presumption that only the visible world exists and analyses its consequences. But unlike the German philosopher, Ivan doubts that egoism could be the definitive solution. Throughout the great novel, we see him permanently concerned with this “everything is lawful”, which defines pure egoism. After Smerdyakov puts into practice this principle, suggested by Ivan, and kills Fyodor Karamazov, Ivan is remorseful and pleads guilty for his father’s death. In fact, since his university studies, Ivan had asked himself torturous questions about the suffering of innocent children and had written the poem *Grand Inquisitor*, in which the luminous figure of Christ appeared, as a possible answer to his turmoil. All these various preoccupations make Ivan an “involuntary egoist”, who pursues his own interests – that of understanding the world by his own powers and thus proving his superiority - but who cannot remain indifferent to the suffering of others.

### **Conclusions**

Max Stirner considers egoism to be the basic feature of the world in which we live. All people, without exception, are egoists, even the God they make, in their imagination, is an “egoistic” one. The German philosopher considers that this egoism must not be rejected, but honestly accepted.

Instead of so-called “ideals”, man must sincerely affirm his own interests and therefore become “pure egoist”. Stirner denies community values based on religion, morals, family, patriotism etc. All of these involve sacrifice, which affects personal satisfaction. The egoist is a “worldly man” (Stirner 1995, 74), who does not recognize any authority outside of him. However, Stirner does not preach freedom, but ownness [Die Eigenheit]. The thirst for freedom implies the negation of the ego, the lack of ownness. Freedom is illusory, but ownness presupposes the fullness of all existence and expresses the individual himself.

In Dostoevsky’s works, this type of pure egoism appears in the person of Valkovsky, who does not seek freedom, but money, the power it gives him, and the possibility to dominate others. Freedom leads, sooner or later, to dependence on something external, and can even lead to slavery. In *The Devil*, analysing the social consequences of freedom, Shigalyov concludes that it inevitably leads to despotism: “Starting from unlimited freedom, I arrived at unlimited despotism” (Dostoevsky 1972, 404). Valkovsky, paradoxically, also wants to be “free” to freedom. He is the only Stirnerian-type egoist in Dostoevsky’s creation. The other three “pure” egoists we referred to – Underground man, Stavrogin and Fyodor Karamazov – have features that distance them from Stirner’s model, although they cannot be categorised as “involuntary egoists”. Thus, Underground man’s relationship with Liza shows him as a potential character with ideals. In fact, in the initial version of the short story, Dostoevsky had presented him as someone who eventually finds Christ (censorship removed this part, as “scandalous” from the perspective of the Orthodox Church). In *A Writer’s Diary* of 1877, Underground man reappears as Ridiculous man, and finds “happiness”, even if in a dream: it is the joy of committing oneself to others. Stavrogin, in turn, has religious anxieties, attends long services at Mount Athos and wants to publicly confess his guilt for the suicide of a 12-year-old girl. And Fyodor Karamazov has moments when he feels remorse: “corrupt and often cruel in his lust, like some noxious insect, Fyodor Pavlovitch was sometimes, in moments of drunkenness, overcome by superstitious terror and a moral convulsion which took an almost physical form” (Dostoevsky 1925, 98).

At the same time, the four “involuntary egoists” – Raskolnikov, the Grand Inquisitor, Kirilov and Ivan Karamazov – differ from the “Stirnerian model”, being much more complex characters than those who have a “cheap egoism” and seek only to satisfy their wishes. They each have their own “ideal”, which we cannot find anywhere in Stirner: Raskolnikov wants to do good for humanity; Grand Inquisitor wants to “free” the weak from the “burden of freedom”; Kirilov dreams of making people happy and free, by overcoming the fear of death; and Ivan Karamazov is tormented by the

need to rationally explain the problem of evil and the suffering of the innocents.

We can conclude, therefore, that Dostoevsky was influenced, in his youth, to a certain extent by Max Stirner and has also depicted a purely Stirnerian character, prince Valkovsky. However, in his period of mature creation, even though egoism constituted a constant preoccupation for him, he created characters that can only be partially included in Stirner's two models of egoism, the "pure" and "involuntary". Dostoevsky's reception of Max Stirner's philosophy is thus a good example of assimilation and adaptation of European philosophical ideas in the Russian culture.

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# Politiques de restrictions migratoires et respect des droits de l'homme : perspectives kantienne

## Migration Restriction's Policies and Respect of Human Rights: Kantian Perspectives

**Abstract:** In recent years, the migration policies of different countries, whether from the north (the countries of the European Union, the United States, etc.), the south (Gabon, South Africa, Libya, etc.) or of the East (Israel, the Gulf Emirates, etc.), are organized around increased protectionism leading to violation of human freedoms. This protectionism tends to make the migrant a dangerous intruder for the good of the citizen of the host country. This contribution aims to show that these restrictions violate human rights, including freedom of movement and establishment. They not only go against the dynamic of globalization that results from cosmopolitan theories which find one of their most elaborate forms in Immanuel Kant's philosophy, but also that they are opposed to the human rationality which perceives the human through a common natural humanity of which all men are heirs. One of the elements which is part of such humanity is the freedom to move and settle anywhere on earth. The Kantian theory of cosmopolitanism and the moral imperative lead to universal hospitality which consists in the right of every individual to go everywhere and in the duty of every state to welcome every migrant without any restriction.

**Keywords:** Migration policies, restriction of migration, human rights, Kantian morality, universal hospitality.

### Introduction

Depuis quelques années, les migrations des citoyens des pays en difficultés économiques et/ou sociopolitiques vers les pays considérés comme plus apaisés et plus prospères font l'objet de discussions. Mais si cette contribution s'intéresse à ces migrations, ce n'est pas parce que ce sont des phénomènes nouveaux, c'est tout simplement parce que les politiques migratoires actuelles de beaucoup de pays de nos jours (que ce soit les pays du nord, du sud ou d'autres espaces du monde) tendent à restreindre le

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droit aux migrations, un des droits humains fondamentaux. Face à ces politiques de restrictions aux conséquences humaines désastreuses, la rationalité humaine est interpellée : comment remettre l'humanisme au centre des questions migratoires de telle sorte que les restrictions migratoires ne sapent pas le projet d'un respect universel des droits humains, projet incarné dans la *Déclaration universelle des droits de l'homme* adoptée par les Nations unies le 10 décembre 1948 ? Partant de l'humanisme des Lumières incarné par le cosmopolitisme kantien, cette contribution vise à donner les repères théoriques en vue que les pays adoptent des politiques migratoires basées sur le respect des droits humains. Dans une démarche analytique et critique, il s'agit d'analyser l'humanisme kantien face à la question migratoire avant d'aborder, à l'aune de la morale kantienne, les défis contemporains que les politiques de restrictions migratoires posent à l'humanisme et aux droits humains pour envisager les solutions en vue de surmonter ces défis.

## 1. L'humanisme kantien et la question de la migration

### 1.1. Cosmopolitisme et impératif catégorique kantien dans les questions migratoires

La question migratoire est passée de nos jours, malheureusement, du stade de l'humanisme à celui de l'instrumentalisation politique de telle sorte qu'on peut se demander si on peut encore cerner cette question à partir des repères intellectuels. Les politiques tentent de déconnecter tout l'humanisme historique qui constitue l'une des identités marquantes du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle de la question migratoire pour en faire simplement une question relative à la politique politicienne. Que ce soit la loi sur les migrations adoptée le 26 mai 2014 en Afrique du sud qui durcit les conditions d'entrer d'étrangers dans ce pays ou les politiques migratoires de l'Union européenne, on constate ces dernières décennies que les politiques migratoires de beaucoup d'États s'opposent au mouvement de l'humanisme rationnel dont l'un des pères intellectuels est Emmanuel Kant. Celui-ci, en postulant *le cosmopolitisme* (qui signifie la conscience d'appartenir à l'ensemble de l'Humanité et non pas à son seul pays d'origine, ce qui conduit l'homme à se comporter comme un membre d'une communauté mondiale) et *l'impératif catégorique humanitaire* (signifiant l'humanisme sans condition) fonde les bases d'une migration qui respecte la dignité humaine. En effet, selon lui, la migration ne doit pas être assimilée à une sorte de philanthropie d'un accueillant qui aurait pu ne pas accueillir le migrant. Mais cet accueil relève de la rationalité juridique et donc d'une sorte d'impératif catégorique juridico-humaine. Cela renvoie au droit qu'a tout homme de se proposer comme membre de la société, en vertu du droit de commune possession de

la surface de la Terre. Il faut donc qu'ils se supportent les uns à côté des autres, personne n'ayant originairement le droit de se trouver à un endroit de la Terre plutôt qu'à un autre (Kant 2002, 55).

Pour Emmanuel Kant, accueillir des migrants n'est pas une faveur que l'on leur fait ; cet accueil s'impose au nom du cosmopolitisme et de l'appartenance de tous les êtres humains à une commune humanité et à une commune terre. Rationnellement, aucun être humain ne peut revendiquer la propriété exclusive d'une portion de la terre car personne n'a reçu en héritage une partie de la terre sur laquelle il aurait un droit exclusif au détriment des autres. Ce cosmopolitisme doublé de l'obligation morale d'accueillir le migrant s'oppose à toutes les politiques migratoires contemporaines de l'Occident basées sur l'appartenance territoriale exclusive. Ceci s'oppose à la conception kantienne selon laquelle l'hospitalité migratoire n'est pas de la philanthropie, mais une exigence rationnelle qui ne devrait souffrir ni de contestation ni de restriction de quelque nature que ce soit. Or de nos jours, « l'idée que le droit des étrangers puisse être dépendant d'un principe intangible de commune humanité paraît bien éloignée de la vision "ethnopolitique" – par opposition au "droit cosmopolitique" de Kant – qui domine les politiques européennes en la matière » (Peraldi 2003, 22).

Pour Emmanuel Kant, la question de la migration ne doit pas être pensée à partir des problèmes de sécurité nationale ou d'intégrité territoriale, mais à partir des repères philosophiques de vivre-ensemble universel et de principes d'un humanisme rationnel. Au cœur de la question de la migration se joue donc le jeu des codes universels de la commune humanité et non ceux de frontières ouvertes ou fermées. Dans la pensée kantienne, la migration relève de la rationalité, de la délibération et non de l'émotion passagère philanthropique ou de la culpabilisation des victimes au profit des États dits riches qui, si on scrute les causes réelles des migrations non désirées ou non choisies, y ont leur responsabilité dans les causes de ces migrations alors qu'ils se disent envahis. Il l'exprime en ces termes :

Si l'on compare maintenant avec cette condition la conduite inhospitalière des États policés, notamment des États commerçants de notre partie du monde [Europe], l'injustice dont ils font preuve quand ils visitent des pays et des peuples étrangers va si loin qu'on en est effrayé. (Kant 2002, 57).

Lorsque la question de la migration est déconnectée du rationalisme universel au profit de l'instrumentalisme sociopolitique, le respect des droits humains dans tout le processus migratoire est soumis à la volonté capricieuse des politiques migratoires dont les principes de base est la sécurité et la territorialité. La liberté de migrer est ainsi entamée.



## 1.2. La liberté de migrer : une question morale chez Kant

Dans la *Déclaration universelle des droits de l'homme* de 1948, le droit à la migration dans ses différents aspects a été consacré. L'article 13 de ce texte, dans son deuxième alinéa stipule que « toute personne a le droit de quitter tout pays, y compris le sien, et de revenir dans son pays ». Une telle liberté basée sur les principes du cosmopolitisme part du fait que la terre est une propriété indivis au-delà des États (Zarka 2008, 7). C'est cette idée qui a présidé à la naissance des premières théories de la liberté de migrer. La première, basée sur le *jus gentium* (le droit des gens) a été élaborée au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle où il n'existait pas d'États à proprement parler ni de frontières comme aujourd'hui. « Tout était commun, il était permis à chacun d'aller et de voyager dans tous les pays qu'il souhaitait » (De Vitoria 1996, 83). Le droit à la migration se justifie donc par le fait que le droit des gens consiste dans le fait que le genre humain, même s'il est divisé en peuples et en royaumes, maintient pourtant à tout moment une certaine unité, comme l'indique le précepte naturel de fraternité et l'aide qui est étendue à tous, même aux étrangers de quelque nation que ce soit (Suarez 2003, 627).

Ce droit naturel des gens implique un droit naturel à la pérégrination (*jus peregrinandi*) ou droit au voyage. Le *jus gentium* relevant du droit naturel, aucun État n'a donc le droit d'interdire ou même de restreindre le voyage et l'installation des gens sur les territoires où ceux-ci souhaitent s'installer. Le *jus peregrinandi* est donc la possibilité qu'à chaque individu de quitter librement son territoire, de circuler librement et de s'installer où il veut.

Malheureusement la naissance et l'évolution de l'État-nation jacobin, surtout dans sa forme actuelle, ont été faites sous le prisme du renforcement et de la protection des frontières. C'est au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle que l'on retrouvera de nouveau la théorisation rationnelle du droit de migration chez Kant à travers sa théorie du cosmopolitisme. En effet, dans son objectif de recherche d'une paix perpétuelle entre les nations, Emmanuel Kant (2002, 91) prône le rapprochement des États à travers une sorte de fédération entre États du monde. Mais dans la pensée kantienne, cette fédération qui se justifie par le fait que lorsque les États se livrent ensemble à des activités communes, il y a un rapprochement et une affinité entre eux, ce qui les empêcherait de rentrer en guerre les uns contre les autres à tout bout de champ, ne serait qu'une transition vers un droit des gens : une sorte d'unité des peuples à la base. Le véritable cosmopolitisme réside, selon le disciple lointain de Emmanuel Kant dans « le fait qu'il concerne, par-delà les sujets collectifs du droit international, le statut des sujets de droit individuels, fondant pour ceux-ci une appartenance directe à l'association des cosmopolites libres et égaux » (Habermas 2005, 57).

Le raisonnement kantien pour justifier le cosmopolitisme, et partant la liberté de migration, est essentiellement d'ordre moral (rationnel).

L'appartenance à une humanité commune avec tous les hommes précède chez l'humain l'appartenance à un État. Tous les hommes appartiennent donc à une sorte d'« État universel des hommes (*jus cosmopolitanum*) » (Kant 2002, 84). Ils ont une communauté de sol pour lequel personne ne prétendrait en être propriétaire (Kant 1993, 235). Une des conséquences qu'on peut déduire de cette appartenance commune est la liberté qu'a chaque habitant de la terre de circuler sans restriction sur toute la surface de celle-ci. Le cosmopolitisme kantien garantit donc moralement un droit de mouvement à chaque individu. C'est cela qui justifie la théorie de l'hospitalité universelle de Emmanuel Kant (2002, 55).

L'hospitalité [universelle] signifie le droit qu'a l'étranger, à son arrivée dans le territoire d'autrui, de ne pas être traité en ennemi. On peut ne pas le recevoir si cela n'entraîne pas sa ruine ; mais on ne doit pas se montrer hostile envers lui aussi longtemps qu'il se tient paisiblement à sa place.

L'hospitalité garantit donc à l'étranger les droits élémentaires de base dont doit jouir un être humain pour que son humanité ne soit pas compromise.

L'étranger a droit à tous les droits qui peuvent lui permettre de tenter d'entrer en commerce avec les autres, qu'il s'agisse de certaines facultés générales, comme celle de se déplacer, ou qu'il s'agisse au moins de la partie des droits privés qui rend possible de contracter... (Chauvier 1996, 45).

On comprend donc, dans la perspective kantienne, qu'il soit rationnellement inacceptable et potentiellement dangereux de laisser aux États le pouvoir d'accepter ou de refuser d'admettre un étranger sur leur sol. Le droit de migration qui est chez lui un droit naturel peut être ainsi compromis. C'est pourquoi les politiques actuelles de restrictions des migrations constituent un obstacle à la rationalité humaine et à la protection du droit humain à migrer.

## **2. Restrictions migratoires : un défi pour la rationalité humaine et pour les droits de l'homme**

### **2.1. Les « murs » anti-migratoires et le respect des droits humains**

Malgré l'adoption des textes pour réglementer les migrations et lutter contre le déni de droits des migrants, ceux-ci sont toujours victimes d'exactions. Ils sont objets, entre autres, de discrimination, de refoulement, de trafic d'êtres humains, de violences physiques et morales, etc. Ces violations sont dues en grande partie à des politiques de protection contre le

migrant. Aujourd'hui, les politiques migratoires dans la plupart des États (comme ceux précités) se caractérisent, non par la rationalité kantienne à propos des migrations et par une conception cosmopolitique du monde, mais plutôt par ce que Étienne Tassin (2017, 210) a appelé la « xénopolitique ». Celle-ci s'illustre par les murs dressés contre le droit à la migration dans la gestion des États où la lutte contre les migrants est érigée en programme politique. Les politiques migratoires adoptées ces derniers temps par l'ex-président américain Donald Trump (Tardis, 2020) connues sous le nom générique de *travel ban* et dont son successeur a du mal à s'en défaire, les durcissements des politiques migratoires des pays de l'Union européenne (Rodier, 2010), allant jusqu'à sous-traiter les migrants aux autres pays (Libie, Turquie), relèvent de cet ordre. Ces murs au sens figuré et au sens propre supposent que le migrant, est un ennemi contre qui il faut se protéger. Ce qui rentre en contradiction avec la théorie kantienne. Pour Emmanuel Kant (2002, 94), l'étranger ne doit pas être considéré comme un ennemi dont il faut se protéger, « on ne doit pas se montrer hostile envers lui ». Les murs pour se protéger contre le migrant sont d'abord d'ordre psychologique et trouvent leur justification ou plutôt leur prétexte dans les idéologies de l'envahissement et du soi-disant « grand remplacement ». Ces idéologies estiment que les migrants, en arrivant dans un milieu, envahissent celui-ci et finissent par se substituer aux autochtones. Ces théories se traduisent au quotidien par la gestion des États axée sur les politiques d'identité nationale, de souveraineté nationale et de sécurité nationale, autant d'obstacles aux migrations.

Les politiques d'identité nationale se caractérisent par une gestion des États basée sur le principe selon lequel, les citoyens d'une république sont porteurs d'une identité commune qui leur est propre et qui les distingue des citoyens d'autres États. Cette identité, axée au prime abord sur des considérations raciales qui ont fait l'objet des critiques acerbes ces dernières décennies compte tenu de leur caractère fictif et des conséquences réelles qu'elles entraînent comme la politique de ségrégation raciale aux États-Unis et en Afrique du sud, est basée sur des considérations socioculturelles. Les idéologies identitaires considèrent l'étranger comme étant étrange puisqu'il ne « nous » ressemble pas. Étrange ici rime avec danger dont il faut se protéger car le migrant est perçu dans une sorte de relation conflictuelle : face au migrant la lutte est engagée, soit il disparaît soit il « me » fait disparaître. Donc avant même que le migrant n'arrive dans le territoire de sa migration, il y est potentiellement dangereux. Cet obstacle ne peut favoriser la migration.

En ce qui concerne les politiques contemporaines de souveraineté nationale, elles consistent à prendre toutes les dispositions pour protéger l'État-nation dans sa forme et dans ses idéologies. Elles puisent leurs sources dans les réminiscences du jacobinisme. Or de nos jours, la

dynamique de la mondialisation amène progressivement à l'abandon d'une grande partie de la souveraineté nationale longtemps considérée inaliénable. Il n'est plus possible de penser un État comme un château fort impénétrable. Le migrant n'est pas un intrus qui doit être soumis à une certaine souveraineté étatique, mais il fait partie de la commune humanité et tout État a le devoir moral (rationnel) de l'accueillir.

Quant aux politiques nationales de sécurité, au nom de la protection du territoire nationale et de la protection des citoyens, elles tendent à considérer le migrant *a priori* comme une menace pour l'État. Ce qui est une absurdité : comment considérer un migrant, par essence faible, comme disposant de force et de moyen pour détruire un État ou des citoyens de celui-ci ? Quelques comportements contraires au vivre-ensemble harmonieux suffisent-ils pour stigmatiser le migrant et le charger de « tous les péchés du monde » ? Certes, on en est encore dans un monde où la différence peut être considérée comme une défiance et une menace. Mais Emmanuel Kant estime que faisant partie d'une commune humanité et ayant la terre en commun héritage, tous les hommes sont appelés à se rencontrer et ils doivent apprendre à se supporter mutuellement dans leurs différences.

Ces murs psychologiques qui se traduisent par de réelles politiques anti-migratoires sont malheureusement matérialisés par de vrais murs physiques par endroit. « De six en 1989, nous sommes passés à près de 63 murs aujourd'hui. Ces nouveaux murs servent davantage à en empêcher d'autres d'entrer ».

Parmi les murs, on peut citer : le mur entre les États-Unis et le Mexique, le mur entre la Hongrie et la Serbie, le mur barbelé séparant Ceuta (Espagne) et le Maroc, etc. Ces murs et bien d'autres constituent la matérialisation de la violation du droit à la migration et partant des droits de l'homme en général. Dans leur forme, psychologique ou matérielle, « les murs » constituent une entrave à la liberté humaine. Or, celle-ci est au cœur du respect du droit et de la dignité humaine. Sans donc aller dans les détails du respect de tel ou tel droit, on peut conclure que les politiques anti-migratoires constituent dans le monde actuel une violation flagrante de l'armature même des droits humains. Ces restrictions à la migration sont, pour la rationalité en général et chez Kant en particulier, de véritables aberrations. En analysant ces restrictions à partir de la morale kantienne, on pourra trouver des repères pour des politiques migratoires qui respectent la dignité humaine.

## **2.2. Les restrictions migratoires à l'aune de la morale kantienne : quels repères pour la dignité du migrant ?**

Rappelons que la question de la migration chez Emmanuel Kant se pose et se cerne dans le cadre de sa morale dont la quintessence se trouve dans son impératif catégorique : la moralité de toute action se trouve dans l'intention qui la conditionne. Et une action est dite morale lorsqu'elle n'est pas mue par un intérêt quelconque, qu'il soit matériel, psychologique ou moral. Une action est dite morale lorsqu'elle n'est conditionnée que par des mobiles dont les bases sont uniquement rationnelles. L'unique critère de la moralité d'un acte est que « la raison puisse [le] justifier » (Kant 2015, 17).

La rationalité de l'action répond à un certain nombre de principes qui sont les maximes de l'impératif catégorique. C'est dans les *Fondements de la métaphysique des mœurs* que l'on trouve sous sa forme la plus complète et la plus détaillée ces maximes qui doivent présider à l'action morale.

La première maxime que Emmanuel Kant (2013, 35) lui-même énonce en deux phases s'intéresse au principe de l'universalité de l'action humaine, principe qui est l'une des conditions de la moralité de l'agir humain. « Agis uniquement d'après la maxime qui fait que tu peux vouloir en même temps qu'elle devienne une loi universelle ». C'est l'impératif universel du devoir de l'action morale qui « pourrait encore être énoncé en ces termes : agis comme si la maxime de ton action devrait être érigée par ta volonté en loi universelle de la nature ». Ce principe théorique et rationnel qui est le premier socle de l'action morale trouve sa réalisation pratique dans la deuxième maxime qui énonce comment l'on doit agir concrètement envers l'autre pour que cet agir soit considéré comme moral. « Agis de telle sorte que tu traites l'humanité aussi bien dans ta personne que dans celle de tout autre toujours en même temps comme une fin et jamais comme un moyen » (Kant 2015, 42). Ici Emmanuel Kant estime que si toute action doit être moralement justifiée par la rationalité humaine, l'homme, pour être traité de manière rationnelle et donc moralement, doit être considéré dans ses relations à soi et à l'autre comme la fin ultime dont le bien est recherché. Les deux maximes précédentes ne peuvent être appliquées que lorsque l'individu se dote d'une certaine liberté rationnelle de délibération qui fait de lui un être autonome capable de légiférer en suivant la rationalité qui n'est ni conditionnée ni influencée par quelque mobile extérieur à la raison pure. « De là résulte maintenant le troisième principe pratique de la volonté, à savoir, l'idée de la volonté de tout être raisonnable conçue comme volonté instituant une législation universelle » (Kant 2015, 44). Autrement dit « agis selon la maxime qui peut en même temps s'ériger elle-même en loi universelle » ou « agis selon des maximes qui puissent se prendre en même temps elles-mêmes pour objet comme loi universelle de la nature » (Kant, p. 49).

Selon Emmanuel Kant (2015, 48), l'action morale doit avoir une forme, une matière et une détermination. La forme qui est énoncée dans la

première maxime vise l'universalité de l'action morale : « Il faut que les maximes soient choisies comme si elles devaient avoir la valeur de lois universelles de la nature ». Quant à la matière, c'est la finalité ultime de l'action humaine et elle est énoncée dans la deuxième maxime, car « l'être raisonnable [l'homme], étant par sa nature une fin, étant par la suite une fin en soi, doit être pour toute maxime une condition qui serve à restreindre toutes les fins simplement relatives et arbitraires ». En fin, la détermination complète renvoie à l'idée énoncée dans la troisième maxime et selon laquelle, « toutes les maximes qui dérivent de notre législation propre doivent concourir à un règne possible des fins comme à un règne de la nature ».

Qu'elles soient volontaires ou forcées, les migrations répondent à des aspirations d'aller où l'on désire au nom de la commune propriété de la terre ou de se protéger en quittant des milieux inhospitaliers du fait de la nature (sécheresse, volcan, tsunami, etc.) ou des hommes (guerres, dictatures, etc.). Cette liberté qu'a chaque individu de se déplacer, de s'installer où bon lui semble, relève, selon la philosophie humaniste kantienne, de sa liberté naturelle que nul n'a le droit de restreindre. Or les politiques migratoires actuelles sont basées essentiellement sur la souveraineté, l'identité et la sécurité. Chaque État, en s'arrogeant la souveraineté de choisir à travers les politiques de visa, de sélection, ceux qui pourraient entrer ou non sur son sol pour y résider ou le traverser, se substitue, dans la pensée kantienne, à la loi naturelle de libre circulation et de libre installation garantie d'ailleurs par l'article 13 de la *Déclaration universelle des droits de l'homme*. Aussi, aujourd'hui, les questions d'identité et de citoyenneté sont-elles au cœur de la gestion des États, mais sous un aspect assez restrictif. Toute république définit les critères identitaires de ses citoyens et par-là les conditions de la citoyenneté. Celle-ci est conçue dans une perspective exclusive : ceux qui ne répondent pas à ces critères n'ont ni droit de circulation ni droit d'installation si ces droits ne leur sont pas octroyés par l'État sous des conditions définies par celui-ci. Enfin, l'un des arguments avancés aujourd'hui pour justifier les politiques migratoires restrictives est la sécurité des citoyens. Autrement dit, les migrations, surtout lorsqu'elles sont massives et incontrôlées menaceraient la sécurité des citoyens qui accueillent les migrants, soit à titre transitoire, soit pour une installation définitive. L'une des conséquences que l'on peut tirer de cet argument est que le migrant est potentiellement dangereux pour les citoyens. Alors on doit se méfier de lui et n'accepter le recevoir qu'à condition qu'il veuille se tenir tranquille.

Cette perception des migrants à travers les politiques actuelles de migration dans la plupart des pays rentre en contradiction avec les principes de la morale kantienne qui porte un regard rationaliste et rationalisant sur l'humanité en l'homme. En effet, cette morale qualifiée d'impératif catégorique dont les principales maximes ont été déclinées plus haut, se base

sur le principe que tous hommes appartiennent à une commune humanité qu'ils partagent comme un indivis physique (terre) ou moral (raison). Par conséquent, nul ne peut revendiquer une portion de cette commune humanité, encore moins son entièreté. Ainsi donc, les basses des politiques migratoires restrictives actuelles sont en contradiction avec la morale kantienne. Ces restrictions contredisent la maxime de l'universalité de l'action humaine par le fait que ce qui est rationnellement universel, selon Emmanuel Kant, c'est la liberté de circulation et d'installation et non le refus à un être humain par un autre de jouir de cette liberté. Par conséquent, les politiques migratoires restrictives actuelles, conditionnant l'accueil du migrant aux lois nationales, fait du migrant un moyen manipulable pour une fin autre que l'homme (le migrant). Autrement dit, on accueille le migrant à condition que... Lorsque l'accueil du migrant est soumis à des conditions autres que celles de la rationalité, l'humanité en l'homme est niée. En même temps, l'autonomie du sujet délibérant et accueillant est émoussée par des intérêts.

On comprend assez aisément, à partir de ce qui précède, pourquoi les restrictions migratoires actuelles dans le monde sont un véritable défi à la rationalité en général et à la moralité kantienne en particulier. Lorsque l'on substitue à la rationalité unifiante et constitutive de l'humanité la passion de l'intérêt personnel qui divise et isole les hommes, on aboutit à des politiques migratoires restrictives qui violent les droits élémentaires et « naturels » des humains migrants.

## Conclusion

La dynamique de la mondialisation dans laquelle s'est engagé le monde actuel facilite les déplacements. Elle rend plus simples les migrations des hommes. Quel que soit le motif pour lequel ils migrent, les hommes ne font que jouir de leur liberté naturelle selon Emmanuel Kant : la liberté de circuler dans la propriété qui appartient en commun à tous les hommes. En ce sens, la libre circulation et la libre installation de chacun sur quelque partie de la terre, consacrées dans l'article 13 de la *Déclaration universelle des droits de l'homme*, sont la matérialisation d'un droit humain fondamental et naturel. C'est, selon Emmanuel Kant, un droit fondé rationnellement. Ce droit constitue donc un impératif catégorique. Cela fait *de facto* des politiques migratoires restrictives rationnellement inacceptables. Ces politiques portent atteinte aux droits humains qui sont ainsi laissés au bon vouloir des politiques. Emmanuel Kant, à travers son cosmopolitisme doublé de la théorie de l'hospitalité universelle, montre la voie d'une migration qui respecte la dignité humaine. En fixant les repères rationnels de l'humanisme et du respect de la dignité humaine, la morale kantienne donne les clés à

l'humanité en vue de l'élaboration des politiques migrations respectueuses de l'humanité en l'homme.

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Corneliu NEGRU \*

## Camus' Quest to Confront and Overcome Nihilism

**Abstract:** Camus' essay *Nietzsche and Nihilism*, which will later go on to become a part of *The Rebel*, is an evaluation of Nietzsche's response to nihilism. This article examines Albert Camus approach to nihilism, focusing on two main aspects: the problematic of suicide in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, and secondly, the relationship between collective and murder in *The Rebel*. While both works are heavily influenced by Nietzsche, Camus is most explicitly and critically engaged with the German philosopher in the latter. Camus argues that Nietzsche's proposed total affirmation of existence as a response to nihilism would imply an incapacity to deny murder – an assumption which we would like to dispute. Nihilism deals with the apparent meaninglessness of existence after the demise of religious and transcendent ideals that previously gave direction and coherence to the individual's life, thus famously prompting Nietzsche to declare God's death. Both Nietzsche and Camus recognize the impossibility of resurrecting the dead God and instead focus on the challenges faced by the individuals living without a transcendental purpose or pre-determined set of values. While Camus' understanding of nihilism is greatly influenced by Nietzsche, works such as *The Myth of Sisyphus* and *The Rebel* offer a critical perspective and prompt a distinct response to nihilism. In this sense it is important to first examine Camus' understanding of Nietzsche.

**Keywords:** Albert Camus, Absurdity, Nietzsche, Nihilism, Revolt, Sisyphus.

This article examines Albert Camus approach to nihilism and Nietzsche's influence on Camus. While Camus' understanding of nihilism is greatly influenced by Nietzsche, works such as *The Myth of Sisyphus* and *The Rebel* offer a critical perspective and prompt a distinct response to nihilism. In this sense it is important to first examine Camus' understanding of Nietzsche. While Nietzsche presents nihilism as the outcome of the collapse of systems that provided purpose and direction in life, Camus investigates the topic from both an individual and a communal standpoint. The French philosopher deals with the question, whether nihilism could potentially invalidate life's worth and which solutions are available to the individual. These aspects are tackled in both *The Myth of Sisyphus* as it is in *The Rebel*, although nihilism is not referred to expressly. However, the author deliberately tackles the issue as he himself mentions to his publisher when

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submitting the initial draft. This is also supported by his exegetes who claim that Albert Camus “understanding of the absurd is from the beginning grounded in Nietzsche’s diagnosis of nihilism, his lucid awareness of the lack of meaning, truth and finality which results from the death of God, and his consciousness of the reality of human suffering which accompanies this silence” (Duvall, 1999, 40) and that “the conclusion of Camus’ *The Myth of Sisyphus* sounds like a distant echo of Nietzsche” (Walter Kaufmann 1956, 21).

In Camus’ view, however, the absurd is a better suited term to render the modern experience of nihilism. In this sense we may consider the parallels between Sisyphus’ constant effort, futilely rolling his boulder, and Nietzsche’s idea of perpetual return, which indicates that the cosmos repeats itself mindlessly, rendering all human attempts appear useless. Another approach is to evaluate Camus’ similar focus on the significance of a tragic perspective of existence that acknowledges both the absurdity and suffering of life, as well as its delights, and rejects false optimism. This tragic lucidity is a means of conquering fate as “the absurd man says yes and his effort will henceforth be unceasing” (Camus, 1991, 123). He also argues that just confirming the universe and our being within it is enough to transcend absurdity and achieve a feeling of meaning. While *The Myth of Sisyphus* emphasized absolute affirmation as a reaction to nihilism, *The Rebel* specifically challenges this notion. Camus attempts to show how rebellion has frequently devolved into what he refers to as “revolution”, in which murder becomes prevalent and the initial impulse of revolt is betrayed. Camus’ article “Nietzsche and Nihilism” is mostly critical, despite his enormous debt to the German philosopher. Camus focuses on examining Nietzsche not just for the explicit content of his ideas, but also for the possible consequences of living with those beliefs. This method is consistent with Camus’ dedication to practical involvement in the social and political life. In this sense, Camus blames Nietzsche of developing concepts that helped form twentieth-century totalitarianism. In essence, Camus’ fundamental criticism of Nietzsche is that his reaction to nihilism, the total affirmation of existence fails to repudiate murder. Also, in *The Rebel* Camus claims that Nietzsche’s theory is to blame for the deviance of rebellion from its original purposes and its plunge into murderous revolution. Second, Camus contends that, while Nietzsche's rejection of transcendent principles appears to promote liberty, it ultimately results in slavery. As such, Camus argues that free activities need some form of guidance, limitations, and aims. His argument is founded on the notion that genuine freedom is not the absence of all constraints, but rather the opportunity to establish one’s own constraints and objectives. In the absence of such limits, universal relativism emerges, paralyzing all activity due to a lack of reasons to choose one thing over another. Camus draws from Dostoevsky in order to

demonstrate that, with Nietzsche “A profounder logic replaces the «if nothing is true, everything is permitted» of Karamazov by «if nothing is true, nothing is permitted»” (Camus 1956, 71). According to Camus, by abandoning transcendent ideals, Nietzsche opts for an unqualified embrace of the world, a dedication to the destiny and the historical fact without evaluating the world. This total affirmation leads to a passive acceptance of things’ supposed necessity and a lack of desire for change. Camus interprets this as Nietzsche’s *amor fati*. Servitude would neutralize all motivation to action and eliminate any agency. After acknowledging the widely recognized influence of misinterpreted Nietzschean philosophy on National Socialism, Camus emphasizes the necessity to vigorously defend Nietzsche against such misconstrues. Nevertheless, he asserts that Nietzsche’s work can serve as a philosophical basis for justifying murder, and to that extent, it is not blameless. In brief, his evaluation of Nietzsche is that “To say yes to everything supposes that one says yes to murder. Moreover, it expresses two ways of consenting to murder” (Camus 1956, 76).

Three potential objections to Camus’ evaluation of Nietzsche’s views on nihilism can be raised. Thus, it is necessary to briefly highlight these criticisms before delving into a more detailed analysis of Camus’ stance on nihilism and its potential benefits over Nietzsche’s. First, Camus’ references in this essay are subject to criticism for being extremely limited in scope. He primarily refers to a small section of *The Will to Power*, and as Duvall has pointed out, this material is not indicative of Nietzsche’s overall published works (Duvall 1999, 51). It is widely known that some Nietzsche scholars question the validity of using any of his unpublished writings to support his actual beliefs, and even if one allows for the inclusion of such materials, it remains highly debatable whether they can accurately represent Nietzsche’s oeuvre if separated from the rest of his published works.

Secondly, an important fact is that other fragments of Nietzsche’s published works contain arguments against revolution. Important Nietzsche scholars such as Keith Ansell-Pearson had shown that Nietzsche continuously opposed the idea of a political revolution contrary to Camus’ claims (Ansell-Pearson 1994). All in all, Nietzsche’s writings show a concern for the loss of the legitimacy of state authority based on religion and the loss of a unified religious culture. Moreover, he continually warns against conflating cultural politics with the easy answer of overturning the government. According to Ansell-Pearson, Nietzsche’s objection to revolution can be summarised as follows:

“For Nietzsche a philosophy of revolution suffers from the delusion that once a social order has been overturned, then «the proudest temple of fair humanity will at once rise up of its own accord». The modern theory of revolution is derived from Rousseau’s belief that beneath the layers of civilization there lies buried a natural human goodness; the source of

corruption lies not within man, in human nature, but in the institutions of the state and society, and in education” (Ansell-Pearson 1994, 83).

In other words, Nietzsche’s rejection of revolution is rooted in his denial of the inherent human goodness that justifies it, as opposed to the affirmation of the world as it is. Another possible criticism of Camus’ argument is that it overlooks a fundamental distinction emphasised for the first time by Gilles Deleuze in his interpretation of Nietzsche’s concept of “absolute affirmation”, which was published a decade after Camus’ essay *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (Deleuze 1983). Deleuze makes the case that Nietzsche is not blind to the logical conundrum of absolute affirmation that seems to require an endorsement of nihilism and its causes, which would only serve to perpetuate rather than resolve nihilism (as Nietzsche himself criticizes in “The Ass Festival” section of book *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*). By examining several of Nietzsche’s works, particularly *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Deleuze argues that Nietzsche’s notion of absolute affirmation includes a form of negation that ultimately overcomes nihilism. Although Deleuze’s interpretation does not provide evidence of Nietzsche’s explicit prohibition of murder, it does challenge the foundation of Camus’ argument that Nietzsche’s philosophy necessarily condones murder.

Camus’ reliance on a small number of unpublished works, as well as his omission of Nietzsche’s complex views on ultimate affirmation, contradicts his thesis that Nietzsche’s philosophy inexorably leads to support for violent revolution. Although Camus’ analysis of meaning of Nietzsche’s absolute affirmation is most likely flawed, it provides insight into his own perspective on nihilism, which may prove to be preferable to Nietzsche’s in some ways.

### **Democratizing Nihilism: Camus’ Response to Nietzsche’s Elitism**

Camus has surpassed Nietzsche in his thematization of nihilism by adopting a distinctly democratic approach. While Nietzsche’s political views are often perceived as aristocratic and elitist, Camus demonstrates an unwavering commitment to equality, solidarity, and compassion for ordinary people. This profound anti-egalitarian side of Nietzsche’s work cannot be supported by Camus. Although Nietzsche explicitly renounces the idea of a revolution, he does so for practical reasons and with the aim of establishing a hierarchical culture, rather than out of any concern for equality, solidarity, or compassion. Nietzsche’s views are famously protean, but from his earliest writings to his final ones, he seemed dedicated to the notion that the answer to modern nihilism and decadence could only be found in exceptional individuals, who are variously characterized in his writings as free spirits, higher types, or *Übermenschen*. Nietzsche’s endorsement of Georges Brandes’ labelling of his philosophy as

“Aristocratic Radicalism” in the 1880s supports the interpretation that his politics are elitist. Nietzsche’s political views are aristocratic because he championed for society based on an elite class, but they are also radical because he called for a new aristocratic social arrangement, rather than preserving existing arrangements, which is what the more prevalent “aristocratic conservatives” desire. Nietzsche does not present a detailed plan, legislation, or procedures for realizing this type of aristocratic society he advocates. However, he outlines it broadly in passages such as the following: “Caste-order, order of rank, is just a formula for the supreme law of life itself, splitting off into three types is necessary for the preservation of society, to make the higher and highest types possible, - unequal rights are the condition for any rights at all” (Nietzsche, 2005, 59). Nietzsche posits that inequality and exploitation are crucial and that a society divided into classes or castes is necessary for the flourishing of “superior individuals”. He argues that these superior individuals require leisure time for their creative pursuits, and such leisure is only possible in a society where the majority focuses on the labour necessary to provide material sustenance for everyone. Nietzsche succinctly expresses this idea in *Human, All Too Human*: “A higher culture can come into existence only where there are two different castes in society; that of the workers and that of the idle, of those capable of true leisure, or, expressed more vigorously; the caste compelled to work and the caste that works if it wants to” (Nietzsche 1996, 162). In other words, Nietzsche advocates for type of exploitation in which one class is subjugated by another. He acknowledges that exploitation is a negative aspect but deems it necessary. Moreover, Nietzsche argues that the existence of the mediocre is justified by the existence of exceptional individuals. The highest sense of life, according to Nietzsche, is achieved by the majority of individuals in serving these exceptional individuals. Also, he establishes a hierarchy of society based on the creative strength rather than the physical, economic, or political power. Creative strength involves honestly confronting the horrors of existence and forging a meaningful interpretation of life, whether through art, philosophy, or some other means. Nietzsche believes that the solution to the problem of declining legitimation of the State by religion is to create new legitimizing structures. These structures can only be created and legislated by individuals who tower above the masses of humanity. While Nietzsche believes that all members of society benefit in some way from the production of higher types, he emphasizes that the primary value of humanity lies in its exceptional individuals. At times, Nietzsche views the masses as dispensable. Bruce Detwiler summarizes Nietzsche’s profoundly aristocratic political position as follows “Among modern philosophers Nietzsche stands virtually alone in his insistence that the goal of society should be the promotion and enhancement of the highest type even at the expense of what has

traditionally been thought to be the good of all or of the greatest number” (Detwiler 1990, 89).

Camus, on the other hand, appears to be levelling the playing field regarding the problem of nihilism. Colin Wilson, an early promoter of existentialism in England, shared a story about his conversation with Camus, which illustrates this point. During their exchange, Wilson suggested that mystical experiences might hold the answer to the problem of absurdity, as he believed that Camus’ writings hinted at such experiences, such as Meursault’s sense of unity with the indifference of universe at the end of *The Outsider*, or the adulterous woman’s orgasmic sensation of oneness with the African night. Wilson then recounted “The idea seemed to worry Camus. He gestured out the window, at a Parisian teddy boy slouching along the other side of the street, and said: «No, what is good for him must be good for me also.» What he meant was clear enough: that any solution to this problem of «absurdity» must be a solution that would be valid for the man in the street as well as for mystics and intellectuals” (Wilson 2004, 173). Wilson challenged Camus’ assertion, likening it to the idea that Einstein should not have developed the theory of relativity because a Parisian teddy boy could not comprehend it. However, Camus maintained his position, and Wilson observed that “his basic premise seemed to be that all human beings are in the same boat” (Wilson, 2004, 174).

In contrast to Nietzsche, Camus believes that any solution to absurdity must be accessible to everyone. He demonstrates this democratic impulse in his writing in two ways. Firstly, he dramatizes nihilism by presenting it in terms of its most extreme practical consequences: suicide and murder. This makes the problem more accessible to a wider audience and emphasizes its gravity. Secondly, he emphasizes the need for rational intelligibility in responding to nihilism. The response to the problem of absurdity must be comprehensible to the average person. While Camus does not believe that human existence has a rationally intelligible meaning, he cleverly provides a thoroughly rational response to nihilism by examining the logical structure of the problem itself. Camus structures his approach to the two nihilistic questions of suicide and murder in a Cartesian pattern. As commonly understood, Camus argues that life’s absurdity is not just its lack of meaning but a conflict between objective meaninglessness and humanity’s desire for significance. For Camus, comprehension involves merging the two poles. The incapability of reason to understand the world results in the failure of unification. Moreover, it is consciousness itself, and the yearning to comprehend the world logically, that disrupts the possibility of unity. Camus contends that if we possessed the same level of awareness as the animals, there would be no separation in the world, and we would be in harmony with it. There would be no contradiction between the human desire for

meaning and the world, and life would not be absurd. Similarly, if the universe possessed the ability to think and feel as humans do, there would be no division, and absurdity would not arise.

Camus uses a Cartesian framework in his thematization of suicide, as he discovers a solution to the problem within the question's structure. Just as Descartes' doubting acknowledges the one thing that cannot be doubted "the cogito", Camus argues that the very question of suicide indicates that taking one's life is not a valid solution to the absurd, rather it is a way to evade the question by eliminating the human desire for significance. Thus, Camus contends that the only consistent philosophical stance is to persist in living, in defiance. Passionate rebellion is a crucial element of Camus' response to nihilism, but it is based on a prior rational analysis that forms the foundation of his position.

*The Rebel* also draws from Descartes' philosophy to construct a logical argument for rebellion. To rebel metaphysically, Camus posits, is to acknowledge that all humans share the same metaphysical situation of being abandoned without God or transcendent values that can give meaning and purpose to life. Rebellion, therefore, demands the recognition of a metaphysical perspective in which all humans are fundamentally equal. In order to express this idea Camus reformulates Descartes famous line *cogito, ergo sum* as: "I rebel – therefore we exist" (Camus 1956, 22). He believes that true rebellion requires solidarity with fellow humans and an absolute rejection of murder, as violence contradicts the very logic of rebellion. Only when rebellion is distorted or forgotten can it lead to revolution and the philosophical justification of murder.

Camus' use of Cartesian reasoning and his commitment to ontological egalitarianism may be related, even if he does not explicitly address the connection. In *Discourse on Method*, Descartes famously claimed that "good sense or reason, is by nature equal in all men" (Descartes 2006, 5). In contrast, Nietzsche's ontological exceptionalism states that only the rare and unevenly distributed power of value-creation possessed by higher types can provide meaning to human life. Camus, on the other hand, employs the most democratic of faculties, reason, as the creator and bearer of meaning. Sartre also alludes to the egalitarian implications of Cartesian reasoning in his book *Existentialism is a Humanism*, by suggesting that the Cartesian cogito is available to all and transcends class divisions. Sartre writes "subjectivity must be our point of departure. What exactly was produced by a craftsman who drew his inspiration from a concept: he referred both to the concept of what a paper knife is, and to a known production technique that is a part of that concept and is, by and large, a formula" (Sartre, 2007, 20-21) and "at the point of departure there cannot be any other truth than this, I think, therefore I am, which is the absolute truth of consciousness as it attains to itself [...]. Before there can be any truth whatever, then, there must be an

absolute truth, and there is such a truth which is simple, easily attained and within the reach of everybody; it consists in one's immediate sense of one's self' (Kaufman 1956, 302).

In a similar move to Descartes' claim that reason is equally distributed amongst all, Camus may have been motivated to use Cartesian reasoning as a means of finding solutions to nihilism that were both certain and rationally comprehensible to all. Camus' approach to the problem of nihilism is particularly praiseworthy because it makes accessible to the general public what are often discussed as abstract concepts. He does this by focusing on suicide and murder as practical consequences of nihilism, and by emphasizing the importance of reason as a universal faculty. For those who value democracy and equality, Camus' treatment of nihilism may be seen as a step forward from Nietzsche's elitist views. However, while Camus' focus on rationalism is commendable, it may also have limitations that need to be addressed. To explore this further, we will consider the treatment of the absurd by Thomas Nagel, taking a slightly circuitous route to this matter.

### **Reevaluating Absurdity: The Influence of Context and Culture**

In his article *The Absurd*, Thomas Nagel challenges the traditional arguments for absurdity and questions their validity. While the arguments he discusses are not the same as those used by Camus, they are still relevant to his approach. The first argument that Nagel examines concerns the concept of "mattering over time", which claims that life is absurd because nothing we do now will matter in the future. Nagel dismisses this argument, as he believes that nothing that will be the case in the future matters now. He argues that the fact that our actions will not matter in the future does not necessarily make them meaningless now. Nagel also questions how mattering in the future could make our present actions any less meaningless. The second argument concerns our place in the universe and claims that life is absurd because of our small size and brief existence "we are tiny specks in the infinitive vastness of the universe; our lives are mere instants even on a geological time scale, let alone cosmic one; we will all be dead any minute. But of course, none of these evident facts can be what makes life absurd, if it is absurd" (Nagel 1971, 717). Nagel argues that the length of our lives does not determine their absurdity, as an eternal life would still be absurd. He also argues that our small size doesn't make our lives any more absurd, and that even if we were as large as the universe, our lives would still be meaningless. Nagel's analysis of these arguments reveals something significant about Camus' approach to nihilism, particularly his focus on rationalism.



Thus, while Nagel rejects the arguments for absurdity based on matters of space and time as bad arguments that do not convincingly establish the absurdity of life, he still believes that life is indeed absurd, and that these arguments express a natural sense of it. He suggests that these bad arguments are actually metaphors for absurdity. While I agree with Nagel's assertion that these arguments are metaphors, I do not believe that his rejection of them as arguments is entirely accurate because of their metaphorical nature. For instance, when Nagel discusses the argument based on space and time, he claims that enlarging our existence or prolonging our lives would not make them any less absurd. While this statement may seem plausible at first glance, a closer examination of the cultural history of meaning may shed light on the connection between space, time, and meaning that Nagel finds perplexing.

According to Nietzsche, the sense of meaninglessness is dependent on culture and history. This means that certain cultures and periods of time may be more susceptible to feelings of absurdity than others. Nietzsche specifically points to Western culture over the past few centuries as an example. He identifies the emergence of nihilism as a result of secularization, which is the process of replacing religious worldviews with secular ones, often through the influence of science. The loss of the religious perspective on life, which once provided a sense of meaning, has been replaced by a scientific and rational worldview that is incapable of providing the same level of meaning.

The process of secularization has had a significant impact on our understanding of the size and time frame of human existence in relation to the universe. Previously, humans believed that the earth was at the centre of the universe and that there was little beyond the earth and the heavens. However, now we understand that the earth is just a small part of an unimaginably vast universe. In addition, our previous belief that the birth and end of the human race were synchronous with the creation and end of the universe has been replaced by the understanding that the lifespan of our race will be a brief moment in the lifespan of the universe.

The argument that life is meaningless because our present actions will not matter in a million years can also be viewed in the context of the history of secularization. In a Christian interpretation of life, all of our actions are significant and have implications in terms of sin and moral goodness, with a Christian eschatology and soteriology providing meaning to our existence based on whether we earn eternal life or damnation in the after-world or the end-times. These arguments illustrate how important elements of religious explanations that gave human life meaning have been replaced by secular explanations that do not provide the same level of significance, undermining the notion of meaning that was once understood within a Christian worldview.

Nagel may not fully grasp the arguments for absurdity he discusses, as he fails to recognize their context in Christian culture. These arguments make sense only within that framework. Furthermore, Nagel's analysis highlights the difficulty of providing rational answers to the question of the meaning of life. Even seemingly rational answers, such as "life is meaningful because we are big", may appear absurd when considered in isolation. Rather, beliefs gain existential power only when knitted together into a "background horizon" of cultural context. Similarly, the arguments for absurdity gain their force not through rational explication, but through their ability to undermine the previous worldview that had given meaning to life. While Camus agrees that life cannot be rationally understood, Nagel's misunderstanding of these arguments highlights a potential problem for Camus' position. Both Nagel and Camus appear to overlook the essential role of an "irrational background interpretation" in constructing meaning. This concept has been recognized by the "Counter-Enlightenment tradition", a collection of thinkers that includes Nietzsche. To fully evaluate Camus' contribution to the interrogation of nihilism we must consider his work in the context of this tradition and explore whether his emphasis on reason causes him to miss an important response to contemporary nihilism.

### **Reassessment of Nihilism: The Rational and the Irrational**

The German Counter – Enlightenment tradition has a distinct approach to the problem of nihilism that differs greatly from Camus. This tradition, represented by philosophers associated with *Lebensphilosophie*, existentialism, and Critical Theory, argues that meaningful existence requires an irrational grounding, often expressed through metaphors of darkness in contrast to reason's light. According to Herbert Schnäbelbach these basic themes are central to the Counter-Enlightenment tradition that states that "subject and object, consciousness and what it is conscious of, are themselves seen as derivative and grounded in an antecedent whole, which it is possible to ascertain only by means of intuition. Pre-and non-objective lived experience, moods, the neutrality of what is experienced are supposed to precede all objectivity; analysis, dichotomisation, the hiatus between intuition and concept – all are supposed to come about only by means of secondary exposition of that whole, which up until Heidegger was called life" (Schnädelbach 1984, 147).

Heidegger's concept of "life" is replaced by "Being," which is a key aspect of the Counter-Enlightenment tradition that emphasizes the necessity of an irrational grounding for meaningful existence. This idea has been popularized by Dreyfus in his critique of artificial intelligence. According to Heidegger and Dreyfus, the ability to perceive significance in the world depends on a background of relationships and assignments

between things that are not easily understood by reason. This background significance is essential to providing meaning in life and attempting to rationalize it can undermine its effectiveness, leading to the oblivion of Being or nihilism (Dreyfus 1993).

In his work *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus characterizes absurdity as the “divorce between the man and his life, the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity” (Camus 1979, 13). This notion differs from the German philosophical tradition of the life-philosophers, Nietzsche, and Heidegger, who attribute reason as the cause of the separation. According to Camus, life is absurd because it cannot be comprehended by reason, and therefore cannot be unified through intelligible thought. In contrast, thinkers like Adorno, Horkheimer, Nietzsche and Heidegger argue that the meaningfulness of existence depends on a connection with an irrational background, a context of interconnected meanings and significances that give direction to our endeavours. They suggest that the scrutiny of analytical reason on every aspect of this background is what has disconnected us from it, resulting in a reduction of its importance and a sense of displacement. The difference between Camus’ approach based on rationalism and the counter-Enlightenment tradition is emphasized by comparing the following quotes.

“To understand is above all unify. The mind’s deepest desire, even in its most elaborate operations, parallels man’s unconscious feelings in the face of his universe: it is insistence upon familiarity, and appetite for clarity. Understanding the world for a man is reducing it to the human, stamping it with his seal. [...] If man realized that the universe like him can love and suffer, he would be reconciled. If thought discovered in the shimmering mirrors of phenomena eternal relations capable of summing them up and summing themselves up in a single principle, then would be seen an intellectual joy of which the myth of the blessed would be but a ridiculous imitation. That nostalgia for unity, that appetite for the absolute illustrates the essential impulse for the human drama” (Camus 1979, 22-23).

“Formal logic was the major school of unified science. It provided the Enlightenment thinkers with the schema of the calculability of the world. The mythologizing equation of Ideas with numbers in Plato’s last writings express the longing of all demythologizations: number became the canon of the Enlightenment” (Horkheimer and Adorno 1972, 7).

The disagreement between Camus and the Counter-Enlightenment tradition can be seen as an “antinomy of nihilist reason” with two contrasting answers. The crux of the disagreement revolves around the value of reason and its role in shaping existential meaning. Camus believes that reason’s inability to grasp life as a unity leads to absurdity and a loss of meaning. On the other hand, Adorno and Horkheimer argue that reason’s success in unifying relations and concepts has led to nihilism. The contrast

between Camus and the Counter-Enlightenment tradition raises a question: can nihilism be solved through rational means? Camus rejects the idea that a rationally meaningful answer to the question of the meaning of existence can be given. However, he still looks to reason for a satisfactory response to our absurd condition, which he believes is available to everyone with rational capacity. Camus proposes that everyone can be an absurd being or a rebel.

### **Literature as a Democratic Response to Nihilism**

Until now, we have argued that Camus surpasses Nietzsche by making the problem of nihilism accessible to the average person. However, his rationalistic approach may be insufficient when compared to other, more compelling solutions. Furthermore, there is a strong connection between his rationalism and democratism, which raises the question of whether his democratism can be maintained if his rationalism is rejected. In essence, can there be a democracy that operates on a non-rational level?

An answer to this problem may be found in an important aspect of Camus' work that has not yet been discussed: the literary dimension. Instead of relying solely on reason, we can argue that there is a faculty more evenly distributed among people: the ability to appreciate a good story and be captivated by compelling imagery. As contemporary theorist of radical democracy Jacques Rancière suggests, "Man is a political animal because he is a literary animal who lets himself be diverted from his 'natural' purpose by the power of words" (Jacques 2006, 39). Perhaps the resolution to the antinomy of nihilist reason can be discovered in literature. However, due to the limitations of this paper, we can only briefly explore this idea.

Literature has the potential to address the antinomy of nihilist reason by engaging both the rational and nonrational aspects of our being. In doing so, literature can complement Camus' rationalist response to nihilism and provide a more comprehensive solution to the problem. Moreover, literature has the advantage of being accessible to a wider audience, making Camus' democratic ideals more attainable. Camus' contributions to democratizing the problem of nihilism and its resolution may therefore be attributed not only to his adherence to his Cartesian legacy but also to his skill as a writer. His literary works remain widely read, and powerful images like Sisyphus's eternal struggle or the archer in *The Rebel* taking aim persist and resonate in the collective imagination.

### **Conclusion**

In this article, we have examined the problem of nihilism in the context of the Western philosophical tradition, focusing on the works of Albert

Camus and his interlocutors from the German Counter-Enlightenment. Our investigation has sought to explore and contrast their respective positions on nihilism, reason, and meaning, revealing a complex dialectic between rationalist and anti-rationalist perspectives. The goal of this analysis has been to contribute to a broader understanding of how these thinkers grapple with nihilism and to consider the implications of their ideas for our contemporary world.

We began our inquiry by outlining Camus' rationalist approach to nihilism, which is grounded in his understanding of the human condition as fundamentally absurd. In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus locates the source of absurdity in the disjunction between our desire for meaning and the indifference of the universe. He contends that in response to this absurdity, the individual must engage in a continuous act of rebellion against the meaninglessness of existence, thus affirming life in the face of absurdity. This perspective, which emphasizes the importance of reason and individual agency, forms the basis of Camus' existential humanism.

To provide a counterpoint to Camus' rationalism, we briefly explored some basic ideas of the German Counter-Enlightenment tradition, represented by philosophers such as Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Adorno. This tradition argues that meaningful existence requires an irrational grounding, which is often conveyed through metaphors of darkness and obscurity. In essence, the works of these thinkers propose that reason, in its pursuit of clarity and unity, can inadvertently contribute to nihilism by alienating us from the very sources of meaning and significance.

Our analysis led us to identify the "antinomy of nihilist reason" as a central tension between the rationalist approach of Camus and the counter-Enlightenment tradition. This antinomy raises the question of whether nihilism can be adequately addressed through rational means alone or whether an alternative, non-rational approach is necessary. To explore this issue, we considered the potential role of literature in addressing the problem of nihilism. By engaging with the works of Camus and his interlocutors, we have sought to illuminate the challenges and possibilities that arise in the quest to confront and overcome nihilism.

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Iuliu-Marius MORARIU \*

## ***La Condottiera: a literary masterpiece with prophetic accents***

(Virgil Gheorghiu, *La Condottiera*, translation & introduction by Inez Fitzgerald Storck, afterword by Thierry Gillyboeuf, Bridgeport, CA: Arouca Press, 2022)

With the translation of Virgil Gheorghiu's *La Condottiera* in English language, Inez Fitzgerald Storck offers to the international literature a masterpiece of one of the most representatives' writers of the Romanian culture. Moreover, her demarche is accomplished according to all the cultural and scientific standards.

It was released with the blessing of His Grace Ioan Casian the first Romanian Orthodox bishop of Canada (because Gheorghiu was an Orthodox priest too), who also writes an endorsement of the book, accompanied by a complex introduction (p. IX-XVIII) written by the translator, a glossary (p. 173-176) meant to help the reader to understand the complex theological universe emphasized by the author there, but also by an afterword written by Thierry Gillyboeuf (p. 177-184) author's testamentary legate and also one of the scholars who investigated Gheorghiu's life and work.

In the introductory note the translator offers a brief presentation of the landmarks of his life and biography. Then, she realizes a complex characterisation of the book and its content emphasizing the fact that:

„*La Condottiera*, one of Gheorghiu's first works in French starts out as a murder mystery, with the killing of the miller Nicholas Akathist. Outside the two children who discover his body, still warm, the only person known to be in the village at the time of the crime was Father Theophorus Akathist, village priest and brother of the miller. The suspense evoked by the murder and the subsequent arrest of Father Theophorus continues until almost the last page.

Woven into the narrative are descriptions of the brutality of the Soviet invaders and their Romanian collaborators, and the principal suffering of the Romanian people. Their penury is exemplified by the childhood and youth of the two Akathist brothers. Later in the novel, Gheorghiu satirizes the American military establishment in post-World War II Germany, and the

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primacy of moneymaking for Americans, influencing even their altruistic activities". (p. XV).

Like other works written by the same author<sup>1</sup>, *la Condottiera* is not only a book with relevance for the literary field. It contains interesting philosophical meditations about the meaning of life, anthropology and s. o., historical information (regarding the Communist regime from Romania and its forms of manifestation, autobiographical notes<sup>2</sup> and different references to the international context of the politics from the after-war period), social and sociological investigations, but also aspects that can be used in different fields. For this reason, the fact that it was translated in English in a very elegant language and accompanied not only by an introductory study and a foreword, both of them well written, come to bring an important contribution to the valorisation of the Romanian culture in the English-speaking space and on the American continent.

For this reason, but also for other ones, as the need of re-discovering the prophetic accents from Gheorghiu's work<sup>3</sup>, the demarche of Inez Fitzgerald Storck must not only be known and promoted, but also read and referred to. As Romanians, we should surely be grateful to the translator for her working of translation of this book) and to feel proud that one of the important militant voices of our culture has gained, even at three decades after his death, notoriety and raised the interest on the recent history of our country and its painful moments.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See, for example: Virgil Gheorghiu, *La vingt-cinquieme heure*, (Paris: Plon, 1948); Virgil Gheorghiu, *De la vingt-cinquieme heure a l'heure eternelle*, (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1965); Virgil Gheorghiu, *Dieu ne recoit que le dimanche*, (Paris: Editions du Rocher, 1990); Virgil Gheorghiu, *Ispita libertății – memorii II (The temptation of freedom – memories)*, (Bucharest: 100+1 Gramar, 2002); Virgil Gheorghiu, *La cravache*, (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1960); Virgil Gheorghiu *La seconde chance*, (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1954); Virgil Gheorghiu, *La tunique de peau*, (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1967); Virgil Gheorghiu, *L'Espionne – roman*, (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1971).

<sup>2</sup> Because as the translator underlines: „As in all his work, Gheorghiu draws on his life experience to depict characters and events. For example, as a boy he planted climbing roses all around his family's partially constructed little house to hide the fact that it was in an unfinished state, due to his father's lack of funds. This transformation of a house to look like it was made of flowers was his first poetic creation, as he recounts in his memories, since one of the tasks of the poet is to change ugliness into beauty. In *La Condottiera* the boy Theodore will do the same thing to hide the mean appearance of his father's house. With regard to characters, Gheorghiu's father serves as a model for the physical appearance for Father Teophorus, both seeming to be primarily spiritual beings, lacking in substance, without flesh and bones". Virgil Gheorghiu, *La Condottiera*, translation & introduction by Inez Fitzgerald Storck, afterword by Thierry Gillyboeuf, (Bridgeport, CA: Arouca Press, 2022), XVII. Cf. Eugen Simion, *Genurile biograficului (The genres of the biographic)*, (Bucharest: National Foundation for Science and Art, 2008), 285; Marinela Dorobanțu, Kretz Erwin,



Kretz, "Exile and Interculturalism – The Case of Five French Writers of Romanian Origin," *Studies of Science and Culture*, 7 (2001), no. 3, 113.

<sup>3</sup> Fact that was also approached in: Iuliu-Marius Morariu, *Virgil Gheorghiu on Communism, Capitalism and National-Socialism*, (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2022).