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RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE AS AN EXPERIENCE OF HUMAN FINITUDE

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**Abstract.** I start from a relatively simple idea: the human being is constantly making a multiple experience of truth (once again, in reference to Gadamer's statement), both scientific and technical, as well as religious or aesthetic. Still, what is the relationship between those experiences of truth? Can they express somehow, precisely by their multiplicity, a neutral ethos of today's man, or do they manage to take part in a larger and more elevated experience of truth? In the following paper I will try to bring into focus precisely such issues. I return to the meaning given by Gadamer to the experience of truth. Then I make the distinction between the common sense and the proper sense of alternative. The latter concerns the correlation – sometimes paradoxical – of different experiences of truth. For instance, the correlation between the technical and the religious experience. So one can understand that religious experience is above all an experience of human finitude.

**Key Words:** experience of truth, alternative, paradoxical correlation, religious experience, experience of human finitude.

## The Risk of a Culture of Indifference

Today more easily accept the idea that man has the possibility of many ways of knowledge. Therefore, one can find the truth in many ways. Given that we accept that there are different meanings of the truth, the scientific attitude can only provide one - or just a few - of those meanings. Thus, the prejudice that the truth presupposes a single attitude of the human mind can be overcome<sup>1</sup>. Still, one would immediately be facing new questions, such as that regarding the relationship between those multiple possibilities of truth. Could they express, due to their multiplicity, a neutral ethos of today's man? In other words, are they foreign or indifferent to each other? Somehow they are subjected to one dominant one? Or, instead, get to participate, each in its own way, to a larger and freer economy of truth?

It is known that Richard Rorty explicitly mentions the need of thought to be neutral - especially when faced with issues of the existential kind. He connects the neutrality of thought with certain phenomena of the modern world, such as secularization, cosmopolitan life and cultural pluralism. Thus, we reach a new spirit of tolerance and cohabitation. He immediately adds that the spirit of tolerance is neutral in regard to the issue of what is really central in human life, an issue about the meaning and purpose of human existence<sup>2</sup>. In other words, the assumption that human life may have a sense (and that one may seriously discuss such an issue) makes no sense to Rorty. He accepts the idea of certain social changes, such as that towards a liberal community of life<sup>3</sup>. Nevertheless, he does not mention anything about the sense of social evolution. In that regard he frequently invokes certain names: Donald Davidson, Jacques Derrida or Harold Bloom. We know that some of them explicitly mention the drift or absence of sense. In another instance, though, Rorty expresses more caution in his statements. He makes a distinction between technical rationality (seen as ability or skill necessary for survival), discursive rationality (in communication) and that specific to tolerance (by which one accepts radical behavior differences in regard to the other). About the first he says that it is neutral from an ethical point of view<sup>4</sup>. Nevertheless, it is hard to believe that certain abilities or competences necessary for survival can be considered as neutral from an ethical point of view. Are you allowed anything in order to survive in extreme situations?

In a certain regard he recalls the older idea that there is a full autonomy of technical thought. That same autonomy is claimed today by economical thought or - easier still - by political thought, the same one that can instrumentalise everything at will.

Indeed, there are authors that feel the need to judge the idea of neutrality in knowledge and in the world of life otherwise. In fact, the issue of a possible sense becomes a problem only when we realize the lack

of sense. The issue of sense is especially discussed when the lack thereof becomes obvious, eventually when nonsense is obvious. Our conscience then discovers that its claim to be rational is utterly debatable. Hans-Georg Gadamer understood that well. In another text entitled *Über die Macht der Vernunft /About the Power of Reason*<sup>5</sup>, he makes an eloquent remark in that regard: he who talks with a certain self-importance in the name of reason contradicts himself, because to be rational is to be aware of the limits of our understanding, thus being able to accept a better understanding, irrespective of where it comes from. Juan Martín Velasco, a famous phenomenologist of religion, accepts the fact that the modern idea of neutrality is linked to the phenomenon of secularization, which had certain positive effects. It led, for instance, to the recognition of the autonomy of certain secular domains: science, ethics, politics. Paradoxically, it also “favored the purification of religious life”. Nevertheless, simultaneously, that phenomenon also effected some negative consequences, such as the rise of a “culture of indifference”<sup>6</sup>. Indifference, though, may easily breed cynicism, political fixations and violence. The latter would also be discussed by other scholars, such as Jan Patočka<sup>7</sup>, Constantin Noica<sup>8</sup>, Paul Ricoeur (when he explicitly formulates the idea of a new ethos of the European man)<sup>9</sup>, Umberto Eco<sup>10</sup> and others. In their studies they do not abandon at all the issue of a possible sense in regard to the life of man in a community.

In fact, it is hard to believe that you can follow a neutral way of thinking without seriously affecting your own life and that of your community. Nevertheless, that idea continues to persist with enough force.

### Different Attitudes in One and the Same Historical World

In fact, historically speaking, there never is only one relevant way of understanding. Thus, we cannot say that modern man, or present day man is fatally under the spell of a single cultural attitude. In *The Limits of Interpretation*, for instance, Umberto Eco describes two models of interpretation, one primarily rational (moderately named after the Latin *modus*) and another, which he names hermetic, in the generic sense of the word<sup>11</sup>. Let us take a look at these two models, because each of them made history in the European culture.

He observes from the start that, from the ancient Greeks to present day, to know means to know with help of a cause. More exactly, to know is to identify a cause, a ground, a reason. Thinking by causes is done in orderly steps, usually in a single direction, such as that from cause to effect. But that cognitive exercise has its justification in what we call logical principles of thinking (the principle of identity, of non-contradiction and of excluded middle). It was already assimilated by many social conducts. For instance, contractual conduct adopts the idea of

norm, especially under the form of the juridical and social contracts. Still, the word *modus* does not mean only “norm”, but also “border” or “frontier”. The will to establish firm borders becomes a decisive reflex for the town-man, the one who claims he is “civilized”. Thus, the great forts and empires of the European world were constituted. “The Latin obsession with spatial borders emerges at once with the founding myth: Romulus draws a border and kills his brother because he does not respect him. Without a recognized border there can be no *civitas* /citadel/”. New categories of thought and common life are called for: delimited space, successive and irreversible time, causal or binary order etc. They are recognizable even today if we consider, for instance, “mathematics and logic, science and computer programming”, new technology set to serve efficiency and, no less, the social mode of power and property reproduction.

Nevertheless, Eco notes that the model of understanding justified by the logic of non-contradiction does not exhaust that known as Greek heritage. Because at the same time there existed a different model, found both in ancient traditions and in neoplatonic, or Christian teachings<sup>12</sup>. The hermetic model of interpretation insists primarily on certain correspondences and analogies, invoking countless ways of communication between the objects that constitute this world. His own language becomes prevalently analogical and symbolic. He extends far into the 2nd century B.C., when the history of the empire turns truly cosmopolite. The world in those times is “a complete mixture of races and languages, a cross-breed of people and ideas, where all the gods become tolerated”. Precisely in such a world, syncretistic and irresolute, “one of the principles of the Greek rational model enters the crisis, the excluded middle”. Nevertheless, hermetic interpretation survives until later, in the Middle Ages, among alchemists, cabalists and neoplatonists (2, 1. 4) who accept it. With some differences, it is recognizable in gnostic tradition (2, 1. 5) and in romantic tradition. In our days there are enough authors who adopt interpretations of the hermetic kind, such as Gilbert Durand, Harold Bloom or Geoffrey Hartman.

It is important to note that the hermetic science, a qualitative one, seriously influences Bacon, Copernic, Kepler, Newton and others. Without intention, “the hermetic model contributes to the birth of its new adversary, the modern scientific rationalism”. That means that the evolution of thinking is much more complicated than we imagine. As noted by Eco at a certain point, “modern quantitative science emerges in a dialogue with the quantitative science of hermetism”. What matters, thus, is precisely their dialogue or confrontation, so that it is hard to consider one of them as valid singularly.

## About Significativity in the World of Life

What we formally delimit as nonsense, eventually as lack of sense, can be relevant or eloquent in many regards. And thus, significant. For instance, the behavior of the religious man, ancient or modern, appears as aberrant to an analysis of positivist orientation (Edward Burnett Tylor, James George Frazer). Still, it becomes intelligible and significant from another perspective, such as the phenomenological one. In fact, it reveals to us the way in which man recognizes his own limits, the difference between reality and appearance, I and the world, or the space of freedom found in its symbolical practices. The phenomenology of religion, especially beginning with Rudolf Otto until today, places great emphasis on this fact.

We know that in existential analysis the significativity is found even at the level of preliminary, pre-reflexive understanding. It was considered in relation to the existential structure constituted by the fact of being-in-the-world (*In-der-Welt-sein*, according to Heidegger in *Sein und Zeit*, § 18). German philosopher says, every time we encounter something, the world has already been discovered, even if not thematically. Similarly, every time we encounter or use something ("proper to its purpose"), we already have an understanding in regard to what will be done, to that thing and to its use. The world of preoccupations we find ourselves in and encounter one thing or another is, in fact, a world of references and functional purposes, that is, a wide network of significations.

In one of his works on interpretation, Paul Ricoeur notes that, currently, there is a slight foreground takeover by different human issues: autonomy, pleasure, property, power, etc. Unfortunately, the issue of sense and nonsense is usually left aside. He immediately adds that we people lack many things, such as justice, or, from another perspective, love, but, if we pay enough attention to ourselves, we see that most of all we lack significance. We do not realize that easily, but it affects us more than we would like to believe.

Many of the late writings of Wittgenstein insist on the idea that certain statements that may easily appear as nonsense, such as the ethical or religious ones, are profoundly significant in the human world of life. He would say the same in his discussions with the people he related with. For instance, in regard to the terms "being" and "anxiety" in certain pages of Heidegger, he notes (in December 1929, in a discussion with Moritz Schlick) that they reveal the very limits of our language. They cannot be formulated in statements with a well determined sense, logically or empirically. Still, their presence is felt, they reveal themselves, as it happens in the pages of certain writers. That which is significant in our life cannot be described as such. Nevertheless, there is the possibility that they reveal themselves - with their significance or their force - in metaphysical meditation, in arts and in religious meditation. Thus we will

recognize, for instance, the significance of time and our fright thereof, the fear of death, the feeling of guilt and the power of sacrifice, the joy of an ancient ritual, the wish to love unconditionally, the idea of salvation and that of a sense in life<sup>13</sup>. As we see, his awareness in regard to that is easy to note, even though he understood well that they they cannot be delimited as some phenomena dealt with by the natural sciences.

### Experience of Truth

In what regard, though, can we speak of an experience of truth ? And why precisely is the meaning of this phrase relevant today ?

We know that the phrase as such is found in the writings of Hans-Georg Gadamer, for instance in *Truth and Method* (mainly in the chapter *The Concept of Experience and the Essence of Hermeneutic Experience*)<sup>14</sup>. The German philosopher makes the distinction from the very beginning between experience and experiment, then between the common understanding of experience and his own. I will briefly mention those preliminary distinctions.

Talking about experiments, Gadamer notes the way in which modern science modifies the idea of experience. It methodically delimits the idea, as if it were a repeatable fact. The experiment is possible as long as the subjectivity of the one conducting it and his historical time are evacuated from the equation. The experience is therefore objectivized, so as to be considered a source of objective knowledge. “The aim of science is to objectivize the experience, so that it retain no historical component.. The fact as such was already noted by Edmund Husserl, in *Experience and Judgement* (1939), where he discusses the unilaterality of the scientific idealization of the experience. But the experience that concerns the world of life precedes, according to Husserl, any idealization thereof through science.

In common sense the experience take the form of repeated facts, happenings or practices that provide man with new knowledge, new skills and competences. They are added to the old ones and can ensure an enhanced degree of comprehension. An experienced man, in this sense, is capable to solve more difficult situations, as when someone passes through a completely foreign land. Nevertheless, it is a matter of an experience with what we are facing: states, situations, ideas, etc. Consequently, it has an objectual character. Even though it concerns heterogeneous situations, our conscience adds one to the others in the same pattern of understanding. It obtains from them a kind of confirmation and extension of the already known, with minor rectifications from one experience to another.

In proper sense, though, the experience concerns precisely the way we think or understand. It seeks to modify the wider perspective of understanding, so that it affects the way we see the world (“an experience

as such is always negative”). There are positive effects of this negative potential, such as the possibility of knowledge “about what we think we know already, thus, about something generic”. As already noted by Hegel, when our conscience makes a certain experience, it does it to itself. Thus, it opens to other experiences - and learns from that opening. Thereby it gains “a new horizon within which something can become an experience”. As saying something more, therefore, he whom we call experienced did not become that just *through* experiences, but also through his openness *toward* experiences. That is why an experience in proper sense “cannot be ‘done’ twice”, it cannot be simply repeated as in a technical laboratory.

### Aeschylus: *Agamemnon*, 77

As it modifies precisely the way we see ourselves, an experience is borne as a decisive happening. According to Gadamer, it has a pathetic character (in the sense of the Greek *pathos*), because it tries us and it can shatter many of our expectations. In that regard he invokes Aeschylus words from *Agamemnon*, 77, where a connection is made between the fact of understanding something essential and suffering itself<sup>5</sup>. The Greek writer recognized precisely the metaphysical meaning of an old saying: “to learn through suffering (*pathei - mathos*)”. It is an expression that make no reference to the fact that we learn through errors and many deceptions. “What man must learn through suffering is not one thing or another, but he must penetrate by judgment itself the limits of human existence, the unsurpassable character of the border to the divine. In fact, the issue is about religious knowledge, that knowledge from which Greek tragedy was born.” Thus, in its proper sense, an experience concerns the human way of being, that which is ontologically specific to it.

To what new conclusion will the notice of that distinct *pathos* of experience in proper sense lead? As Gadamer writes, the experience as such is “the experience of human finitude”. Consequently, Aeschylus was talking about that which lies in man’s power and especially that which does not. In fact, only in the far light of the beyond does the understanding of our own way to be become possible. The experienced man, who makes such an experience, “knows that he cannot master time and future”. He understands well something essential, that is, “the limits of any foresight and the incertitude of any plans”. Exactly in that sense the issue is about knowledge in the historical way to be of man.

Can we also say, though, that this experience is in regard to the truth itself? It is precisely what Gadamer points out further on. In the conscience of the one who makes it “the value of truth of the experience is accomplished”. Thus, the value of truth owns now the experience as such. The truth itself becomes now an experience, or, as Gadamer says, an event (*Geschehen*). Moreover, the experience of finitude accomplishes that value of truth. Having made the experience of his own finitude, the man will

recognize what is real and catch a glimpse of what really is. He will prove to be true that which matters in the world of his life. Something turns out as real precisely because it cannot ever be at one's disposal, for instance, it cannot be turned into its opposite, "it cannot be overturned anymore" (Heinrich Ranke). Real is that which reveals one limit or another of the experience, making us understand that not everything is in our power.

We understand, in fact, that in the world of history one cannot revoke anything, there is not enough time for everything and nothing turns back the same. That is precisely why our projects and the expectations that drive them must be seen in the light of our own finitude.

### Another Meaning of Alternative

Now we encounter a new difficulty. It being multiple, could the experience of truth indicate any point of intersection for its important modalities? Does it reveal any common root or, more importantly yet, a point where roots converge?

It is not enough to distinguish between different experiences of truth. We could not be content with the mere recognition of their multiplicity, because we would still risk falling into neutrality and valoric relativism. Therefore, we must assume a possible intersection or a correlation thereof. Precisely in that sense I will bring into discussion the idea of alternative of experiences of truth.

Alternative in what sense, though? We often use that word in the sense of new or different variant. It is what we mean when we say, for instance, that the moral solution may be an alternative to the juridical one. In fact, the term is used in every day talk with two meanings. It may name the possibility to choose a solution out of two available ones: if one is chosen, the other is abandoned. The term "alternative" also signifies the succession of two paths or solutions<sup>16</sup>. In that sense, we say, for instance, that lay moral represents an alternative to the religious one. Both meanings above, though, may unfortunately lead to enough confusion. The first meaning complies with the logical operator of exclusive disjunction: if one solution is considered true, the other is necessarily false. The second meaning may be mistaken with "alternation", because it involves the simple alternation of distinct data.

That is why I would like to turn your attention to another meaning of alternative, not a new one, as the Latin etymology of the term makes a clear suggestion thereof. I do not mean the verb *alterno*, -āre, in the sense of "to alternate", "to take turns", but the adverbial pronoun *alterutrumque*, "each of two", "one and the other", "both one and the other". Can we can talk, in this case, about an inclusive disjunction? I do not think so, because this expression is artificial, forced, as when we say "gentle violence" or "reciprocal separation". Such an oxymoron is not the best example, though. The disjunction means partition, separation, diastase<sup>17</sup>. Still, the



significance of *alterutrumque* does neither imply temporal succession of the two situations, nor their reciprocal exclusion<sup>18</sup>. Moreover, there is no indifference towards one another, either, as if they would ignore each other.

In its proper sense, the alternative concerns precisely the correlation – and sometimes co-presence – of different experiences. That meaning may be rendered by other expressions too: for example, a bifurcation of the sense of truth, a concurrence of different experiences of truth, their concomitance, etc. That may happen when an experience of truth opens by itself and freely towards a different one. It does so, as mentioned above, inasmuch as it is an experience of one's own limits and as it participates to the self-understanding of man.

That meaning of alternative, even though it was not thematized as such, has already been applied by certain interpreters. For instance, it was applied by those that recognized the real significance of a paradox in regard to the human way of being. Certain writings of Blaise Pascal or Søren Kierkegaard (especially *Either/Or*, 1843 and *Philosophical Fragments*, 1844) may offer many indications in that sense. The idea was applied even earlier, during the patristic age, by those writers who recognized the theological sense of paradox and antinomy. Not incidentally it returns with those who, by true philocalic tradition, thoroughly research the apophatic way of thinking and the theological significance of antinomy. Mircea Vulcănescu, for instance, frequently mentions the idea that, from a Christian point of view, man lives both in this age and beyond it<sup>19</sup>. In reference to the Christian dogma, Paul Evdokimov discusses its profoundly antinomic character<sup>20</sup>. He draws attention to three distinct dogmatic situations, out of which one in reference to the Holy Trinity, another in regard to the double nature of Christ and the last one in reference to authentic living in Christ. The rules of logical thinking, such as the exclusion of the middle, are now relaxed to the extreme. Olivier Clément, when discussing “dogmatic definition”, firstly takes into account its antinomic expression for the human intellect<sup>21</sup>. Also, Dumitru Stăniloae, in reference to that which is specific to human existence, uses in several instances the term “alternative”, as one that indicates precisely its paradoxical character.

### Alternative Experiences of Truth

Nevertheless, how can such a paradoxical correlation of distinct experiences of truth be possible? In other words, how is the alternative as such possible? Let us take a look at several situations in that regard, which might illustrate, one way or another, the idea above.

For instance, we should remember that the Greek term *techne* signifies both craft, skill and art. In fact, it names a human disposition that directs to at least two senses, both to production and to creation. It directs

both to the technical world of artifacts and to the artistic one. Consequently, together with the technical experience there occurs, one way or another, the aesthetic experience as well. Together with the technical will of man, his aesthetic sensitivity is awake as well. Both of them regard the world of artifacts, even though with very different intentionalities. When Gérard Genette aims to define the work of art, he considers it from the beginning as artifact - or as a human product - with an aesthetic function. Later, other interpreters, as Roger Pouivet, will also start, in his discussion on the work of art, from that world of artifacts<sup>22</sup>. Technique and arts divide among them, affecting each other in the process, the same symbolic world.

Still, the technical experience, by being equivocal, also participates in another correlation, a somehow unexpected one. It is that correlation where the other term constitutes the religious experience itself. That correlation was already discussed by some phenomenologist of religious life, as Van der Leeuw, Eliade and others<sup>23</sup>. They take into consideration the religious significance of technical conduct, even in reference to modern technique. One of the theologians who joins this discussion, Joseph Ratzinger, actually points out that applied technologies reactivate in our conscience a more ancient difference, one that is linked to the Greek heritage of Europe. It is the “difference between goods and Good”, originating in the difference noted by Plato between good things and good as such. In that difference, “the right of moral conscience and the reciprocal relationship between *ratio* and *religio* are given at the same time”<sup>24</sup>. In the modern world the phenomenon of secularization places face to face once again two economies: that of social production and that of the gift. The above mentioned fact is taken into account even by certain more skeptical interpreters, such as Gianni Vattimo (for instance, in his conversations with Richard Rorty, published in 2005 under the title *The Future of Religion. Solidarity, Charity, Irony*).

When discussing *subtilitas applicandi*, Hans-Georg Gadamer rediscovers what more ancient hermeneutics named analogical understanding, which is able to change and to edify self-conscience itself<sup>25</sup>. It is that situation where the conscience does not decide to take one of the two possible variants (for example, “explanation or understanding”, “practical or theoretical attitude”, “action or contemplation”). It does not accept the relationship of adversity between attitudes that can be different. On the contrary, it recognizes a common root thereof, a justification of each one and - beyond that - a common horizon of sense. At the same time, it sees a test of the limits of understanding as such. For instance, virtue can be truly understood only by the one who practices it. And the one who practices a certain virtue will not disregard the other virtues. Similarly, in regard to the issue of justice, of certitude and of good, of beauty and piety. Real understanding does not require one only to know, but also to evaluate and to decide, eventually, to do yourself that

which you understood must be done<sup>26</sup>. Understanding and will - to the extreme, contemplation and the act - are no longer strange to one another anymore now. Everything happens as in some sort of secret and essential to them negotiation.

Dumitru Stăniloae discusses with great clarity, in his writings of dogmatic theology, the real presence of the alternative, such as it is innate to the human way to be. He starts from what was well understood in patristic literature, that man, as a person, stands both in this world and beyond it. Beyond this world does not mean separated from it at all, something impossible in fact, but in an essential relationship with that which transgresses it. It is a situation that generates many strong contrasts, real bifurcations in a man's life<sup>27</sup>. They appear as real paradoxes, ones that do not necessarily require a logical or technical solution. For example, the inexhaustible, yet touched finitude character of the human being. Or its constant will to know even that which cannot be comprehended by its mind, in which case not knowing may mean "knowledge of the mystery". At the same time, the constantly manifested double tendency: to edify and simultaneously fall into the world ("into passionate pleasures").<sup>28</sup> That is a duality that expresses "the possibility of alternative movement" of the person itself. Some contrasts may be linked with the antonymic logic of the being of the created. Thus are those that reveal the person as unique - yet equal to the others, oriented towards self - yet towards the other, always the same - yet evolving, ineffable - yet explainable in certain regards.

The alternative of certain experiences becomes possible by virtue of what each of them recognizes beyond its inevitable boundaries. It is not just the simple recognition of another, strange experience, but the self-recognition in an apparently strange one. Let us think, for instance, of the metaphysical significance of daily conduct, eventually of the religious significance of our technical conduct. You may think that, thereby, completely strange experiences are linked in a relationship, but it is only a paradoxical correlation. Such correlations describe the horizon lines of our world, even if they seem obsolete and hard to notice<sup>29</sup>. That is how I would understand the older idea that the experience of beauty is also that of love, that is, the love of beauty. The expression as such is paradoxal, though. When he said that beauty might save this world, Dostoyevsky did only go deeper into an ancient paradox. In the same way, I would attempt to understand the idea - coming from Plato - that good is above being. Likewise remember the situation where truth and life mean one and the same thing. The correlated terms may seem, at first glance, as perfectly strange, only that their meaning reveals itself precisely in that strange proximity of the different.

As for the truth, since we are discussing experiences of truth, it must be seen in another than any of its common acceptations. It is not a matter of, let us say, only that called exactitude, or coherence, or economy of certain

statements. Neither is it a new acception next to the previous ones, such as certitude. In fact, no acception of the truth matters that much anymore, except for the possible experience with each of them in turn. Because, as we have seen, the experience in its own sense sets in relationship the truth and the conscience of our own finitude. More precisely, it sets in relationship the truth and that unusual freedom that cannot be discovered but in the conscience of one's own finitude. It is what we learn from the neo-testamentary writings, as in *John*, 8. When it says there that the truth shall set us free<sup>30</sup>, that truth cannot be fixed under any formula. It values, in the end, as a horizon for a sense of knowledge and also of life, a horizon towards which any of us can open.

Translation by Norbert Poruciu

### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Some of these ideas were formulated, with different arguments, nevertheless, in Ștefan Afloroaei, "Distinct Ways of Thinking and Distinct Experiences of Truth", in *Journal for Interdisciplinary Research on Religion and Science* (2, 2008), 157-188.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Richard Rorty, *Essays on Heidegger and Others* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 132-133.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Rorty, *Contingency, irony and solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), section 9. In such a community diversity would really be free: different types of people, cultures and vocabularies would cohabitate peacefully. In fact, in the closing pages of his book, he describes a kind of utopia whose meaning makes reference precisely to the possibility of that liberal community of life.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Rorty, *Truth and Progress* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 114.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, „Über die Macht der Vernunft", in Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Lob der Theorie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1983).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Juan Martin Velasco, "Eliade și teologia creștină: câteva repere" ["Eliade and Christian Theology: a few guidelines"], in Cristian Bădiliță and Paul Barbăneagră (eds.), *Întâlnirea cu sacralul [An Encounter With the Sacred]* (Botoșani: Axa Publishing House, 1996), 106.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Jan Patočka, *Platon et l'Europe* (Paris: Verdier, 1983), 65 sq.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Constantin Noica, "Încercare asupra filosofiei tradiționale" ["An Approach to Traditional Philosophy"], in Constantin Noica, *Devenirea întru ființă [Becoming Into Being]* (București: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1981), especially the pages on the ethos of neutrality and the oriented ethos. I already mentioned Noica's writings in Ștefan Afloroaei, "Neutral Reason and Oriented Reason (Constantin Noica: a distinct project on the phenomenology of reason)", in *Journal for Interdisciplinary Research on Religion and Science* (5, 2009), 72-101.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Paul Ricoeur, "Quel éthos nouveau pour l'Europe?", in Paul Ricoeur, *Sur la traduction [About Translation]* (Paris: Bayard, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Carlo Maria Martini and Umberto Eco, *În ce cred cei care nu cred ? [What do Non-believers Believe in ?]* (1996) translation by Dragoș Zămosteanu (Iași: Polirom Publishing House, 2001), 17-19.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Umberto Eco, *I limiti dell'interpretazione* [*The Limits of Interpretation*] (Milano: Bompiani, 1990), § 2. 1.

<sup>12</sup> It is hard to assert that the three spiritual traditions (Christian, neoplatonic and hermetic), quite distinct from each other, assume the same model of interpretation. Sometimes Eco takes an even greater risk and mentions only two traditions: the neoplatonic-christian and the hermetic.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. in regard to this issue Mircea Flonta, *Gânditorul Singuratic. Critica și practica filosofiei la Ludwig Wittgenstein* [*The Lonesome Thinker. Critique and Practice of the Philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein*] (Bucharest: Humanitas Publishing House, 2008), 148-169, 349-361.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Hermeneutik, I, Wahrheit und Methode. Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1990), 325 sq.

<sup>15</sup> Let us briefly review a few lines. "He who praises, with open soul, / the triumphant name of Zeus / will gain wisdom in all. / He opened to man / the wise paths / and gave them a law: / 'To suffer so as to learn'. / Even in deep sleep, / when the heart is faced with the oozing torment / recalling so many needs, / is overcome with wisdom. And that's grace / bestowed by the will of the gods seated / at the holy helm" (Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, 77).

Before that, though, the Greek writer recalls the myth of the *Moirae*, in which the focus is on a kind of short-sightedness of human beings. As daughters of the Night, the *Moirae* are guardians of the ancient ways and they severely punish any transgression of natural limits, such as homicide, parricide, deeds of impiety, etc. Thereby they remind man of an absolutely elementary fact, that he is mortal. It is precisely therefore that they limit the power of visionaries, so as not to reveal to man too much about the future.

<sup>16</sup> The first meaning indicates two very different experiences, as if they were two distinct genders. The second, though, takes into account two distinct phenomena in the sphere of one and the same experience. There are other terms in the same semantic family: *alternation* (in biology, the succession of a sexed generation after a non-sexed), *alternating* (electricity), etc.

<sup>17</sup> In logic alternative is a form of disjunctive judgement: when one proposition is true, the other is necessarily false (according to the law of the excluded middle). Disjunction can be 1) exclusive, when it expresses the incompatibility of the two terms ("you can be either awake or dreaming"), either one is true or neither; 2) inclusive, when either one is true or both, but never neither ("for this trip we need a compass or a torch"). The latter situation is somehow artificial, though, or improper, as the connector "or" loses its disjunctive function.

<sup>18</sup> I discussed this distinct sense of alternative in Ștefan Afloroaei, "Adversity and Alternative. Their expression in the will to interpret", in Ștefan Afloroaei (ed.), *Alternative hermeneutice* [*Hermeneutic Alternatives*] (Iași: Cantes Publishing House, 1999), where I mentioned the philosophic understanding of the term (pp. 13-19), the difference to dilemma and to a dialectic figure (pp. 20-26), its ontological and existential sense (pp. 26-34), the possibility of alternative interpretations (pp. 35-41).

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Mircea Vulcănescu, *Creștinul în lumea modernă* [*Christians in the Modern World*], in his volume *Eros și Logos* [*Eros and Logos*] (Bucharest: Paideia Publishing House, 1991).

<sup>20</sup> Paul Evodokimov, *Ortodoxia* [*Orthodoxy*], translation by I. Popa (Bucharest: Editura IBMBOR, 1996), 190.

<sup>21</sup> Olivier Clément, *Biserica Ortodoxă* [*The Orthodox Church*], translation by Alin Ionescu (Bucharest: Teora Publishing House, 2000), 43. Cf. also John Meyendorff, *Teologia bizantină. Tendințe istorice și teme doctrinare* [*Byzantine Theology. Historical Tendencies and Doctrinary Themes*] (Bucharest: Editura IBMBOR, 1996), 299 sq.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Roger Pouivet, *Qu'est-ce qu'une oeuvre d'art ?* (Paris: Vrin, 2007), especially fourth section.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Ștefan Afloroaei, "Mircea Eliade: două lecturi inevitabile" ["Mircea Eliade: two inevitable readings"], in Sorin Șelaru (ed.), *Dialogul dintre teologie și filosofie* [*The Dialogue Between Theology and Philosophy*], II (București: Editura Basilica, 2009).

<sup>24</sup> Joseph Kardinal Ratzinger, *Europa – verpflichtendes Erbe für die Christen*, in Franz König und Karl Rahner (Hrsg.), *Europa. Horizonte der Hoffnung* (Wien, Köln: Verlag Styria, 1983), 71.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, second part, II, 2. See in that regard Jean Grondin, *L'universalité de l'herméneutique* (Paris: PUF, 1993), 175 sq.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Matthew Foster, *Gadamer and Practical Philosophy. The Hermeneutics of Moral Confidence* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), 69 sq. In the study entitled "About Interpretation. Description of Frontiers", in Ștefan Afloroaei (ed.), *Limite ale interpretării* [*Limits of Interpretation*] (Iași: Axis Publishing House, 2001), 148 sq., I named this threshold of understanding "the Pascal frontier", since the French thinker found, as few others did, the ethical exigence of any reference in existential values.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Studii de teologie dogmatică ortodoxă* [*Studies of Dogmatic Orthodox Theology*] (Craiova, Editura Mitropoliei Olteniei, 1990), 173-200.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*, 179.

<sup>29</sup> I made a summary of certain correlations - or paradoxical conjunctions, as I named them then - in Ștefan Afloroaei, *Metafizica noastră de toate zilele. Despre dispoziția speculativă a gândirii și prezența ei firească astăzi* [*Our Daily Metaphysics. About the Speculative Disposition of Thinking and Its Natural Presence Today*] (Bucharest: Humanitas Publishing House, 2008), especially § 47.

<sup>30</sup> "If you hold to My teaching, you are really My disciples / Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (*John* 8, 31-32).

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