

***Paideia* and *Kenosis*: the setting up and resignification of the idea of edification between Greek philosophy and Eastern Christianity**

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Abstract

The current study is an assessment of the establishment and evolution of the European cultural model from an education the perspective of the idea of training. European cultural history has followed has been guided by a few formative training ideals, which had a decisive influence on the European collective mentality. If the ancient Greeks were the first to formulate the need for *paideia* as one means to cultivate the self, modernity brings the concept of *bildung* – edification – to the table. However, the complexity of the European cultural model is probably probabbly best illustrated by the human edifying path described by Christianity, especially by its Eastern branch. In this case, edification is understood as *kenosis*, self-emptying – which must not be seen as the an annihilation anihilation of one's personality but as an the experience of that which was called the of returning to the self. The conclusion outlined in this article is that the Christian Orthodox understanding of edification offers interesting and very productive solutions to the recent crisis of training education models for individuals and it suggests that they should be considered persons – a term that is very rich in significations in Eastern Christianity.

Abrégé

Le présent travail évalue la constitution et l'évolution du modèle culturel européen dans la perspective de l'idée de formation. L'histoire culturelle européenne a connu quelques idéaux formatifs, qui ont influencé de manière essentielle le mental collectif européen. Si les anciens Grecs ont formulé pour la première fois la nécessité de la *paideia* comme voie de se cultiver soi-même, la modernité s'appuie sur le concept de *bildung*, d'édification. Néanmoins, la complexité du modèle culturel européen est probablement le mieux illustrée par la voie d'édification décrite par le christianisme, surtout celui

oriental. Car, dans ce cas, l'édification prend la forme du *kenosis*, du dépouillement de soi-même, qui ne doit pas être vu comme annulation de la personnalité, mais comme expérience de ce qu'on a appelé retour à soi-même. La conclusion de cette étude est justement que le sens édificateur dans l'orthodoxie chrétienne offre des solutions intéressantes et très productives à la crise récente des modèles de formation de l'individu, tout en proposant la compréhension de celui-ci comme personne (avec toutes les significations que ce terme implique dans l'Orient chrétien).

The theme of edification in the present interpretive context

When linked to human experience, the term of *edification* proves to be a recent one. It is a product of Western philosophical meditation and it originates in the shift of perspective brought by the Enlightenment and the Romanticism. In German expression, as *Bildung*, the term caused significant meditations on human experience, concerning both its nature and especially what is related to the purposes that host or might host the human way of creating experience. The present concerns with respect to the connection between interpretation and understanding, as path towards self-edification, brought a few dilemmas that cross the various perspectives. Thus, *the subject* is claimed by the phenomenologically marked and open hermeneutics, but also by the analysis resulting from the horizon of analytical thought and by pragmatism. At the same time, a theme opened to present debates is that related to the dilemma between *externalism* and *self-knowledge* with respect to the meaning of edification.¹ It is a recent rephrasing of a more ancient dilemma pertaining to the *hermeneutic circle*: edification is linked to self-knowledge, which, in its turn, depends on the experience of the world, the experience of the otherness. The experience of the otherness is not possible without a preliminary set up of the self by internal knowledge. The

¹ Jordi Fernandez, *Externalism and Self-Knowledge: A Puzzle in Two Dimensions*, in *European Journal of Philosophy*, No.1, Vol. 12, Blackwell, 2004, p. 12.

understanding movement takes place continuously from the whole to the part and back to the whole. The task is that of extending the unit of understood sense in concentric circles. Harmonizing all traits into the whole is always the adequate criterion for the correctness of understanding.² Recently, especially in the (British and American) English area, the discussions referring to the exit or to the way of surpassing the dilemma mainly employed the conceptual instruments provided by the analytic philosophy. For instance, K. J. Kraay, when analyzing the theory of Tyler Burge named the *inclusion theory*, in a study called *Externalism, Memory, And Self-Knowledge* states: „*Externalism* holds that the individuation of mental content depends on factors external to the subject. This doctrine appears to undermine both the claim that there is *a priori* self-knowledge, and the view that individuals have privileged access to their thoughts. Tyler Burge’s influential *inclusion theory of self-knowledge* purports to reconcile externalism with authoritative self-knowledge. I first consider Paul Boghossian’s claim that the inclusion theory is internally inconsistent. I reject one line of response to this charge, but I endorse another. I next suggest, however, that the inclusion theory has little explanatory value. First, externalism seems inconsistent with the view that there is *a priori* self-knowledge. (If mental content is individuated partly by factors external to *S*, then it seems that *S* must investigate the external world in order to know her own thoughts.) Second, if externalism rules out self-knowledge, it is also inconsistent with the thesis that individuals have privileged access to their thoughts. (Without self-knowledge, privileged access is impossible.)”³ The philosophy of language was also involved, stressing on the influence of the understanding and of the interpretation process with respect to the external reference when passing through the categories of language. In this context, the issue of referentiality involves the problem of truth of the sentence.⁴ The involvement of the concept of faith, when related to the act of understanding belongs to the same register. Understanding depends on the act of faith, yet the meaning of

² H. G. Gadamer, *Adevăr și metodă [Truth and Method]*, Ed. Teora, București, 2000, p. 409.

³ K. J. Kraay, *Externalism, Memory, And Self-Knowledge*, *Erkenntnis*, 56: 297–317, *Kluwer Academic Publishers*, 2002, p. 297.

⁴ Catherine Z. Elgin, *Interpretation And Understanding*, *Erkenntnis*, 52, *Kluwer Academic Publishers*, 2000, p. 175.

the term faith is the largely subjective one, not involving the explicitly religious dimension. The truth conditions of a sentence as preliminary act to the decision of trustworthiness are studied.⁵ However, in the present continental philosophy there is a tendency to research the conditions of edification in an existential register, attitude shown by Wilhelm Dilthey's texts, the one that conditioned the possibility of understanding, as constituent of edification, by *reliving*, the only way to sense the oneness of the spirit's products. Understanding differs from explanation as the sciences of spirit have a completely different object from those of nature. The search of what is particular to the sciences of the spirit, the central theme of Dilthey's research, will decide on the long term the destiny of continental discourse on the act of understanding, Husserl's work being the best example in this sense.

In fact, the particular importance given to the theme of self-edification originates especially in Martin Heidegger's thought who determined a crucial turn in the meanings that the act of interpretation is based on. The turn consisted in the change of the object of interpretation, passing from the interpretation of texts as central issue of hermeneutics to existential understanding, result of the human way of being in the world. Human existence necessarily involves the act of understanding, the „text” is the world now or, to be more precise, human existence in its openness to the world. The direction initiated by Heidegger, with fundamental existential accents, but also with an important phenomenological openness, could be valued, in its spirit, by the thought that will become aware of the failure and the inappropriateness of the Enlightenment featured gnoseological paradigm. H.G. Gadamer will give the most learned expression to this need of reviewing the model of obtaining the truth claimed by the thought of the XVIIIth and XIXth century (but which had serious consequences on the XXth century, too). In fact, Gadamer's critique aims at the traditional gnoseological vision of the Enlightenment, according to which knowledge would be an active process of

⁵ David Hunter, *Understanding and Belief*, Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, vol. 58, No. 3, 1998, p. 559.

identifying the subject with a self-distinctive object. The distance between the two terms of the gnoseological act that takes the shape of a mutual antinomy may no longer be cancelled. This hermeneutic conscience rephrases the demands of the act of interpretation, considering what received the name of *horizon*. There is a difference of principle between the author's horizon and the interpreter's one, as historicity cannot be avoided. It is important to acknowledge the temporal distance as a positive and fruitful possibility of understanding. This distance is saturated by tradition continuity as in its light any transmission process occurs. Moreover, Gadamer claims that the temporal distance can solve the genuinely critical task of hermeneutics of distinguishing the true prejudgments from the false ones.⁶ However, modernity's claim of *objectivity* in truth delivery due to the methodology of science was also seriously challenged, as the prescientific dimension of the method of science is not a scientific one. Natural language, with its role in verbalizing scientific discourse is the best example of the necessity to review the claims of science for the objectivity of results of this type of discourse. On the meanings of self-edification, it is certain that these assertions will denote a real change for the ideal that hermeneutics and phenomenology will express with respect to man's ways of formation. The "stake" of this vision is significantly larger as it gives the human being higher and radical powers than the simple true knowledge of the world by self-description or by means of humanities. This formation ideal discusses the assumptions of the education model of modernity and the whole recent cultural model in a more general plan. Such a perspective makes Gadamer claim that the result of formation (*Bildung*) is not accomplished by a technical control, but rather derives from the internal process of formation and set up, thus being subjected to a continuous evolution and formation. Therefore, Gadamer compares *Bildung* to the Greek *physis* as formation has as little external purposes as nature.⁷ Going even further, the German author

⁶ H. G. Gadamer, *op.cit.*, p. 414.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 20.

claims that formation and culture cannot be considered a purpose, except for the case of the trainer's reflected themes. The concept of *Bildung* goes beyond the simple nurture of some aptitudes.

As mentioned above, after Heidegger, two different directions for solving the problems regarding the need of self-edification took shape. Mostly due to the need of objectivity, the „technical features” of edification received the discursive expression of analytics and pragmatism. However, this direction may not account for the ultimate purposes of formation that cannot be expressed within the limits of positive discourse. Therefore, not only hermeneutics, but especially phenomenology and existentialism make up for an understanding that modernity ignored with respect to what self-edification refers to. Here, the recent French phenomenology that recovers evangelic statements in a spectacular way is the best instance.

There is a special element that occurs with respect to the Romanian spiritual field and to the cultural model of the Eastern Europe of Byzantine origin, in general. The concept of *formation* is rather unknown to the mentalities that the spiritual openness of the East European traditions developed. To be more precise, it is about the significances that this concept received in the context of Enlightenment along with early modernity. Especially in the XVIIIth century, the breakage between the two European cultural expressions became extremely visible, i.e. that of a confident West in the possibilities of positive description of man along with the more and more efficient manipulation of the human, both in terms of individual and community, and that of an East that seemed anachronistic and immovable by its anchorage in Tradition, characterized by an appeal to historicism that could not receive (in any way) positive consideration from the part of the West in any way. The East remained misunderstood until the middle of the XXth century, if not totally disdained. Certainly, this occurred due to the ideals of Enlightenment and rationalism that considered the logical and reasonable nurture of mind as the fulfillment of man's most authentic designation. This paradigm mostly lost the means of the symbolic expression of reality and especially man's own way of existing.

Therefore, these meanings that the idea of edification had could not correspond to what the East understood by the purpose of human being. Only along with the shift produced by Heidegger in formulating the purposes of interpretation and of the nature of understanding things began to change. Moreover, the hermeneutical and phenomenological discourse arising from this displacement gave the Western authors a good opportunity to define their own cultural data in a more authentic spirit. I recall the events in Paris at the middle of the XXth century when a consistent immigration of the Russian Intelligentsia produced astonishment by using the cultural data in an unexpected and ignored so far way by the Western environments.

If we were to discuss the idea of self-edification *nowadays*, it is obvious that we could only depart from the ways of creating understanding as its fundamental premise. The path between interpretation and understanding is a compulsory aspect of research in Heidegger and Gadamer's posterity. However, we must throw light on the relevance of this path from the perspective of Eastern Christian spirituality, a spirituality which uses other symbolic codes and is anchored in a perspective dominated by what was called the *person's apophatism*.⁸ It is not an easy task as the confusion resulting from terms that seem synonymous in a modern language, but that are really loaded with symbolic meanings and different traditions must necessarily be avoided. There are plentiful traps that modern cultural mentalities set to an accurate and refined understanding of what is particular to expressions that describe the formative ideals that various European cultural traditions and not only them relate to man's destiny and their specific traits. A type of syncretism of values and traditions, an unjustified overlap of spiritual values and interpreting perspectives is the most harmful and yet the most handy solution for an interpreter that is still under the influence (either conscious or not) of the ideals of Enlightenment and rationalism that still have a powerful influence nowadays.

⁸ Christos Yannaras, *Persoană și eros [Person and Eros]*, Ed. Anastasia, București, 2000, p. 21.

As Eastern people, we have to assume the cultural horizon from a proper interpreting position so that we can reach understanding and consider it as a datum that we cannot ignore. Yet, paradoxically, we are found in a strange cultural situation nowadays as the paideutic_paradigm that crosses both the education system and the present cultural values is of Western origin and mostly owes to the ideal of Enlightenment. Consequently, we are forced to clarify the context of our own tradition, tradition that influences us, even if at an unconscious level. Moreover, what it means to be an Easterner must be made plain, along with the real central data of such an attitude with respect to the world and the self. Definitely, such an enterprise goes beyond the aims of this study, but it is a task that we must be aware of nowadays more than ever. It is a mutual task of both European cultural models and this is extraordinary. If we benefit from the overall Western philosophical evolutions, and especially from the interpreting ones, in the elucidation of our own identity, Eastern philosophical meditation can also recover an ignored aspect of understanding the world and the self by the symbolic-apophatic conscience that was given the name of *mysticism*, an awkward name for a way of understanding of Byzantine origin.

The set up of the idea of self and the need of formation: the origin of the Greek paradigm

Firstly, we have to discuss the origin of a self attitude that defines the European cultural model, a view and understanding of what we call *self* that implies an unknown ideal to other cultural spaces: the need of formation, of edification. From the perspective of the European cultural paradigm, the act of formation is something conscious and directional, implying the presupposition that the need of formation is essential to man as a being that cannot be considered fulfilled in itself but only if he follows what is proper to his nature. Even if other cultural horizons, such as the Chinese or the Indian one, also considered that man had to change his status acquired by birth, what was aimed at was different from a formation ideal fulfilled through a *paideia*. The first period of European culture, i.e. that of the Ancient Greece, is the one that must provide essential elements in

understanding the resorts that determined a formation ideal with conclusive effects in the identity of recent man. We must come back with other interpreting instruments for the Greek texts for a better understanding of our reaction to the self. We must keep in mind that the historical distance may be an advantage and sometimes even a crucial one for the authenticity of understanding, as Gadamer claims.

As Werner Jaeger points out, we cannot challenge the fact that the Greeks were the ones that debated on the issue of human individuality; therefore any history of the concept of personality must depart from them.⁹ Now it is only natural to understand man under the instance of individual and personality with all the meanings of these distinct characters that individualize and differentiate, but this mutation is related to an exceptional novelty in the Greeks' understanding of the self in the ancient times. Jaeger believes that this radical innovation might come from an innate sense of the Greek for what corresponds to "nature".¹⁰ They are the first to draw up the concept of nature as it was proper to them to see things in an organic way (to see things). As opposed to Vedathin, Indian Brahmanism, which stated that Brahman is the ultimate reality, the rest being magic or illusion of God (or of collective ignorance, according to a late rephrasing of Buddhism), Greeks established that the organic solidarity of nature does not annul in any way the features of individuality. This distance between East and the Greeks will remain a generic one, valid for all the subsequent path of the manifestation of the two cultural attitudes until present day.

This crossroad of self conscience change brought with itself the outlining of another need concerning education. As Jaeger states, the clear conscience of natural principles of human life and of the immanent laws that govern man's body forces must have become very important when Greeks faced the issue of education. The Greeks used all their knowledge on nature and individual for the purpose of man's formation task in the same way the potter creates pottery. The most

⁹ Werner Jaeger, *Paideia*, vol. I, Ed. Teora, București, 2000, p. 15.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

important masterpiece achieved by the Greeks is the living man.¹¹ For the first time, the *paideutic* act is seen as a process of conscious structuring. The Greeks were dominated by the obsession of discovering the laws that govern reality under all its aspects and articulations, trying to guide people's life according to it. This act of search received the name of *theoria*, a display in knowledge that definitely contains more than the rational element. We have to revise most of our understanding of the Greeks as only a source of logically formal oriented rational thought or of philosophic speculation. *Theoria* is, perhaps, one of the most outstanding examples of full knowledge and is somehow incomplete to reduce it to what is commonly understood nowadays by knowledge. The Greek's postulation of the need for formation was especially related to the orientation of the one that experienced knowledge so that one could be as able as possible to grasp what overpasses the pure logical and rational categories of the mind. Greek *theory* is also related to art and poetry, not to mention the experience that will have large consequences on the Greek spirit, the initiation in *mysterics*. E. R. Dodds drew the attention on false stereotypes that concealed the modern exegesis of Greek classic textuality in his time, as the Greeks were associated with the projections of the Renaissance imagery, that rhymed the Greek spirit only with harmony, order, symmetry, reason and logics.¹²

The presence of what we call *irrational* in the Greek mind is fully portrayed by Dodds and furthermore, it is obvious that this side was a very important aspect for the Greek experience of the world and the self. We reduced too much our relationship with the Greeks to some stereotypical interpreting schemes so that we are no longer able to see the depth and the extreme complexity of a way of being and knowing that does not allow the categories of modernity to grasp it so easily. We are wearing interpretative lens that we should simply leave aside. The best example of the interpreting failure of the paradigm that was associated to

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p.17.

¹² See E. R. Dodds, *Dialectica spiritului grec [Dialectics of Greek Spirit]*, Ed. Meridiane, București, 1983.

modernity is the way in which the histories of philosophy have been compiled. Borrowing schemes from science, especially from biology in its evolutionist description, the history of thought is understood as following the logics of evolution from simple to complex, from less evolved to more evolved. Therefore, the ancients were given only the credit of initiating, of originating an attitude in thought, but not much beyond it. The original thought was a naïve one. They might have noticed something but, due to the primitivism of thought and of concepts they had begun to dispose of, they could not say much. Except for intuitions, modern history of philosophy does not give much credit to pre-Socratic philosophy. Now, when the failure of interpretation modernity gives to reality, especially in science, becomes more and more obvious, these visions of the history of spirit become unusable, thus we must simply give them up and revise the reading of classics. As guiding mark, we have what Heidegger understood from the reading of the pre-Socratics: one of the most subtle philosophical doctrines of recent times originated in the result of the interpretation of these texts.

Closing this bracket, let us specify that there is a dimension in the ideal of formation that Greeks used and that belongs completely to them: the access to knowledge. The Greeks expressly understood to make culture in an explicit and community manner for the first time. In their collective memory, the Greeks retained seven names as being related to wisdom in the true sense of the word and their seven Wise Men were not authors of speculative philosophy, as someone would perhaps expect, but those that gave the community the norm. These moral law givers have been considered as an example of gained wisdom as they set the norm of the community existence of the Greek in *polis*. The Greek *polis* is not only an exceptional creation in the ancient world as it also put as central something different from the royal power or the god's temple. This empty space, *agora*, was the place of exertion of something else than a symbolic power that could not be doubted: the power of the word was exerted. Therefore, something surprising is set up, that is the community control not only on the magistracies of the state, but also on the

creations of the spirit.¹³ If the word becomes the favoured instrument of power, then what is related to the word must be cautiously managed. A control that meant keeping the secret and the access not just for the elites, as it happened, for instance, in the kingdoms of Middle East, but democratizing the access to knowledge and techniques. The knowledge was presented in the public market and subjected to criticism and controversy.¹⁴ Paideia had an active character not only in the sense of an ideal of man's completeness, but also due to the fact that it was always refined in content and intention by the debate in the public market. For the first time, we can talk about an authentic need of self edification in the context of the first Greek horizon. A self edification that does not embrace a scheme for human perfection delivery, focusing on its logical rational formation, but on a disposition of the entire display of the whole human being with respect to *ontos*.

The need of formation could become a conscious and very important need for the Greek due to an essential and extraordinary association: between soul or what the Greek called *psyche* and man's divine origin. And especially, as Rohde points out, „at a certain moment the idea of the divine character of the human soul and, by this fact itself, of its immortality occurs in a clear shape in Greece, and nowhere else so early than in Greece”.¹⁵ A big step was already taken when *psyche* was the basis of the Greek's individuality not only in this life, but also in the other. If this latest understanding belongs to the period of mythology, the Homeric myths being the most significant here, to philosophy belongs the expression of the need for *katharsis* as sign of Divine origin of what is higher in us and must be purified to take back the lost place in the world of gods. It seems that the initiation rites, those from Eleusis or the Orphic ones, played an important role in the certification of the association between *psyche* and something divine in man, the highest part of him that inhabited the body consequently to a fall from a higher reality. Therefore man had to pass through the initiation rite to recover his lost condition after death. Yet,

¹³ Jean Pierre Vernant, *Originile gândirii grecești [Origins of Greek Thought]*, Ed. Symposion, București, 1995, p. 71.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p.70.

¹⁵ Erwin Rohde, *Psyche*, Ed. Meridiane, București, 1985, p. 217.

the philosophic exercise is the one that gave credit to an even more important association: when soul is considered as equal to reason.¹⁶ Besides, one of the main tasks of philosophy for the Greek, if not the essential task of philosophy exertion, was the accomplishment of the catharsis act that aimed at a superior posthumous existence. The reason, the favored capacity of the soul is a power that can and must be exerted. However, the purpose of such an exertion is not the simple use of the mental availability to make analyses or syntheses, or to acquire knowledge according to a certain rationality. The philosophic exercise was meant to produce a radical change in something related to the depths of the human being, to reorient it. We may talk here of a sense of interpretation that is not related to textuality, but to the self and that can be compared only to the meaning that Heidegger starts to give to hermeneutics. Certainly, one of the sources of Heidegger's decision to reassign the object of interpretation is related to the way in which he studied the Greek texts that aimed at *paideia*. For the wisdom seeker of ancient Greece, interpretation was an open act in the most proper sense as it defined a self experience aiming not only at knowledge, but also at a change according to an ideal, a quest, and the understanding deriving from this investigation took the shape of a transforming understanding. As Foucault noticed, what crosses the entire ancient philosophy until the rise of Christianity (but which is also found in Christianity, at least in the time of its discursive phrases, in the expression of Alexandrian spirituality) is the self-concern (*epimeleia*) that occurs as clearly as possible along with the character of Socrates, but which is displayed before him.¹⁷ Such an attitude was inconceivable for the Near East cultures or for the Far East spirituality. The difference is that, as opposed to Indians or Chinese, for instance, the self-concern was based on the conscience of an unbreakable individuality that is meant to the paideic act by its own essence. The search of reason must not

¹⁶ E. R. Dodds, *op.cit.*, p. 179.

¹⁷ Michel Foucault, *Hermeneutica subiectului [The Hermeneutics of the Subject]*, Ed. Polirom, Iași, 2004, p. 21.

be something outstanding or the attribute of an elite, but proper to all men, as long as it reaches *sotiria*, that is freedom.

This proved to be the most significant inheritance of Greek philosophy from the perspective of the new spiritual model that will be established in Late Antiquity, i.e.: Christianity. This statement is proven by the turn that the philosophic exercise acquired in Late Antiquity, especially in Neoplatonism. The way in which (the practice of Greek) practising philosophy in Plotinus' time was understood is far from the pretence of systematizing of the modern metaphysics, giving the impression that there is a lack of theme ordering. Plotinus' intellectual environment was defined by discussions of circular meditation, of theme recurrence. Such a manner was proper to another interest than that of reflecting reality as precisely as possible, the elucidation of key aspects in the world existence standing for the opportunity, the framework in which the final existential experience could be carried out, that is *exstasis*.

Plotinus and those around him had the conscience of a comment in the master's spirit when they were meditating on Plato's dialogues, although what resulted from this way of thinking is significantly different from the intentions of Plato's texts. In that era, understanding obviously had existential purposes and the writings that present Plotinus' reflection display a reverse of what seems natural in the relation between interpretation and understanding: it is not the interpretation that decides and articulates understanding, but a certain radical experience that is related to the intuition or even to the union with transcendence (that in Platonism takes the shape of the reunion with and in the One) and that starts to give sense to understanding and from here the world and the self could be interpreted. A scheme that is finally characteristic to the experience that we call mystical, a situation in which the diachronic feature, the normal stream of consciousness, therefore of thought, passes through the paradox of suspension with radical consequences on understanding.

Anyway, the first elaborated expression of the ancient Greek understanding of edification belongs to Plato. Plotinus and his followers always pursued and repeated the reading of Plato's texts especially for a better understanding of the

subtleties given by Plato to the perspective of the human formation purpose. Formation has the meaning of *reorientation*, the one that gave a meaning to formation close to discourse and mystical experience. Martin Heidegger will apprehend the importance and significations of Plato's *paideia* when discussing the Myth of the Cave. What is required by the course of formation is *the reorientation of the entire soul (periagoge oles tes psyches)*, presented in the symbolism of visual reorientation. Heidegger believes that the Platonist understanding of *paideia* is closer to the significance of the German term *bildung*, its original significance: "paideia is closer, even though not completely, to the German word bildung...let us forget the misinterpretation it fell prey to in the last part of the XIXth century. Bildung means two things: on one hand a formation, in the sense of a modeling that unfolds. Nevertheless, this „formation” forms altogether, starting from a predicted reporting to a measure giving vision, called image-model. Bildung is modeling and guiding by means of an image."¹⁸ The reorientation described by the myth of the cave concerns human nature in its essence. A *measure giving* orientation is aimed at, departing from a relation on which the human being is already based on and which must become a *stable behavior*. The human being must adapt to a field that is bestowed only on it and this act is called *paideia* by Plato.

However, Heidegger warns us that the term is untranslatable.¹⁹ By this untranslatability we must especially see the re-orientation path of the soul. The fact that the myth is used to point out the character of this edification act is a clue in itself. It is known that Plato did not incidentally employed myths in his dialogues or due to aesthetic reasons, but precisely in those aspects that the discursive-rational investigation cannot debate on. If it is possible to reach the highest issues by means of discourse, their proper discussion is impossible. The nature of the ultimate subject does not allow the use of language at our disposal, as this language can only aim indirectly at the transcendent, in a more or less improper manner. When a Platonist dialogue reaches the point in which

¹⁸ Martin Heidegger, *Repere pe drumul gândirii [What is Called Thinking]*, Ed. Politică, București, 1988, p. 182.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

it must invoke the ultimate subjects, the discourse breach occurs along with the passage to the myth plan. The mythical discourse was considered a proper one by Plato due to its quality of leaving something said and something unsaid. This is also the situation of *paideia* that does not stand in any way for a technical process, a “technology” of man’s reorientation towards the “area of the being” that is proper to it, but must be understood as an internal process of formation and set up, an unceasingly evolving and formation process. It is certain that this dimension given to formation by Plato originates in the direct experience he had around his master, Socrates. Socrates is the one who induced a practical experience in his disciples that remained a guiding mark in history. His maieutic art did not aim at the construction, at the positive edification of contents in his dialogue partners, but rather at the dead end that sends to a self search to discover something deeper, which may be the source of truth. I believe that at present, despite the enormous exegetical work and philosophic meditation centered on Socratic dialectics, we mostly lack the subtlety and the nuances involved in the ultimate appeal that Socrates was indirectly sending us to, that internal reality that received the name of *notion*. Probably Socrates is the one that proved the value and the sense of formation at the highest level, precisely because he demolished an imagery that reoccurred more than once in history after him and also visited modernity: *paideia* as formation methodology. The ones that dealt with Socrates, that is the sophists, firstly claimed that they could offer training, a technique, that might lead to *arete*, to virtue, the supreme value for the Ancient Greek. In that cultural context, virtue was understood as *power*, and the proper Romanian equivalent would be that of *vârtute*²⁰. This virtue may be only the result of an effort of self knowledge that leads to the discovery of something stable and that offers a criterion in authentic knowledge, in finding the truth. The act of formation is not presented as a transmission of something, of a content, but rather as something indirect. Here, there can be identified an exceptional dimension of man that only European tradition

²⁰ In Romanian, “vârtute” means “virtue and power at the same time” (n.t.)

sets, starting with the era of Socrates: the uniqueness of individual. Other cultural models did not acknowledge at all this non resemblance of the closer, this permanent and elevated identity of each man or, if they approached such an intuition, they did not expressly word it. Socrates decisively came closer to this fundamental intuition when adopting this path of awakening in his co-speakers a search that he could not properly describe or point out. The quality of Greek culture would be significantly influenced by this way of edification, departing from this apparent contradiction between two Socratic sayings: "Know yourself" and "All I know is that I know nothing". Therefore, the cultural Greek model of Antiquity would have risked, at a certain moment, to fail in a list of cultural technologies ensuring the obtaining of "the properly done thing", regardless of the fact that it was art or philosophy.

Kenosis, unification and mediation: the paradox of edification within Christianity

It was necessary to mention these central aspects of Greek thought because otherwise it would not be possible to properly justify the need for edification that modern man asks for. When we propose to follow the meaning of edification for the present man, as a result of the process of understanding and interpretation, we must establish the original frameworks that allow us this search and guide us towards it. Our tough conscience to be an individuality that may not be altered or diminished originates in these intuitions and formulations of the Greeks. For a better understanding of what we should look for and why we feel the need to search something related to what is deeper in us, we must return to the essential texts of the Greeks. Heidegger is the philosopher of modern times that proves this in all respects. In this case, perhaps hermeneutics best proves the invoked dimension of a continuous process. It is out of discussion ending at a certain time, the exegesis of texts that marked our self conscience as we know it today because the need of self understanding is continuous and always recalls existential history which it draws from. For a better understanding, we must better understand those that

had the intuitions and took the founding decisions particular to us, too.

In the same measure, we must always use sources that have given an essential plus to the identity that we refer to: the *person's* dimension. Nonetheless, things get more complicated here, as we have in view another type of founding spirituality, the Christian one. It is a paradoxical spirituality even from the start, with respect to man's self. We cannot only talk of a scriptural tradition, but also of a tradition of another genre that we might call experiential and that is the basis of what is called Tradition in Christianity. In the central text of Christianity, the Gospel, Christ's statement that for whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it ²¹, so that self edification is paradoxical and it seems that the theme of edification encounters a main difficulty. However, a closer look reveals that what the word of the Gospel aims at is self- edification originating in the self and having a purpose in itself, the trust that someone may be complete by himself and his own. To believe that it is possible to achieve something regarding yourself only based on your own powers and capacities does not correspond to the Christian spirit. Therefore, the term of *edification* may not be used in its proper sense in the Christian context and this can be seen especially in the set up of the notion of person in the patristic horizon. It was very difficult to find the discursive phrases for the meaning of man as this meaning is revealed by the essential message of the Gospel: the Resurrection. Christ's resurrection meant, among others, the restoration of human nature, therefore a tremendous change of man's humanity. A restoration not fulfilling by itself, automatically, in man, but which respects his freedom and asks for his participation. On the other hand, by Baptism, man acquires a dimension that was unknown to him so far, as Christ becomes internal to him and then a Christian anthropology can no longer describe man only in the limits of humanity, and must remember that man changes his status simply by Baptism.

²¹ Luke, 9, 24.

Thus, what Basil the Great or Gregory of Nazianzus aimed at when employing the term *hypostasis* was the outrun of the conceptual dimension of the terms describing man's humanity. Along with these Cappadocian Fathers, it became obvious that man, image of God, may no longer be framed in conceptual definitions as he is defined by *ex-stasis*, the self outrun and the exit from the self into personal communion. Communion with God involves that secret mutation of man's humanity into something beyond it, by *theosis*, by arriving at something superior to it, to divinity. But what becomes essential in this self ascension and overpassing of human nature is humbleness, *kenosis*, according to the teaching of the Gospel. That is self emptiness. Obviously, it is hard to properly speak of edification when the essential act of experience is self emptiness, giving up all that involves one's own will. However, there is no mortification here, but rather stating that there is a will more proper to you than your own subjective one and this will belongs to the One who is with you in a more delicate and deep way, but not as a will ready to annihilate yours. This extremely subtle situation of internal Christian experience was described by Saint Maximus the Confessor when speaking about the two wills of Christ.

The hesychast experience is an essential guiding mark in establishing the possible sense that the notion of edification can receive in Christianity and especially in the Eastern one. In the XIVth century, during a dispute arising from the demurs brought by Varlaam against the defense of the hesychast practice, Gregory Palama described, among others, *self come back* or *self return* as a central aspect of the hesychast practice. This *self* is not an *ego*, as internal experience actually means a personal encounter with the One that is more proper to yourself (particular) than you are. It is hard to accept such a statement, as hard as it is to accept the following saying of the Apostle: „I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me”.²² In the hesychast practice, we may find an equivalent of the modern term of *edification* as what happens is not a simple contemplating act, but rather a total experience that includes and outruns the

²² Galatians, 2, 20.

duality subject-object in knowledge, towards a face to face encounter with the radical consequences on understanding and on the attitude towards the self and the world. Gregory Palama considered that there is no place for spirituality in Christian spirituality.²³ This statement must be understood as a warning of the rigor and precision that the hesychast practice involved (up to a point a method was also involved). Palama often mentions the *appeal to experience* as a marker of guiding understanding and spiritual experience.²⁴ Actually, it was no novelty, only rephrasing because, invoked in a form or another, the criterion of the appeal to the testimony of experience was always present departing from the patristic texts and continuing later with the Byzantine authors.²⁵ This appeal to experience has a larger and deeper character than the understandings of modern empiricism. As John Meyendorff mentions, „By returning to the self, the hesychast does not search a subjective feeling, does not abandon himself to introspection to find an ego, but seeks Christ who became an objective presence in the Church by baptism and sacramental life and does not belong only to him but to all that have believed in Christ”.²⁶ Anyway, experience is an indicator of the stage and correctness of the direction that the one that practices hesychasm is in, an experience whose meaning cannot be limited only to the dimension of interiority, but which is not purely external. It is essential that the *body* is recovered and plays a decisive role in the experience. Palama pointed out that „it is not difficult to purify mind which easily loses purity, by its nature. It is for beginners. The true effort is to clean up all the faculties and powers of the soul and of the body”.²⁷ The hesychast controversy confronted two anthropologies as premises of obtaining an answer related to the nature of knowledge, therefore also of understanding. Varlaam, the opponent of Palama and the follower of the Western formula concerning the way of knowing God, insisted on the need of purifying the

²³ John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Hesychasm: historical, theological and social problems*, Variorum Reprints, London, 1974, p. 201.

²⁴ Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, Paulist Press, New York, 1983, p. 57.

²⁵ John Meyendorff, *op.cit.*, p. 188.

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

²⁷ John Meyendorf, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, St. Vladimir Seminary Press, Crestwood, New York, 1998, p. 144.

mind against any mixture with the senses. He implicitly rejected the positive role of corporeity in the act of contemplation/knowledge, the senses having only a distracting effect on the rational power from the highest act that was proper to it, the *contemplation of divine essence*. Eastern anthropology referred to by Palama sustains that experience can by no means have a divine essence as its object but only what receives the name of *uncreated energies* and this knowledge is the result of the effort of all the human capacities altogether to open to the divine datum. The role of ascetics is described differently in the East: not as purifying the mind, but as restoring human capacities that may hardly be divided between body and soul capacities, as any act of the mind depends on a state of the body works. The texts of Gregory Palama offer a privileged access path to the understanding that Byzantine people had regarding their own way of edification, as these texts are the result of a challenge of the Byzantine humanism, according to some scholars, or the Western perspective on experiencing the ultimate experience, according to others. It is the case of a terminological refining and completion that clarifies the intention and practice of hesychast practice that was not something new, being simply described in the XIVth century. A symbolic term with a special meaning for describing the Eastern Christian understanding of edification is that of *light*. If, in a synthetic way, the essential act of experience was designed as being *sight*, light is the one that enters sight and not any light, but the *uncreated light*. This type of sight act is not a passive one; it cannot be described in terms of a simple sensorial reception but a *unification* is performed in this way. Certainly, an extreme symbolism functions here, an apophatic symbolism as a content of this supreme experience cannot be pointed out, it can only be said that such an experience turns man in his whole being. There is something here that may be described as edification. Discussing this experience, Dumitru Stăniloae mentions important explanations: „In the light being the one who sees, he looks at the light. Escaping from all the others, the whole of him becomes light, and he turns himself into what he sees, better said, he unites unmingled with it, being and seeing light through light. Looking at himself, he sees light; looking at what he sees, he sees light, the power

through which he sees is also light. This is the unification, as all these are one and he who sees can no longer be distinguished from what he sees and through what he sees, as everything is a light, different from those created."²⁸ It is even spoken of a suspension of the activity of the mind²⁹, but we must understand that the case here is of a suspension of discursive processes of the mind, of the *dianoetic* processes, remaining only another functioning of the mind, the *noetic* one, particular to such an experience. The difference between the two mind functions working in the Byzantine textuality was taken from Aristotle. If the dia-noetic part of the soul (which was mortal for Aristotle) works for the things belonging to the world, where there are processes everywhere, only something having a similitude in the soul could be valid for contemplating the eternal ones: its noetic part (Aristotle considered it as the immortal part of the soul), the one beyond processing. In patristic tradition, especially since Isaac of Syria, it is always spoken of a suspension of the mind called *abduction*, a state in which processing ceases and that fusion where all becomes light occurs, a state beyond words and discursive phrases. Therefore, the Byzantine meanings of edification point out that this act is not an exclusively human one so that nowhere in orthodoxy, was a way of formation for the individual formulated to guarantee the achievement of a state as the aforementioned one.

Another aspect must not be omitted, i.e. the one sustaining once more the idea that according to the Eastern perspective, self edification is not consumed within the data and the limits of subjectivity: the understanding of man as *mediator*. Statement belonging to Saint Maximus the Confessor³⁰, this understanding of man's role in the world and beyond it involves its description as microcosm and, consequently its symmetry with the Cosmos. As Maximus describes it, mediation is carried out on several plans, starting from

²⁸ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Viața și învățătura Sfântului Grigorie Palama [Life and Teaching of Saint Gregory Palamas]* Ed. Scripta, București, 1993, p. 58.

²⁹ *Ibidem*.

³⁰ Maxim Mărturisitorul, *Mistagogia. Cosmosul și sufletul. Chipuri ale Bisericii [Saint Maximus the Confessor, Mystagogy. Cosmos and Soul. Images of the Church]*, Ed. Institutului Biblic și de misiune al B.O.R., București, 2000, p. 26.

mediation between man and woman to mediation between sky and earth, between the sensitive plan and the plan beyond the body.³¹ This mediation that man is called to is possible because the entire creation is under the same Logos, sharing a mutual rationality. Therefore self edification cannot have a finality that exclusively aims at the ego, at the subjectivity but plays an essential role in the evolution and conduct both of the sensitive world and of the whole creation. Self edification equals to generating an objective change in reality, to giving a plus to it in terms of its deepest rationality.

The frameworks of setting up a paradigm as a horizon of possibility for edification nowadays

When asking the question of the need for self edification nowadays, we must have in view these founding aspects of the horizon of possibility in the cultural model of present day Europe and of the Western world in general. The fact that we are concerned with the issue of edification departing from an *ego*, but also having the conscience of a dimension that *transcends* the limits of the individual, is in itself a proof of our involvement in this guiding marks. Surely, our particular experience today in trying to achieve something related to edification is different, but, similar to an expedition that needs a map to follow its path, spiritual experience also needs firm guiding marks to find its way, especially if what happens has a sense. Anyway, it is wrong to consider this guiding marks as history, as something that was important once but is no longer now. The set up of our internal guiding marks is a cultural datum beyond which we cannot act meaningfully.

³¹ Lars Thunberg, *Antropologia teologică a Sfântului Maxim Mărturisitorul. Microcosmos și mediator [Microcosm and Mediator: The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor]*, Ed. Sofia, București, 2005, p. 157.

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