

Neutral Reason and Oriented Reason (Constantin Noica: a distinct project on the phenomenology of reason)

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Abstract

In this article I focus on the distinction between „neutral reason” and „oriented reason”, a distinction which is analysed by Constantin Noica especially in his *Essay on Traditional Philosophy* (published as the first volume of the work *Becoming within Being*, Bucharest, 1981). This distinction is extremely important in the current philosophical discussions, as it draws our attention to the possibility of some relevant or lasting reference points for man’s thinking and actions in the contemporary world. In the first part of the article, I will emphasize certain ideas which describe the context of the matter under discussion: reason, as it is usually understood, can be neutral or indifferent; there is a modern privilege of the logical or discursive sense of reason; the space of freedom of thinking is larger than the one described by the modern logic of non-contradiction. In the second part I refer to Noica’s arguments in connection with the idea of oriented reason : a) the categories of classical logic (identity, contradiction, etc) may be questioned; b) from a phenomenological point of view, consciousness is consciousness “within something” (and not only “of something”); c) hermeneutically, it describes a reflexive, circular movement; d) it is realised as oriented reason, “consciousness of becoming within being”; e) metaphysically, “the consciousness of becoming within being *is* conscious becoming within being”, an elevated form of spirituality.

1. Reason can be neutral or indifferent

In the following pages, I intend to focus on several aspects regarding a distinction which I consider to be increasingly important in current discussions: the distinction between

neutral reason (or indifferent reason, as it has sometimes been considered) and oriented reason. The term “reason” is most frequently used to denote a definitive human faculty, as a logical way of thinking or as a discursive form of knowledge. It may also have the meaning of essential character of human behaviour (or even of the human mode of existence). Its meaning has often been debated in metaphysical discussions. As we know, several relevant meanings of this term have been carefully distinguished for a long time: *ratio cognoscendi* & *ratio essendi*, *ratio fiendi*, *ratio particularis* or *vis cogitativa*, as well as *recta ratio* (the equivalent of the Greek *orthós lógos*) or, in a different respect, *ratio facilis* & *ratio difficilis* etc.

The distinction above, between neutral and oriented reason, draws our attention, from the very beginning, to the fact that not every rational behaviour is oriented (or significantly oriented). Thus, the statement that man is a rational being (corresponding to the Greek phrase *zōon lógon échon*, interpreted in Latin as *animal rationale*, creature endowed with reason)¹ does not mean that man is always and implicitly oriented. Neither does it imply that man always aims, by himself, at really significant standards from a spiritual point of view. Some neutral acts, without having clear targets, may be rational. As it has been said, the rules of logic are indifferent to ethics. Similarly, some indifferent human acts may ignore any superior moral standards. It is known that the Latin term *ratio* may denote, in different contexts, completely neutral things: calculation, list, business, number, report, rule, proportion, plan, sketch, etc. Consequently, any act which follows a technical rule may be considered rational. However, such an act is not necessarily oriented, even if the rule which was followed is technically efficient. This act may ignore the important cultural standards of a human community. For example, when Suetonius, in *De vita Caesarum*, speaks about *rationes imperii*, denoting the state affairs, he refers to the

¹ The Greek sentence refers above all to the act of speech – or, more exactly, to that of dialogue – as a defining one for the human being. This sentence appears, for example, in Aristotle’s works “Politics” and “Nicomachean Ethics”. The Latin interpretation of this sentence is, in many respects, questionable (cf. Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, § 34), but it has been accepted by the whole Western world.

calculations made and the measures taken by the state in order to preserve its power and its functions. As we know, the logic of power may be completely indifferent to the life of individuals or to the life of human communities.

Obviously, such observations are not new, but they are to be viewed from new perspectives, some of which really paradoxical. First, I will try to develop several ideas which I introduced in two articles and in the first section of a book published in 2008². Then, in the second part, I will refer to the writings of Constantin Noica, the philosopher who supported, with many arguments, the possibility of recognising the idea of oriented reason and practising it as a mode of life or existence.

2. The logical or discursive sense of reason

When we use the term reason, we mainly refer to the significance of the phrase “human reason”. This phrase has several meanings: a) the faculty of logical thinking (in the form of judgements or valid reasoning), b) the faculty of discursive knowledge (empirical data are ordered and explained by means of some concepts and theories). The concept of logical thinking, based on judgements and ratiocination, was imposed by the ancient Greeks, being used in Plato’s works (*Rep.* 510 d – 511 a) and in Aristotle’s works (*Anal. Post.* I, 89 b and II, 100 b)³. The concept of discursive knowledge, methodical and

² Cf. Ștefan Afloroaei, *Our Daily Metaphysics. About the Speculative Disposition of Thinking and Its Natural Presence Today*, Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 2008, especially pages 49-92; *Distinct Ways of Thinking and Distinct Experiences of Truth*, an article published in JIRRS, no 2, 2008, pages 157-188; *Mircea Eliade. Two Unavoidable Interpretations: Literal and Spiritual*, in the volume coordinated by Sorin Șelaru, *The Dialogue between Theology and Philosophy*, II, Basilica Publishing House, Bucharest, 2009, pages 39-95.

³ The term *diánoia*, in the sense of discursive thinking, realized in the form of reasoning or syllogisms, is often opposed to *noûs*, interpreted as intuitive thinking, a direct act of the intellect. The latter act is present especially when some fundamental principles are intuited (cf. Aristotle, *De anima*, III. 5; *Met.* 1049 b). In the case of the human being, some authors have referred to the existence of an intuitive act of the intellect, when a universal truth or a principle, *arché*, is taken as an indemonstrable and necessary premise of discursive or demonstrative thinking (*Anal. Post.* II, 99 b – 100 b; *Met.* 980 a – 981 a).

rigorously conceptual, was imposed mainly in the 17th century, by such authors as Galileo Galilei or René Descartes, irrespective of the important philosophical differences between them.

Why do we consider logical thinking, on the one hand, and discursive knowledge, on the other hand, as pre-eminently rational acts?

As has been observed, for the ancient Greeks “knowledge is defined as knowledge obtained by means of the cause”⁴ In fact, knowing something means identifying a cause, a motive, a reason. The language of causality – in the old sense of the word – is remarkably relevant; “the very definition of God consists in defining a cause beyond which there is no other cause”. The process of thinking based on possible causes develops in ordered steps, usually in one direction, such as the direction from cause to effect. It takes place in the form of “a monodirectional chain: if a movement takes place from A to B, no force can determine it to move from B to A”. This cognitive process has a strong justification in what we call the logical principles of thinking, that is “the identity principle ($A=A$), the non-contradiction principle (it is impossible for something to be and not to be A at the same time) and the principle of excluded third (A is either true or false; *tertium non datur*)”. Eco’s conclusion is simple and clear: “from these principles derives the typical thinking of western rationalism, that *modus ponens*: if p , then q ; but p ; then q ”. Discursive or rational thinking cannot function without this *modus ponens*.

These senses of reason may become absolutely privileged, as has happened in the modern world. Some institutions with historical value (school, emblematic cultural authorities, the official academic discourse, etc) tend to support and to justify them at the same time. They usually keep their distance from man’s “natural attitude” (considered non-critical) or from his daily life. This distant attitude has taken highly debatable forms: the severe and even violent criticism of tradition, the

⁴ Cf. Umberto Eco, *I limiti dell’interpretazione*, Bompiani, Milano, 1990, section 2. 1 (where the author discusses the two emblematic models of interpretation, one which reappears in the form of the rationalist attitude, and another one with a hermetic orientation).

refusal of any prejudications (this term being assigned a negative sense), the “theoretical” separation among different human experiences (scientific, aesthetic, technical, religious etc.)⁵. It was considered then that the process of thinking based on “clear and distinct” concepts, following logical rules, was the pre-eminently rational act. In fact, one of the explanations for this attitude is related to the technical orientation of modern thinking, in which such categories as exactitude, logical and empirical verification, calculation and efficiency play a determinant role. They correspond to a certain type of will which tends to “master nature”, to establish “social order and supervision”, to dominate the “external world” (some of these behaviours were remarkably analysed by Michel Foucault)⁶. We know that such authors like Francis Bacon and René Descartes admitted explicitly the existence of this new type of will.

The above-mentioned author, Umberto Eco, finds some social and even historical behaviours which have assimilated this mode of thinking. The concept of norm – logical, judicial or social – becomes inevitable. Thus, a widely recognized type of behaviour was born: the contractual one, especially in the form of judicial and social contract. However, *modus* does not mean only norm (such as the logical norm), but also border, limit, frontier. The will to establish firm borders is typical of the “citizen” or the “civilised” person (as the citizens call themselves). In fact, this is how the great Roman cities and empires were founded. “The Latin obsession of spatial border appeared at the same time with the foundation myth: Romulus draws a border and kills his brother for trespassing. If there is no border, there is no *civitas*”. Several distinct categories of thinking and of social life were introduced: limited space, successive and irreversible time, stable order and natural law,

⁵ Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode. Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik*, J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), Tübingen, 1990, especially pp. 281-311.

⁶ Cf. Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison*, Gallimard, Paris, 1975, especially part III, entitled *The Discipline*, in which the author discusses “docile bodies”, “the means of good modeling” and “panoptism” in the social economy of modern world.

univocal causality etc. They are still recognizable nowadays, if we think about such domains as “mathematics, logic, science and computer programming”, the new technology in the service of efficiency or the social way of reproducing power.

3. The hermetic model of interpretation: beyond discursive reason

As Umberto Eco says, the pattern of thinking legitimated by the non-contradiction logic “does not exhaust what we call the Greek inheritance”. He refers to a different model of interpretation, adopted not only by Christian and Neoplatonic thinking, but also by the hermetic tradition. This model, with its different variants, tries to overcome the non-contradiction rule. Before giving a brief description of this model, I will make one observation. It is hard to support the idea that three spiritual traditions (Christian, Neoplatonic and Hermetic, very different from each other) would assume the same interpretation model. Sometimes Eco takes on further risks in his judgements, referring to only two traditions: Neoplatonic-Christian and Hermetic. He probably refers to some authors who are under a double influence; otherwise this strange assimilation could not be explained.

The one who follows the Hermetic model of interpretation would speak mainly about *sympatheia* and *analogia*, invoking countless similarities, resemblances and forms of communication among the things which compose this world. Ultimately, they recognize a universal form of *coincidentia oppositorum*. To express it, language becomes widely symbolical. “Hermetic thinking considers that the more ambiguous, the more polyvalent, the richer in symbols and metaphors our language is, the more appropriate for naming the One in which the coincidence of the opposites comes into being. But the coincidence of the opposites denies the principle of identity”⁷. This was a dominant idea for ages. It was widely spread in the 2nd century A.D., when the history of the empire became really cosmopolitan. That world was “a complete mixture of races and languages, a cross between peoples and ideas, in which all the gods came to be tolerated”. It was in such an irresolute, syncretistic historical situation that “the

⁷ Umberto Eco, *op. cit.*, section 2, 1. 3.

principle of excluded third – one of the principles of the Greek thinking pattern – reached a crisis”.

Some of the consequences of this way of thinking are already known. One of them refers to the meaning of statements included in sacred books: this sense is always allegorical and allusive. The unlimited use of allegory leads to the idea of infinite interpretation. “Trying to find an ultimate, unattainable sense, we accept an unstoppable slipping of the sense”, as Umberto Eco says⁸. The infinite interpretation is, in this respect, negative. Looking for an “ultimate sense” does not mean catching sight of it or naming it. On the contrary, the “ultimate sense” is unattainable: it does not show itself and it has no existence. The interpretation takes in fact the form of initiation. It is a way towards a final – or void – and, simultaneously, initiatory secret. What really matters is the continuous search carried out by the person who is initiated, his evolution from one level of the gnoses to a more profound one, which is an endless process. There is a mystical dimension of this initiatory hermeneutics. Thus, “in the 2nd century, the *noûs* became a faculty of the mystical intuition, of the non-rational illumination, of the instantaneous, non-discursive vision”. Therefore, the hermetic interpretation is mostly allegorical, infinite, negative and initiatory, with an explicitly mystical intention. The logic of non-contradiction is left aside for the benefit of an original or direct vision of the mind.

The hermetic orientation of thinking is survived later among “alchemists and cabalists, as well as in some of the aspects of the timid mediaeval Neoplatonism” (2, 1. 4). The book itself, *Corpus Hermeticum*, was discovered later, in Florence, during the Renaissance. The interpretation model which it proposes is re-elaborated by Pico della Mirandola, Ficino, Reuchlin or Paracelsus. “The hermetic science

⁸ The example which he offers is an eloquent one. “A plant is not defined by its morphological and functional characteristics, but by its similarity, even partial, with another element of the cosmos. If it resembles vaguely with a part of the human body, the plant has sense because it refers to the human body. But that part of the body has sense, in its turn, because it refers to a star; the star has sense because it is associated with a musical scale and so does the latter because it is associated with an angelic hierarchy and so on” (*ibidem*, 2, 1. 3).

influenced Bacon, Copernicus, Kepler, Newton, and the quantitative modern science was born from this dialogue with the qualitative science of hermetism, too". Although this was not its purpose, "the hermetic model contributed to the birth of its new adversary, the modern scientific rationalism". This means that the evolution of thinking is usually much more complicated than it is described in classic textbooks. With some differences, the hermetic model can be recognized in the Gnostic tradition (2, 1. 5), as well as in the romantic one⁹. There are degenerate forms of hermetism, well discerned by Georg Simmel (when he refers to the enormous social power gained by a man who "treasures a secret") and by Karl R. Popper (taking into account "the social theory of conspiracy"). The contemporary inheritance of hermetism is impressive. There are many authors who make room for the hermetic type of interpretation, such as Gilbert Durand, Harold Bloom or Geoffrey Hartman.

We realise that there are many analogies between the situation described by Eco and our contemporary world: cosmopolitanism, strange mixture of languages and ideologies, syncretic cultural forms, spiritual irresolution and lax, insecure tolerance. But other spiritual features of the Hellenic age do not seem to characterise us: the indefinite allegorism of sacred books, the eager expectation of a new revelation, the complete trust in the cryptic message of Tradition, the orientation towards the exotic symbolic traditions (which were thought to "preserve a sacred aura"), the use of the archetypal memory as a form of salvation. I would also note that the hermetic model to which Eco refers discovers a nocturnal or gloomy regime of

⁹ "Then the hermetic irrationalism emigrates, on the one hand, to the mystics and alchemists, and, on the other hand, to poets and philosophers such as Goethe, Nerval, Yeats, Schelling, von Baader, Heidegger and Jung. And it is not difficult to identify it in many post-modern conceptions belonging to the criticism of the idea of continuous slip of the sense" (*ibidem*, 2, 1. 4). A series of exegetes are invoked to back up this argument: Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion* (Boston, Beacon Press, 1958); Ioan Petru Culianu, *Gnosticismo e pensiero moderno: Hans Jonas* (Roma, „L'Erma" di Bretschneider, 1985); Giovanni Filoramo, *L'attesa della fine. Storia della Gnosi* (Bari, Laterza, 1983) and others.

thinking. But, as we will see further down, the Aristotelian logic is discussed not only through the exploration of this nocturnal regime of human thinking. Speculative thinking, for example, as it was practised by Plotinus and Dionysius the Areopagite, or, much later, by Cusanus and Schelling, does not mean indefinite allegorism and obscure cultivation of an initiatory secret. The hermeneutics which characterised it, with its variants which are distinct from one age to another, is radically different from the hermetic tradition.

4. The space of freedom of thinking

As I have tried to argue on another occasion, we could recognise a wider space of freedom of thought than the one described by some influential modern authors, such as Kant. This space of freedom is no longer limited by the logic principle of non-contradiction, on the one hand, and by the strictly empirical reference, on the other hand. This means that we can distinguish other ways of thinking besides the analytical and the technical ones. However, these different ways of thinking are not beyond the sensible, reasonable thinking. In other words, it is not necessary to follow the hermetic model, as it is described by Umberto Eco, in order to obtain a certain freedom in comparison with the logic of non-contradiction.

To what other ways of thinking do we refer? We have already discussed, on a different occasion, speculative thinking, as the ancient Stoics called it¹⁰; and about apophatic thinking, often practised in the patristic literature. Different from technical thinking, meditative thinking (Heidegger) is the one which keeps questioning about the sense of being in some states of things¹¹. The latter does not transform what it thinks

¹⁰ Cf. Ștefan Afloroaei, *Our Daily Metaphysics. About the Speculative Disposition of Thinking and Its Natural Presence Today*, ed. cit., pp. 49- 92.

¹¹ Cf. Martin Heidegger' s letter dated March 1964, written for the debate at Drew-University, Madison, 9-11th April 1964, and published later, together with the work *Phänomenologie und Theologie*, under this title, at Vittorio Klostermann, Frankfurt am Main, 1970, a volume dedicated to his friend and theologian Rudolf Bultmann. In *Gelassenheit*, 1955, Heidegger states that " there are only two types of thinking and each one is equally legitimate and necessary, in its own way: calculating thinking (*das*

into objects and it does not follow the technical criteria of objectivity. Symbolic thinking (Eliade)¹² is also different from the discursive – or analytical – thinking, although, in one respect, the latter does not completely lacks the symbolic element. Symbolic thinking, however, is based on other suppositions and other criteria of truth than the analytical one. The important differences involved by the comprehensive or hermeneutical thinking (Gadamer)¹³ have also been discussed. After all, the type of thinking which exceeds the logic of non-contradiction induces another image of the world in which we live and it can describe another experiences of truth (the expression used by Gadamer) such as the metaphysical, the aesthetic and the religious ones.

This means that we can speak about an alternative in a different, more radical, sense, which may be observed in the disposition of some authors (or of whole epochs) towards really alternative visions. Aristotle was not alien to the idea of an alternative world. When he discusses contingent or future facts, he accepts exceptions to the rule of non-contradiction. As he says, “in those things which are not actual, there is a possibility for something to be and not to be” (*De interpret.* 19 a). He also knows well that, whenever human deliberation intervenes, which means an alternative, the principle of non-contradiction is

rechnende Denken) and meditative thinking (*das besinnliche Nachdenken*)”. He probably considers that any other way of thinking may be reduced to these essential ones.

¹² Cf. Mircea Eliade, *Images et symboles, Essais sur le symbolisme magico-religieux*, avant-propos de Georges Dumézil, Gallimard, 1952, especially the pages in the author’s foreword and those in chapter V, discussing symbolism and history. An important precedent in this matter is represented by Ernst Cassirer’s work, *An Essays on Man. An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture*, published by arrangement with Yale University Press; see especially the first part, chapters II and III. Also see Paul Ricoeur, *La Métaphore vive*, Éditions du Seuil, 1975, especially section VII, 5 (about the concept of “metaphoric truth”) and VIII, 3-4 (about the metaphysical and metaphorical movement of thinking , with a delimitation of the speculative type of discourse).

¹³ Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode. Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik*, ed. cit., especially the section *Grundzüge einer Theorie der hermeneutischen Erfahrung*, pp. 270-345.

exceeded. The same situation appears when we refer to facts which are completely subject to time, uncertain or accidental.

There are enough situations in our daily life when man feels that something exceeds the rule of non-contradiction. A frequent situation is the one in which our mind faces an alternative. Another example is the situation in which the focus of our attention is a living person or the life of a human community. A deeply antinomic nature can be observed in the aesthetic experience and in the religious one. The latter situation is well known to some phenomenologists, such as Rudolf Otto, who speaks about *coincidentia oppositorum* (easily found in *Mahayana* or, later, in the works of such authors as Meister Eckhart) and about the Jobic reasoning. It is a type of ratiocination which takes the form of an irreducible antinomy, frequently used in the testamentary¹⁴ and patristic writings, or in the works of some modern interpreters such as Luther and Pascal. Taking into account the Byzantine theology and a model of thinking which expanded a lot during that epoch, John Meyendorff insists on the situation called antinomy¹⁵. He observes that the long-term controversies may lead not only to new meanings, but also to „a certain ‘freeze’ of the concepts and formulae /under discussion/”. Beyond this, the antinomic formula announces a real opening, a subtler form of freedom, as we can discover in the Byzantine theology.

The Christian writers observed that the testamentary truth could not be expressed in the Aristotelian logic of non-contradiction. In such an apophatic experience, the antinomy is real and ineffable. In fact, the same state of things may appear both as antinomic, in the logic of non-contradiction, and paradoxical, in the common already accepted doxy. This is not a simple synonymy. The paradox is real, for example, when you find that you must love the one who hates you, you must do good to the one who wishes the worst for you and you must pray for the one who persecutes you (*Matthew* 5, 44). It cannot

¹⁴ As we find, for example in *Iob* 42, 2: “you know You can do anything and there is no thought which does not become act for You”.

¹⁵ Cf. John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology. Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, Fordham University Press, New York, 1983, especially the final section (entitled “The Antinomies”).

be translated into the terms of a formal contradiction, in which case it may lose its very essence. Yet, if we speak about contradiction, then we should observe that it only hides a real paradox¹⁶. This paradox cannot be accessible to analytical thinking, no matter how far such an attempt might take it. Arius, a great scholar, expressed, by means of his heresy, among other things, the attempt to translate into the logic of non-contradiction something which exceeds it in a limitless way.

One might be surprised by some interpreters' unusual attempt to use memorable names in order to denote some current trends in thinking. For instance, man has practised lately differential thinking (Gilles Deleuze), ironical thinking (Richard Rorty), complex thinking (Edgar Morin), symbolical (Mircea Eliade) and disseminatory thinking (Gilbert Durand), really antinomic (Stéphane Lupasco), contradictorily (Jean-Jacques Wunenburger), weak or relaxed (Gianni Vattimo), hermeneutical (Jean Greisch), etc. Each of these explanations reiterates the idea that the space of freedom of thought is much larger than people used to think. In this respect, the Aristotelian logic should suffer serious modifications or, what is more, it should be partially put between parentheses.

5. On the possibility of oriented reason (Constantin Noica)

The problem under discussion could be formulated in the form of relatively simple questions in the beginning. Namely, if there are more ways of thinking (and different experiences of truth), then what is the relation between them? Could each way of thinking be considered neutral or indifferent in itself? Could you choose to follow any way of thinking without serious consequences?

In this respect, it is worth focusing on what Noica says about the „ethos of neutrality” and the “ethos of orientation”. His ideas are important not only from a conceptual perspective, as a philosophical distinction supported with

¹⁶ Cf. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Studii de teologie dogmatică ortodoxă (Studies of Orthodox Dogmatic Theology)*, Mitropolia Olteniei Publishing House, 1990, p. 194.

many arguments and examples, but also as a guide in the concrete human life, helping us to understand better the irresolute epoch in which we live.

He brings in the classical logic for discussion, watching carefully the logical requirements of such relations as those of identity and contradiction. For example, in a relation of contradiction for modern thinking, there is a perfect symmetry between the two terms: $A \equiv -A$. Their opposition gets to an equal and perfectly reversible power, indicating their reciprocal exclusion. In this way, their contradiction becomes a simple mutual negation. From a strictly formal point of view, the relation of contradiction can be seen in this way, too. But from other points of view, such as the cultural or the historical one, or, on another level, the ontological one, such an interpretation of contradiction has strange consequences. Unfortunately, modern thinking invoked this formal logic (of contradiction as mutual exclusion) in situations which are completely alien to it. Modern thinking "is trapped in the scheme of a linear and evolutionary causality, or of a linear evolution yet (if not a spiral one). And when it sometimes tries to get out of the chain of causal determinism or out of the current of ceaseless becoming, modern thinking meets a different scheme from the /hermeneutic/ circle: it is the oscillation between two poles, connected with the category of polarity"¹⁷. It is this category, of polarity, which dominates the reflections of such modern authors as Vico, Goethe and others.

But Noica assures us that the states of things do not manifest this type of relations. More exactly, they are not subject to a blind or indifferent becoming, they do not describe successive and self equal polarities. On the contrary, they make visible a certain orientation, a tendency or a "principle of order". This principle will be called "becoming within being". Or, the idea of "becoming within being" announces a different logic from the formal one¹⁸. This logic tells us, for example, that the particular can contradict the universal, but the latter does

¹⁷ Constantin Noica, *Devenirea întru ființă (Becoming within Being)*, The Scientific and Encyclopedic Publishing House, Bucharest, 1981, p. 14; also see Constantin Noica, *Scrisori despre logica lui Hermes (Letters about Hermes' Logics)*, Cartea Românească Publishing House, Bucharest, 1986, pp. 19-35.

¹⁸*Ibidem*, p. 9-15.

not contradict the particular, it takes it over. If the non-being – in its multiple forms – contradicts the being, the latter does not contradict the former, but it widens the horizon in which it can be transcended. Noica brings many examples from the history of science and of European culture. And he observes that, in such situations, the contradiction, for example, does not function like in the formal logic, but rather as a “unilateral contradiction”: the old element contradicts the new one, but the latter does not contradict the former; on the contrary, being freer or larger, the new element tries to take over and to integrate the old one in a larger configuration. In other words, “the contradictory distances itself from the term which it contradicts, but it is /finally/ taken over by the latter”¹⁹. This is a dialogical logic, which implies the hermeneutic figure of circularity.

In fact, what does the new sense of reason, its meaning as oriented reason, consist in? Firstly, what are the arguments that make Noica speak so confidently about an “ethos of orientation”?

6. A historical argument: the Greek way of thinking

Although reason is sometimes presented as “absolute indifference, as cold impartiality, as a supreme instance of arbitrariness”, it must be “taken out of this neutrality”²⁰. In fact, reason can be neutral and it can be considered neutral, as it has often been. But this is not defining for it; this is not the way it is ultimately defined as reason. That is why it is necessary to take it out of neutrality again.

The ancient Greeks already prepared this step in many respects. “It seemed *natural* to *them*, that reason should be oriented; it was obvious to them that reason was the instrument of being; dialectics itself represented a way out of neutrality and the beginning of a process of ascendance; just as philosophy in general represented for them an immediate passage from the level of “what it is” to the level of “what it should be”. But we have to learn all these, unlearning many other things” We find out from these observations that oriented reason meant at least three things to the ancient

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 11.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 104.

Greeks: it orients towards the being and not otherwise; it does so by the rediscovery of a “process of ascendance”; this “process of ascendance” leads from “what it is” to “what it should be” (something ideal). The intentionality of reason is not, therefore, of a constitutive order only, as it is for modern thinkers, but of an orientation order as well.

In connection with the way in which the Greeks used to think, it is known that they accepted qualitative differences between the existent things, for example between hot and cold, dry and wet, full and empty, blunt and sharp, etc. This difference was translated into conceptual terms (rest and movement, identical and contradictory, being and *non-being*), eventually leading to the difference between good and evil. For example, in *Lysis*, “the opposition is, at the beginning, between friend and enemy; it conceptualizes, becoming an opposition between similar and dissimilar; then it is taken to the extreme conceptualization: identical and contradictory, ending up in the opposition between good and evil”²¹. Thus, the first term appears to be “better” or “more natural” than the second one. Human thinking “prefers” the first one because things in our world tend towards something “natural”. The whole dialogic of real things was, one of the good and the evil, after all. The sense of this opposition was not at all a moral, but a metaphysical one.

The ancient Greeks could think in this way as long as they considered things to be signs in the line – or in the direction of – the being: signs “*that* they are and *how much* they are”. The being itself meant orientation, sense (with its double interpretation: meaning and direction). And the more elevated meaning of the being is the good. After all, “the good and the evil are signs, directions, and the Greek consciousness wanted to prove in this way that everything is in orientation”. It becomes really significant what points towards the being (or the good), the pre-eminent sense²². When man understands something, this thing is connected with the being, not with the non-being. Something which opposes something else (for

²¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 106-107.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 107.

example, the non-being as opposed to the being) cannot be absolute: the evil could not be considered absolute, because, in this case, “the world risked not being (being a complete chaos, dissolution) and the reason risked not functioning”. In fact, the evil does not exist, as it names only the non-being, the lack of being (in a higher or lower degree). In other words, something which opposes something else cannot be significant in itself, it represents a “more or less”. We deal with a really metaphysical belief, the one that “the world is not irremediably bad”. After all, the good and the evil are not equal; the good overcomes the evil. Plotin clearly expresses this belief when he says that the good means “the ultimate purpose of all the existent things” (*Enn. I, 8. 2*)²³. Only the good can be conceived by itself, free or absolute.

7. A phenomenological argument: consciousness is “within something”

The answer given by Noica has a definite phenomenological dimension: man’s consciousness “is within something, therefore, beyond itself”²⁴. Unlike the classical, Husserlian phenomenology, Noica focuses on two distinct characteristics of consciousness. Firstly, consciousness is not only consciousness of something, but also consciousness *within something*. This idea will be revisited explicitly somewhere else. “‘The intentionality’ of consciousness has been often discussed by contemporary philosophy. Revisited by Husserl and phenomenology from Brentano (although it could be found at Hegel as well), this character expresses the fact that any consciousness is a consciousness of something. Yet, why do we not say, in a similar way, that any dialectical step is a step within something? There is no movement without direction and there cannot be any dialectics without orientation”²⁵. Then, consciousness is to the same extent consciousness *from something*. Noica does not use here this phrase, “consciousness from something”. Yet, he has it in view, for example when he speaks about what is preliminary in ontological order. As he says, reason without orientation “knows nothing beforehand and wants nothing; it is

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 108.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 16.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 109.

nothing”²⁶. Making this double observation, Noica seriously modifies the phenomenological thematization of consciousness and, eventually, of reason.

The new sense of intentionality, with its triple implication (“of something”, “from something” and “within something”) does not define only the human consciousness. Noica speaks about an elementary form of intentionality peculiar to life itself; pointing to the fact that life is oriented and not neutral. “The Greeks said that any form of life is a form of intentionality, which they called Eros; everything aspires to something, determined or not, each creature has its *daimon*. And in Goethe’s words – but without his philosophical indifference - we could say: one form of daimony or another is everywhere in this world”²⁷. The idea gets a new significance when intentionality is attributed to reason in general. “We consider now /.../ that this almost universal daimony is still related to reason, namely to one characteristic of reason, that of being oriented. Reason must be understood as a life, as a way of tending towards something, not of registering and filtering something”. The intentionality of reason is announced by its oriented character. Only in this way it proves to be alive, free in its continuous transcending of the given data. Noica takes another step in this phenomenological approach. Namely, he will speak about the oriented character of spirit itself. The philosophy of spirit, as Noica understands it, becomes a real phenomenology. “The spirit is this *distensio*, this Eros, this processuality, in other words, this mediation – which only philosophy can make in an organised way-towards something that is not given to us directly”²⁸. As a principle of orientation in general, the spirit tends to mean one and the same thing as the being itself. We realise that both the Greek source which thematizes the spirit and the modern hermeneutical source are visible in this way of thinking.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 110; also see p.16-26 about *anamnesis* and about the anticipatory, preliminary element, used in the hermeneutic sense in any reflexive or circular approach, by such authors as Augustine, Descartes, Kant and others.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 123. Noica found in Saint Maximus the Confessor’s work *Ambigua* an excellent expression of this old idea: nothing in the world of life and of spirit – form, order, proportion etc. – has a neutral character; on the contrary, to the man with an elevated spiritual life, all these represent signs or senses, indicators to the whole economy of creation.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 126.

Therefore, any dialogics – both the one of the consciousness and the one of things – is oriented in one way or another. It does not mean a simple constituting of something, rather it is oriented “from something” and “within something”. It is not a neutral act of constitution, but an oriented process. Ultimately, it orients to what being means (seen both as the internal order of a thing and, in a broader sense, as its horizon of possibility). The states of things, in their most significant part, make visible both a dialogic and a form of orientation. Yet, this mode of being is not external to human consciousness and to reason in general. For instance, if we speak about a sense in the becoming of the existent things and, also, of human life, then we must accept the idea that such a sense becomes possible in the presence of spiritual acts. It manifests itself in relation with the human spiritual life or with that mode of spirituality which leads beyond this. As he says, “as soon as a reality endowed with reason/ such as man/ appears in this world, the being institutes itself”²⁹. Such an idea has a phenomenological orientation. But Noica’s phenomenology is a really distinct one. Its sources are various, Greek and patristic, then modern, as a continuous navigation between Hegelian and later phenomenology (I refer to Gadamer, for instance, but also to the phenomenology of spiritual life developed by Rudolf Otto and others).

But this type of phenomenology has rarely assumed less importance in the last two centuries. Noica will speak about a debatable direction of modern consciousness, namely historicism, which cultivates the idea of an evolution without orientation. The subtext refers to any form of relativism. (“Modern consciousness set on a voyage without a way, on a blind and absolute manifestation of relativity”). Or, as he suggests in other pages, it is about a Gnostic disposition of the actual consciousness, for example, when it is considered that the opposite terms – the good and the evil, the real and the apparent, the being and the non-being – are equal as possibility and as an ontological sense³⁰. The eclipse of some

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 144.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 107-109.

decisive categories – “where from” and “where to” - becomes symptomatic for the consciousness of our age.

8. A hermeneutic argument: the idea of reflexivity

The orientation of consciousness becomes possible as a reflexive act, by which it turns in a decisive way to itself. A circular movement occurs: “the knowing the knowledge (which Plato spoke about), the love for love’s sake (which Socrates speaks about in *Lysis*), the remembrance of memory (which Augustin mentions in his *Confessions*...”³¹. In this way, the simple thought becomes an idea. (“Any human being has thoughts, maybe other living creatures have thoughts, too, but only the one who reflects on his thoughts has ideas”). What is more important, in this way, it gets to another level of reason, apparently more abstract, yet more subtle and more comprehensive.

The act of reflexivity is noticeable not only in the case of some acts of the consciousness; “in mathematics, physics (and, probably, biology) there appeared some strange examples of possible reflexivity, or even effective reflexivity”. It refers to the so-called “function of a function” (as an operation based on operation, or operation to an operation), “wave” (a movement of a movement), genetic code, etc. Each of them denotes a model, is situated in the order of being. Let us not forget what Noica says somewhere else: that the being institutes itself phenomenologically, in the presence of self-consciousness or in the presence of the spirit.

The reflexive process is an oriented one, as it anticipates what is going to appear. This is what is well illustrated by the Platonic dialogics through the idea of *anamnesis*, the Augustinian meditation (which invokes the hypostasis of “interior teacher”), the modern perspective on “inborn ideas” and memory, the idea of “original synthetical unity of

³¹ Cf. St. Augustine, *Confessions*, X, 24 (*ibidem*, p. 16). In Noica’s works, there is an elaborate analysis of the idea of circularity, in its hermeneutic sense: in chapter I (*The Circle in the Philosophical Consciousness*), chapter II (*The Circle in the Philosophy of Spirit*, with the sections A. *The Circle in Table of Categories*, and B. *The Circle in Dialectics*), and chapter III (*The Circle in the Philosophy of Being*), over 150 pages altogether.

aperception", or the modern idea of form in ethics³². In such cases, it is noticeable both the circularity of some acts of reason and their tendency to "fit into order" Thus, "in the logical act, the individual universality (Socrates with his socrality) tends towards the general universality (the mortal human being); in the act of knowledge, the actual knowledge tends towards contemplation; in the ethical act, freedom tends towards submission"³³. This involves meeting again a preliminary order, but in another horizon, a wider one, and in another form, a more elevated one. The intentionality of reason for individual things sometimes appears as a tendency towards the ideality³⁴. Such is the tendency towards beauty in itself for any beautiful thing, the tendency towards *ens realissimum* for real things, or towards the level of contemplation for any act of knowledge.

9. A speculative argument: philosophical thinking is thematic

The idea of orientation draws attention to another way of thinking, close, in many respects, to the one which was called speculative. It can be easily recognized when we focus on somewhat paradoxical statements: the philosophical reason must "find out how it is possible for the particular to be universal"; "one term is contradicted only by affirmation, not by negation"; the being is what is distributed without being divided; the being does not exist, it is making itself; "the consciousness of becoming within being *is* conscious becoming within being"; "man is rational even in his absurdity, even in excess", etc. Such statements remind us of a subtle observation made by Schelling, that the thing in front of a mirror and its reflection in the mirror represent one and the same thing. Everything happens in such a way that "the image may turn into the object and the object into image"³⁵. In other words, any real object has an ideal, intangible side.

³² Constantin Noica, *op. cit.*, pp. 16-26. Noica calls this type of circularity, characteristic to hermeneutic thinking, "vectorial" circularity (cf. *ibidem*, pp. 11).

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 26.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 26-35.

³⁵ Schelling makes this statement in the work *Bruno or About the Divine Principle and the Natural Principle of Things* (1802).

Speaking about the Greek way of thinking, Noica distinguishes a series of categories which were peculiar to it, such as “ascendance” or anagogical movement, ideality or “must” (“must be”), being (*ousía*), “good” (in a metaphysical sense, *agathon* above the existent things), etc. He himself discusses in detail those categories which are characteristic of oriented thinking: “being”, “becoming” and “becoming within being”. They are necessary first and foremost in order to understand better the reflexive or circular movement of reason³⁶. Then he adds others, in the form of ideas as: “to be engaged within being”, fulfilment (or “plus of being” etc.³⁷. When these categories are employed, reason becomes, as Noica says, “an instrument of the being”: it orients towards the being, recognizes it and makes it. He restores it to its position of source of meaning, the being is the sense itself or the pre-eminent direction. He also considers that a re-definition of reason is necessary. Reason is no longer a mere faculty of deliberation, but “the reflection in the spirit of the becoming within being, therefore, the *consciousness* of becoming within being”³⁸. In other words, reason “does not have to arbitrate between the good and the evil, between being and non-being”, as if these terms had an equal ontological power. He does not invoke the non-being in itself, as mere absence, as it happens, unfortunately, too often nowadays. On the contrary, the oriented reason prefers the dialectics (in its Platonic sense, as dialogics), a live confrontation in the horizon or the light of the *lógos* itself.

The discussion on the doctrine of categories (and on some significant pages from Kant, Hegel or Heidegger) leads to a new conclusion. That is, we never start with a simple thesis, as in the classical triad: thesis, antithesis, synthesis. For example,

³⁶ Constantin Noica, *op. cit.*, pp. 53-63.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 104, 106. For example, when he tries to reconstruct the sense of freedom, Noica invokes the sense of “it must be”. We quote: “What is freedom? It cannot be freedom of choice in the sense of indifference of choice, as existentialism seemed to make, when, in our opinion, it was misunderstood; it is the freedom which only reason can offer to human reality, it is the freedom to be what it must be...” (*ibidem*, p. 121).

³⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 60-61. In a note, Noica adds: “A rational man becomes, in the sense of a law. A rational situation, too” (*ibidem*, p. 61, note 1).

if the thesis is something individual, in the act of its becoming, our reason does not start only from this fact, but it considers it in a wider horizon which makes it possible (“the being”). Such a preliminary horizon – either as a universal element or as a whole – will be called theme. Then we move towards something which opposes it, the antitheme (“becoming without sense”), then to thesis (“becoming within being”) and, ultimately, back to the theme itself (“the being itself”)³⁹. The starting point is usually a whole (“the target and the way to it”), a horizon or a medium of existence, even if insufficiently determined⁴⁰. In this way, the starting point and the target represent a theme, something of thematic nature. It does not represent a thesis, something ofthetic nature, as it has been thought for a long time; it does not represent something placed by reason, “a position which is due to be abandoned”. Ultimately, “our thinking is thematic, not thetic; the difference between common thinking and philosophical thinking could be that the latter is *consciously* thematic”. And the point towards which reason orients itself – as reason of thinking and, equally, of those which are thought – is the same, the being itself, gradually rediscovered with another sense. In such reflections, Noica displays a real and authentic speculative disposition, in the positive sense of the term.

³⁹ A rigorous analysis of these terms (theme, thesis, antitheme and again theme) can be found in Sorin Lavric’s *Noica’s Ontology. An Exegesis*, Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 2005, pp. 91-108. “You never start from the theme, but from the antitheme, and move in the horizon of the theme, but you only realize this in the end, when you properly meet the theme” (*op. cit.*, pp. 106-107).

⁴⁰ Constantin Noica, *op. cit.*, p. 77. “You do not start by stating the thesis (here, the part), but you get to something of its nature. First you state the whole, in a common sense, the target and the whole way up to it; then you get closer to it by travelling through that whole. You establish the horizon and, within it, you travel. Or, even simpler: you set an objective and then you accomplish it, that is you put something inside that objective”.

10. The ethos of neutrality in the contemporary world⁴¹

Noica made the observation that the 19th and the 20th century are dominated by an “ethos of neutrality”. In their characteristic way of thinking, the double quality of reason, the fact that it presupposes something and that it leads towards something, is no longer essential. Its orientation, expressed by means of two fundamental dispositions, “from” and “towards”, is no longer decisive⁴². “Reason appears more as a faculty of deliberation. It intervenes between something and something else in order to decide. It weighs estimates and offers things a logical value”. It pretends to be an impartial faculty, like an indifferent referee.

As we know, our reason always recognizes a series of differences, oppositions, contraries, etc. But it often considers the opposite terms as if they were equals, with equal justification in their existence or in their nature. The logic we usually use – a formal, quantitative, neutral one – is eloquent in this respect. After all, reason is defined as a mere faculty of deliberation between equal or neutral terms. This is what seems really strange and seriously alarming to Noica. How can you accept this simple equality of profoundly different things? What is the origin of this profane coincidence of contraries, their flagrant indifference? Isn't there any discontinuity in the world of contraries, “either in reality or in spirit”? Then, can we speak about progressive movement, growth, radical alterity any longer?

To clarify this thing, Noica presents a situation which he considers extremely relevant for philosophical thinking – the opposition between particular and universal. Any other contrarily, for example the one between multiple and unique, individual and general, finite and infinite, etc. could be reduced to this one. “In other words, any philosophy says in its own way: the particular *is* the universal (the reality is water, it is fire, it is thought, it is

⁴¹ The term *ethos* (“character”, “way of life”, or even “way of being”) is used by Noica in quite a broad sense in order to denote, ultimately, what is proper to reason in general or to a whole epoch. The older source may be the Aristotelian one. For Noica the ethos becomes noticeable especially in our way of thinking and feeling, in the elementary logics which we use at a certain moment.

⁴² Constantin Noica, *op. cit.*, , p. 110.

Idea, it is form, it is Will etc.)”⁴³. When these two terms are maintained in their simple duality, saying, for instance, that “the particular is what it is and the universal is what it is”, their duality becomes irreducible, abstract. They seem to be equal from a logical point of view. In fact, their equalization represents a frequent attitude in our life and culture, which is made possible by the very “disposition to neutrality” of reason.

Yet, such terms are never equal, in perfect symmetry. We realise their inequality as soon as we regard them “from a certain angle (at a certain moment of their unfolding)”. What does the inequality of the two terms - the particular and the universal – mean? They do not contradict reciprocally or with equal power. The particular may contradict the universal, but the latter does not contradict the former, it tries to bring it into its freer horizon. Therefore, their contradiction, if there is one, is unilateral⁴⁴. Only that through abstraction (a logical operation which is sometimes justified) and through oblivion, the contradiction is understood as bipolar, neutral.

The consequences of this ethos of neutrality are multiple. The series of dualisms is endlessly multiplied, an inflation which becomes really alarming. The real world will appear doubled by another one made up of concepts, laws and local systems, the sciences of an epoch. With the latter double, a rational or scientific form of idolatry emerges (the consciousness being dominated by general laws and phantom ideas)⁴⁵. Some modern authors were fascinated by the idea

⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 111.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 111.

⁴⁵ “Here the world has rarefied; it is the “night” which Hegel spoke about, the world in which everything is gray, because everything was looked at with indifference” (*ibidem*, p. 112). Noica does not speak explicitly about *idolatry*, but the idea as such is clearly presented in these pages. Also, cf. p.116, where he says that philosophic thinking “must not cultivate the illusion that it can conceive the non-being”. The ethos of neutrality is, after all, an ethos of the non-being or of death, maintaining “a sensibility of despair and death”. The concepts which seem impeccable from a logical point of view can provide, in their autonomy and logical sufficiency, “a spider web thrown over the world” (*ibidem*, p. 117).

Regarding the conceptual idolatry which modern philosophy cultivates, Noica can be analysed in reference to Nietzsche and his late exegetes, Gilles Deleuze, Otto Pöggeler, Jean-Luc Marion and others.

that everything is “equally justified”. Thus they thought that everything can “grow, develop, aspire to fulfilment, in a blind demony state”, in which reason is but one of the heroes in ‘bacchic frenzy’ /.../”⁴⁶. Noica refers to authors as Goethe, Hegel and Nietzsche, or, later on, some existentialists. Negation comes to be thought in itself (and not as denial that is from a certain point of view and as a verb, a particular act)⁴⁷. The power of no “becomes immense and indefinite. But you cannot understand any longer how “growth, a sequence of yes” is still possible in this world⁴⁸. The idea that the world “is not given from the beginning, but it produces out of itself what it was not”, is complete eclipsed. The barren concept of human reason makes contemporary anthropology consider existentialism as “a contribution to understanding man as a more rational being”, for instance, as a being-in-the-world, fallen or temporal being, possibly absurd⁴⁹. To be rational and to be absurd appear as exclusive modes through their sense. In fact, reason is seen only in its strictly logical function, and not as open, free dialogic⁵⁰. Some characteristics peculiar to man come to be understood like in an upside-down world. For example, the freedom of choice is seen as an “indifference to choice, which existentialism seemed to adopt”⁵¹. It is ignored – probably non-deliberately – what life itself means, both as the world of life and as human life. More exactly, what they ignore is its elementary form of intentionality, the fact that it is oriented and not neutral.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 113.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 115.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 118.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 120.

⁵⁰ “It is absurd to say: man is something else besides a rational being. Being something rational is everything he is, even what, apparently, he will be beyond reason. Man is rational even in his absurdity, even in excess. That is why he is absurd (he can commit suicide, for example), because he is rational. Natural things are not absurd, they do not know any form of our human absurd” (*ibidem*, p. 121).

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p. 121.

11. The ethos of orientation: an undated philosophical solution

What should be done in this serious situation? Is there a new solution, or should we rediscover a way of being which has never been alien to us?

As Noica tells us, we should reactivate the other fundamental disposition of reason, namely the ethos of orientation. We could see that, in this way, logics becomes a dialogical logics again, offering access to the live universality of reason, to its oriented character⁵². In this paradigm of logic, the contradiction, for example, appears as unilateral, asymmetrical. "The contradiction is really made by means of affirmation, not by negation; increasing, not decreasing; the dialectics of circles expresses, in this sense, the act of life in its richness, the process of growth"⁵³. Negation – as a particular act of denial – is only one moment in this vast process of growth⁵⁴. In other words, "no" represents a mere face of "yes". Other situations should be understood in a similar way: contradiction is only one moment in the dialogics of reason, and so is duality compared to contrariness, or neutrality compared to orientation⁵⁵. "It is essential for 'yes' to be conceived as more comprehensive than 'no' and as a term which generates the latter". In this way, reason proves to be affirmative, oriented, a real organ of the being, as the philosopher says.

Obviously, this way of conceiving reason must not lead to the idea that everything which is rational is implicitly just, positive or absolutely redeemed. As a matter of fact, what Noica says then represents a serious warning in this respect. "Reason is biased; it is sectarian, fanatical, exclusivist. But it is sectarian and fanatical for the being /.../. This is the source of the rational failure, in our inhuman misery. The misery of human condition is too often related to the fact that man is a rational being and, while not being able to reach perfect reason, he preserves nevertheless the sense of

⁵² *Ibidem*, p. 123.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, p. 118.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 119.

⁵⁵ The idea is resumed on the next page. "Because it is affirmation, thinking can be, at a certain moment, negation and self contradiction. Because it is oriented, it can be, at a certain moment, neutral. Remaining at the moment of neutrality of reason means not understanding neutrality itself" (*ibidem*, p. 120).

orientation and, therefore, the fanaticism of reason. Wherever we find partial reason, its fanaticism is complete". Such considerations deserve deep reflection. On the one hand, reason is not absent in those phenomena which we consider absurd or teratological. On the other hand, it means "consciousness of becoming within being", which significate its orientation. This is a tendency constitutive for its mode of being. It tends continuously to be affirmative, more comprehensive, but for this it describes a free and endless procesuality.

In this respect, Noica adds one more observation which deserves to be taken into consideration. The fact that reason is oriented does not mean that it is implicitly providential. It may be oriented in many ways; or it may have a hidden, equivocal orientation, or it may be indecisively oriented in its particular acts; hence, the idea of mission of consciousness – especially of the philosophical one. "Therefore, the mission of philosophy is not to prove that reason is oriented; but, discovering its orientation, to show *how* it should be oriented. Philosophy, as consciousness of oriented reason, is meant to show *to what* is reason, really oriented"⁵⁶. There could be several favourable signs in this respect. We refer to "the return of philosophical thinking to ontological problems", along with the deep interest in the Greek philosophy and Hegelianism, "in one word, the aspiration to connect the problems of reason with those of the being", as Noica says. Another sign is represented by the new, freer relation of philosophy with religious experience⁵⁷; in this respect, Noica's pages deserve a distinct and enlarged research.

Philosophy, especially as a philosophy of spirit, is going to rediscover a possible sense of knowledge and of our daily acts.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 124.

⁵⁷ Noica's references to the testamentary writings or to the religious experience are much more frequent and decisive then they might seem; cf. p. 14 ("you wouldn't look for me if you hadn't found me"), pp. 15, 24-26, 29-30 (about Pascal), p. 67 (always something beyond, the infinite itself), p. 103 (the image of the Creator), pp. 114, 126-128 (about St Augustine), p. 133 (where he discusses the phrase "I am what I am"), p. 134 (speaking about negative theology), pp. 148-151, 157 ("the steady being, the divine"), p. 159 ("this world will disappear, but my words will not"), etc. As a matter of fact, the parable of the *prodigal son* may be considered a perfect theological expression of the way which the philosophical consciousness (and, in general, any oriented reason) follows.

Such a sense is abbreviated by Noica in the phrase: “to become within being”. But this phrase should be interpreted with the prudence of the mind which has sometimes experienced the justification of a sceptical attitude. “In a way, we *are* being, but, in the complete sense, we only try – through knowledge and spiritual life - to *be* it. In other words, we are always as within being”⁵⁸. In fact, the being is not something already given (“the being is not something immediate”). It rather means the live and dynamical reason of one thing, on the one hand, and its wider horizon of possibility, on the other hand. Thinking becomes possible in this horizon and it continuously aims at it. In other words, the being is “pre-eminent theme”, both in the order of thought and in that of existence. And human reason is – or it consciously tries to be – oriented in and towards being (“within being”). This is the horizon in which human reason itself is possible.

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