



STUDIA UNIVERSITATIS  
BABEŞ-BOLYAI



# PHILOSOPHIA

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PHILOSOPHIA**

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## PATTERNING THE COSMOS: THE RELIGIOUS IMAGINATION AND CONNECTEDNESS WITH THE NON-HUMAN WORLD

ARTHUR SANIOTIS<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT.** In many cultures the human body can be viewed as a connecting pattern for negotiating bio-social and cosmological constructions. The human body provides a cartography of the cosmos and mediates between the visible and hidden worlds, the domestic and wild domains. The body provides a way of embodying the non-human and sacred Other, thereby enabling the cultivation of empathetic responses to the non-human world. This paper examines how the religious imagination of traditional cultures maintains connections with the non-human world. It explores how the religious imagination merges cosmological and experiential elements of human existence via sensuous engagement with the non-human world. In relation to shape shifting, the paper contends that this kind of sensuous engagement is biophilic since it is based on a reverence for the non-human world and a desire to merge with it, so that all bodily thought and action coalesce with the non-human world. In this way, the biophilic embodiment may be understood as a phenomenology of mimesis.

**Keywords:** *Mythopoeic constructions, metaphorical correspondences, entheogens, shapeshifting, biophilic embodiment*

### Introduction

The aim of this paper will be to examine how the religious imagination of traditional cultures maintains connections with the non-human world. It will argue how mythopoeic understandings and experiences of the body cross-culturally provide a means for fostering intimacy with the non-human world. Moreover, I contend that this kind of mimetic engagement metaphorically ties the body's external and internal

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physiology to the non-human world (Jackson 1996:33). The religious imagination of indigenous cultures have been well documented among both anthropologists and mythologists during the twentieth century providing a rich source for understanding the human religious imagination (Levy-Bruhl 1936; Campbell 1956; Evans-Prichard 1956; Levi-Strauss 1962; Eliade 1964; Jung 1964; Douglas 1970; Hertz & Stephen 1989). William James (1963) claimed that the religious imagination is a source of personal revelation, insight, and moral power. For James, the power of religion derives from the strength of a person's religious belief, or what F.R. Tenant (cited Barbour 1974, 135), refers to as the "sustained effort of the will." James divides religion into two areas: "the experiential and the relational" (Berkovitch 1989:122). According to James, the religious imagination serves a variety of subjective purposes; one such purpose could be encountering different modes of self awareness as a way of apprehending the mysteries of the Divine Other. Bercovitch suggests that James is alluding here to the "invisible realm of religion," and that it could represent regions of the "subliminal consciousness" that is independent from conscious awareness (1989:122). This is tied into James' pragmatic view of religion as conveying to believer, aspects of their individual interests (Bercovitch 1989:122).

While an in-depth analysis of religious imagination is beyond the scope of this article, I will explore how religious imagination in various traditional cultures merges cosmological and experiential elements of human existence via sensuous engagement with the non-human world. The first section provides an overview of the importance of pattern in mythopoeia across various cultures, and how mythic based patterns establish and maintain connectedness with the non-human world. In many indigenous cultures there exist metaphorical correspondences between human corporeality and the natural world. In this way, the human body is tied to cosmological processes which inform the social order. The second section explores the role of entheogens (psychotropic substances that trigger unity with the sacred Other) in fostering altered states of consciousness (ASC). Entheogen based ASC are significant in establishing intimacy with the non-human world; entheogens mediate human awareness via fostering connectedness with plants, animals and spirit beings. Entheogens trigger different ways of experiencing the life-world and the sacred Other; these experiences build upon the mythological knowledge of human societies, as well as, enabling individuals in exploring other ways of corporeality. The third section examines the phenomenon of shapeshifting as a biophilic embodiment. Shapeshifting alludes to a transformation of consciousness which infuses with the consciousness of animals, thereby providing a platform for an ecological awareness for the non-human world.

### Mythopoeic Constructions of the Inner and Outer Worlds

For both Comaroff (1985:6-7) and Merleau-Ponty (1963:82,146) the body is the “tangible frame of selfhood in individual and collective experience” the “vehicle of being in the world”. The body mediates action within the lifeworld and constitutes the self. Yet the body is not just a thing in itself isolated from the lifeworld. The body is subjected to biological and cultural forces whereby its form is continually transformed. For Merleau-Ponty the flesh is negotiated by a “reciprocal commonality” (Merleau-Ponty cited in Gill 1991:72), between knower and the known, “the sentient with the sensible” (Abram 1997:66). This process of change is both a product of biological ageing and a consequence of purposeful manipulation. Moreover, Stoller (1986, 1997) declares that the body incorporates a secret history that is disclosed via sensuous engagement with the lifeworld, conveying a mosaic of experiences. He refers to this sensuous awareness as “sensuous scholarship”. An individual’s creative embodiment of religious based symbols is noted by Eliade (1965:204), who points out that religious symbols allow an individual to explore those cosmic processes which form “an integral part of the World,” such as life, death, and regeneration, in terms of their own existence.

In his book, *The Body in the Mind*, Johnson elucidates a topography of human experience by identifying the main forms and junctions by which human experience and understanding are rendered (Johnson 1987:XXXVII). Johnson claims that certain “embodied schemata” (1987:XXXVI), structure and make sense of human experience, or as he puts it “putting the body back into the mind”(1987:XXXVI).

The eco-philosopher David Abram (1996, 2010) notes that the human body has evolved to attune itself with the non-human world, in a reciprocal and sensuous dance of the senses. Nature’s patterns are interwoven in the body’s animal design, which is foremost a carnal entity. For Abram (2010), human corporeality is embedded in reciprocity with the non-human world. Abram’s cosmos is redolent with connectedness, the primal senses constantly presenting us to nature’s kaleidoscopic textures and rhythms.

The correspondence between human corporeality and nature is highlighted by Jackson (1983, 1989). Jackson is interested in the ‘psychological aspects of metaphor’ in disclosing the self to the world, and how thinking, speaking and behaving of “Being are made to correspond and coalesce” (Jackson 1983:127). Elaborating on Merleau-Ponty’s notion that it is through the body that provides a “setting in relation to the world” (1963, 303), Jackson’s notion of metaphor links the personal, social, and natural bodies (Jackson 1983:127).

In many cultures the human corporeality has been a point of comparison with the cosmic body. In Chinese cosmology, the inner and outer worlds are believed

to have identical physiological systems (Rawson 1968:231). This correlation between the microcosm and macrocosm forms the basis of traditional Chinese medicine. This is comparable to the Hindu conception of *purusa*, the cosmic body, the origin of existence (Jackson 1983:128); the cosmic body also being a template for human social order, each of the four major castes (*brahman*, *ksatriya*, *vaisha*, *sudra*) correlating with different parts of the cosmic body. For the Warlpiri people of Northern Australia, the human body is metaphorically tied to the land, "in terms of internal, visceral physiology" (Jackson 1996:33). In this way, relations between people and the land are understood according to bodily processes of eating, digestion, excretion and procreation (Jackson 1996:32). The Dreaming is the all-encompassing cosmology of Australian aboriginal life, establishing the interactive patterns between the human and non-human world. The Dreaming inaugurated fauna and flora, the shape of the land, human law and custom. The Dreaming ancestors continually shape shifted between human and non-human forms, through their creative actions they prescribed the modus operandi of life as a dynamic and continuous metapattern (Bird Rose 2005). Where the ancestors travelled they created the song lines which extant Aboriginal people perform; the song lines which continue for thousands of miles throughout the Australia continent link clans to the land, clans to the ancestors. Moreover, extant Aboriginal ceremonies enable participants to recreate the travel of Dreaming ancestors, the motion of dancing bodies unites humans to cosmic patterns, movement is infused with desire (Bird Rose 2005). "The movement between the ephemeral and the enduring suggests that the power of life in potential has yet another desire," the desire to embrace the ephemeral nature of life, and the desire to return to the source of life (Bird Rose 2005).

Jackson's idea of the metaphorical correspondences between different bodily domains is relevant here since actions in one domain have consequences for other domains (Jackson 1998:174; 1989:9). Relevant here is also the Dogon conception of their geographical and social order as a human body (Calame-Griaule 1965:27). Thus, the Dogon house, as the locus of human beginnings, is conceptualised as a man lying down and in the act of procreating, whereas the village is likened to a person lying down in a north-south direction, with smithy located at the head (north) and shrines at the feet (south) (Griaule 1954:95-98; Jackson 1983:128).

Metaphorical correspondences between the micro and macro worlds are central to the construction and implementation of exorcist healing designs called *puleeta* (charm wick), which are used by Sufis in North India. Various levels of *puleeta* symbolic domain attempt to exploit the metaphorical associations between *puleeta* and patient. It can be suggested that the exoteric form of the *puleeta* has probably been influenced to some extent by the Hindu concept of *purusa*, as it "incorporates both an anthropocentric microcosm (a world conceived in terms of a human body)

and a cosmo-morphic man (the universe within the human body)" (Barkan 1975). For example, the spatial organisation of symbols within a stylised human shape, is the basis of the Hindu temple (*mandir*) and talisman (*yantra*). As a power diagram, a *puleeta* comprises various symbols, numbers and phrases using Arabic, Farsi and Urdu, as well as, idiosyncratic language. The phrases incorporate Quranic script, names of angels, demons, malefic beings, and historical individuals. The invocation of sacred beings plays a vital part in a *puleeta's* spiritual efficacy, and informs us on the importance of sacred authority and assistance within the context of exorcist rituals and *puleetas'* symbolic motifs.

Metaphorical correspondences between the body and cosmos have been lucidly researched for decades by anthropologists. For example, Douglas (1969) contends that the body is a blueprint for categorising social and moral systems. Douglas emphasised the role of pollution and dirt in informing social behaviours, highlighting how bodily processes are linked to social patterns and elicit powerful emotions. In many cultures, body's orifices are particularly polluting since they challenge social conceptions of bodily order. Douglas's 'social body, is in effect, the manipulation of the 'natural body' (Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987). Indeed as many theorists have pointed out there are complex interactions between social and natural bodies. What seems evident from prehistory has been the human desire to manipulate the natural body as a way of connecting with the cosmic order. As earlier stated, this patterning is evident in the Australian Aboriginal Dreaming, as well as, many indigenous cultures. Victor Turner's symbolic approach (1967, 1969, 1972, 1974, 1975) took Van Gennep's (1960) notion of the ritual body further, by stating that a ritual's liminal phase re-located the social body within a state outside ordinary social structure which an individual had occupied. In short, the liminal phase symbolically manoeuvred the social body towards a temporary and unordered state. However, it is during this 'betwixt and between' state which spurred *communitas* – an unstructured communion between human individuals or between humans and non-humans. Turner's approach to liminality highlights its ludic and creative elements, especially in his later works (1979, 1982, 1989) in relation to pilgrimage and theatre. For Turner, *communitas* was essentially a necessary connecting pattern that fostered new ways of being-in-the-world. Indeed, *communitas* prompted the religious imagination by attempting to induce in ritual participants a sense of belonging to a larger whole that was greater than self. While Turner's notion of *communitas* has been critiqued in pilgrimage studies (Eickelman 1976, Pfaffenberger 1979; Morinis 1984; Delaney 1990; Eade and Sallnow 1991) the determinism of Turner's *communitas* is questioned, not its existence.

Jackson's book *At Home in the World* (1995) discusses the complex interconnections between body, experience and dreaming of the Warlpiri people of central Australia. Land is predominant to the Warlpiri people, the source of their being; land is not merely 'home' in the western sense, but a set of dynamic relationships with the non-human world which are reified in ritual and myths, disclosed in dreams, and informed by encounters with nature (Jackson 1995:152-153). Warlpiri life patterns are constantly infused with the land, and mirror the "generative activity" of the Dreaming ancestors (Jackson 1995:153). Jackson explains how the procreative patterns of the Dreaming inform Warlpiri experience via trees. In Warlpiri, the word *yama* implies a shadow, a person's likeness or tree shade. During the Dreaming, the ancestor Yunkuyirranu visited the place bearing his name and left his "vital essence" (*kuruwarri*) there. For the Warlpiri, Yunkuyirranu's essence is cognate with the shade of a tree. Thus, by standing under the tree where Yunkuyirranu once stood a Warlpiri comes under the ancestor's influence and is imbued by the Dreaming there (Jackson 1995:153). In Warlpiri discourse this process is considered as a "coming into being" (*palka-jarrimi*), "a kind of birth" (Jackson 1995:153).

A feature of extant shamanic cultures (which could be similar to ancestral religious imagination as demonstrated in Upper Paleolithic art) is the dynamic interplay between the cosmic and mythic realms. For example, among the San of the Kalahari knowledge of the environment is embodied via songs and movement, and may be acknowledged as an embodied epistemology (Keeney 2005:77). San cosmology is exemplified by fluidity and indeterminacy, and underscores the multifaceted nature of *G/aoan* (the spirit other). Consequently, San shamans are believed to possess *thuru* – an ability to shape shift. In San philosophy, shape shifting may be viewed as the recursive relationship between change and stability (Keeney 2005:80). Recursion is a pattern of relationships underlying San experience of the biosphere (Keeney 2005:80). For San shamans *thuru* may be represented by a dynamic circle, cognate with the Hindu idea of mandala – a simulacra of the human psyche, a unity of mind and nature. In San shamanism mythopoesis is interpenetrated by recursion. During dance, the shaman's body becomes *G/aoan*, embracing the psychophysical energies of our humanity, but never privileging one aspect of human nature over another.

Similarly, in the Nuer worldview the conception of *kwoth* (spirit), like *G/aoan* is interchangeable, reflecting the multitudinous nature of life. Among Nuer of South Sudan and Western Ethiopia, *kwoth* may be associated to air spirits, totem, community or lineage and spiritual power (Evans-Pritchard 1953:204). It is *kwoth* which mediates Nuer sociality. *Kwoth* is intertwined in the fabric of Nuer life, existing beyond yet intrinsic to Nuer social order (Evans-Pritchard 1953:214). *Kwoth* is metapattern.

### **The Role of Entheogens in *Communitas* with Nature**

The use of psychotropic substances in human societies has been widely researched (Furst 1972; Harner 1973; Myerhoff 1974; Dobkin De Rios 1984; Grob 1998; Wink 1998; Winkelman 1996; Mentzner 1998). Psychotropic use in *homo* has a very long history. Thinkers such as Winkelman (2003) have proposed that *homo* and psychotropic plants had co-evolved over a long evolutionary period and that such co-evolution gave ancestral humans certain benefits by serving as sources of neurotransmitters while enhancing neurotransmitter processes (Sullivan & Hagen 2002). Winkelman (2001:339) contends that ancestral *homo* may have had an innate drive towards taking psychoactive substances. The latter claim that ancestral and extant *homo* has had a 'natural' craving to use psychoactive and mood altering substances due to the neuro-hormonal organisation of the human brain. The fact that extant *homo* has an ability to metabolise psychotropic agents is indicative of such co-evolution. For example, human beings possess the gene CYP2D6 that allows psychotropic substances to be metabolised. In nature, various non-human species have been observed to selectively choose and ingest psychotropics (Samorini 2000). Jacques (2004:91) notes that in many non-human animal species there is an apparent compulsion towards modifying consciousness via the ingestion of natural hallucinogenic substances. The use of such substances may have fitness advantages in that they enable animals to experience their environments in different ways.

Focussing on their psychotropic qualities in promoting ASC, entheogens may have been since prehistory as they enhanced self-awareness, connectedness with the non-human world, and promoted attributions of nature as sentient (McKenna 1992). Psychotropic use shares with other techniques in promoting ASC, which are commonly used in shamanic healing practices (Winkelman 2003). Siegal (1989:100, 211), opines that drug seeking behaviour is normal in the animal kingdom and that in *homo* may have been evolutionary advantageous. Similarly, drug seeking behaviour in *homo* has since prehistory craved the euphoria which psychotropic agents have elicited, and that when used in a religious context promoted group bonding and connectedness with the natural world. Samorini (2000:84-85), correlates the "adaptive evolutionary value" (Siegal 1989, 211), of entheogens with the biological notion of "provocative operation factor" (POF), otherwise known as "de-patterning". POF is explained as concepts or insights which are non-conventional, and therefore, not restricted to the parameters of established paradigms. Thus, POF not only liberates the mind from the rigidity of dogmas but mediates the generation of new insights (Samorini 2000:85). In Turnerian terms, POF is cognate with the liminal phase of rituals, whereby participants are allowed to invert conventional thinking, and discover new possibilities. Over time, novel ideas are integrated in social structures. In

this way, social structures evolve. Although speculative, entheogens may have been used as a technology of the mind by ancestral shamans. As a shamanic technology, entheogens may have enabled shamans to integrate modes of consciousness, thereby informing human cognitive evolution (Winkelman 2000:58).

Alan Watts (1965:18), points out that entheogens are sacramental – infused with grace, since they enable an experience of the sacred. Watts further states that entheogens mediate between patterns of human experience and knowledge, leading to an integration of both patterns (1965:16). Jung (1964), argued that the world's mythologies are based on archetypes – principles of psychic organisation which are informed by the collective unconscious; a universal ocean of atavistic energies, connecting ancient parts of the brain with the recently evolved pre-frontal cortex. According to Jung, the archetypes are the source of primal mythologies that later on became systematised during the Neolithic period. Entheogen-based mythologies belong to this archetypal structure (Trichter 2006:34).

In the Navajo and Huichol cultures (South-West United States), *peyote* plays a central role connecting the cosmological and social orders. *Peyote* is important in Navajo and Huichol healing rituals, and is a significant entheogen. The role of *peyote* as entheogen can be understood in relation to Navajo and Huichol animism. During the *peyote* pilgrimage to the sacred place *Wirikuta*, *peyote* is used by the Huichol pilgrims in order to become united with their deities (Myerhoff 1974:240). According to Huichol myths, *Wirikuta* is the geographical birthplace of the Huichol deities, the sacred centre of the Huichol universe. It is at this sacred place where *peyote* reveals itself as mediator between the visible and spirit worlds. According to Myerhoff, *peyote* enables the Huichol pilgrims to enter a state of 'transcendental *communitas*' in that they perceive themselves as living incarnations of the Huichol deities (Myerhoff 1974:241). What is significant here is the conflation between place-centred sacredness and person-centred sacredness. At *Wirikuta*, the bodies of Huichol pilgrims become microcosms of the Huichol universe. As embodied sacred centres, they once again return to the state of non-differentiation, synonymous with Eliade's notion of *illud tempus* (Eliade 1957).

Alternatively, for the Navajo the *peyote* is imbued with personality and intelligence, allowing for both corrective and contemplative reflexivity (Stedman 1982:505). The ritualised context of *peyote* merges symbols and entheogen towards the manipulation of somatic and unconscious processes (Stedman 1982:506). Navajo conceptualise the *peyote* as being omniscient and invested with the Holy Spirit; able to access the recesses of human psyche (Calabrese 1994:510). *Peyote's* role as spiritual teacher (which resembles the mediating function of traditional shamans) highlights the pedagogical role of entheogens, not necessarily from their ability to induce ASC, but more significantly from the ritual context in which they are used and which endows them with sacred meaning (Tupper 2003:151).

In South American indigenous and syncretistic religions, the psychotropic *ayahuasca* has been central to their religious complex. Amazonian cultures may have used *ayahuasca* for at least 3,000 years (Naranajo 1983). Fortunately, the role of *ayahuasca* in the shamanic and syncretistic religious systems has been well documented (Andritzky 1989; Schultes & Raffauf 1992; Luna 1993, 2000, Ott 1994; MacRae 1998; Mentzner *et al* 1999; McKenna 1999; Polari de Alverga 1999; Wilcox 2003; Kjellgren *et al* 2009). *Ayahuasca* is made from the yage vine (*banisteriopsis*) and is a powerful (and in many accounts a confronting hallucinatory) concoction. Early anthropological fieldwork on *ayahuasca* amongst Ecuadorean shamans revealed that ASC induced by the *entheogen* psychically transported shamans to chthonic realms, which often included visions of jaguars, snakes and anacondas (Oberem 1958:80; Harner 1962:260-261). Another early account reported that *ayahuasca* was used among Embera and Noanama cultures in order to commune with the spirit world and animal powers and for divination (Reichel-Dormatoff 1960:131-132). Among the Jivaro the ingestion of *ayahuasca* and fasting are performed in the context of accessing an *arutam* (a kind of soul), which confers invulnerability from physical attack to the participant (Harner 1962:260). Once an *arutam* is ‘touched’ the participant has a dream of the *arutamas* a Jivaro elder who initiates a connection with the dreamer, having lodged itself in the dreamer’s chest after the dream (Harner 1962:260). In this way, *ayahuasca* is involved within Jivaro relations with unknown forest ancestors, who in turn empower living Jivaro.

### **Shapeshifting as Biophilic Embodiment**

Numerous indigenous and classical mythologies are replete with theriomorphs and humans who were intentionally changed into non-human animals, or otherwise had the power to shape shift into non-human animals. The earliest verifiable examples of theriomorphs are the “Lion Man of Hohlenstein” (30,000ky) carved from mammoth ivory and the cave painting known as “the Sorcerer” (13,000ky) in Trois-Frères, France. Both figures imaginatively combine human animal and non-human animal features. Prevalent belief in theriomorphism and shapeshifting are probable prehistoric relics when ancestral *homo* co-evolved with the non-human world. In the Pleistocene period when human survival was tenuous, there was a high premium in knowing the behaviours of non-human animals. *Homo* co-evolved with many other species during the Pleistocene period which informed its evolution (Ehrlich 2000: 44). Ancestral shamans may have taken this scrutinising penchant further by creating a mythological realm in which fauna and flora acted as guides and teachers. Ancestral *homo* would have observed how certain non-human animals underwent somatic transformations (i.e. insect metamorphosis, limb and skin regrowth). Metamorphosis may have been viewed as a kind of re-birth, as it was later conceived by post-Neolithic cultures.

A significant element of extant shamanic cultures is the need to incorporate the behaviours of non-human animals in order to commune with them and to embody their power. This aspect has been painstakingly examined by anthropologists since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Human “capacity to Other” through mimicry is referred to by Taussig as ‘mimesis’, that is predicated on a desire to be another, or to share similarity with a physical being or object (1993:66). The mimetic capacity for “bodily mirroring” the Other is a way of initiating an ontological bond with it (Taussig 1993:46). In this way, shamanic shapeshifting represents a way of embodying the generative essence of the non-human Other, a quintessential ‘biophilic embodiment’.

Shapeshifting as a biophilic embodiment is poignantly expressed by Jackson (1990) in his relationship with a Kuranko shaman of the Sierra Leone who believed that he could become an elephant. Jackson contends that shapeshifting is a stratagem for existential retrieval during a life crisis; a way of balancing between the vital and ‘wild’ energies associated with the wilderness and the social order. Kuranko shapeshifting is reminiscent of Jackson’s notion of the regenerative powers which are associated with the wilderness (1998:46). As Jackson (1998:46), points out: “Vitality always exists beyond. At the edge”.

Similarly, Sakha shamans of Siberia seek to establish relationships with both domestic and wild animals which mediate a shaman’s powers. Avian spirit helpers such as ravens often assist Sakha shamans to find sickness spirits or lost souls (Balzer 1996:306). Like other shamanic forms, Sakha shamanism utilises the animal powers in order to benefit human society. A Sakha shaman’s unique tie with the non-human world is based on the belief that he possesses a kind of ‘maternal soul’ which can access the spirit world, where it transforms to aniiᑕ-kyyl (mother beast) (Balzer 1996:308). Shaman and iiᑕ-kyyl share an intimate relationship; if the iiᑕ-kyyl dies so does the shaman (Balzer 1996:308). An iiᑕ-kyyl acts as a shaman’s protector and can offset other shamans. In one account, a Sakha shaman called Parilop avenged himself against an Evenk shaman by changing himself into a wolf and killing his rival’s reindeer (Balzer 1996:308).

Abram (2010:229), claims that the human body is par excellence a metamorphic entity. He notes that it does not suffice to invoke the non-human Other via the imagination, the Other must be carnally embedded. The porous nature of the body enables it to mimetically encompass the animal world, and by doing so, becomes empathetically engaged with the non-human Other (Abram 2010:254).

A key element in such kinetic invocations of another animal is the magician’s ability to dream himself in the wild physicality of that Other. Allowing his senses to heighten and intensify as he becomes possessed by the carnal intelligence of the creature. (Abram 2010:239).

This biophilic mimesis of shamans is pertinently illustrated in Abram's relationship with Sonam, a Nepalese shaman. Sonam was adroit in mimicking animal behaviour such as the croaks and gutturals of ravens with such precision that the birds would fly towards him (Abram 2010:237). Under Sonam's guidance, Abram learnt that shapeshifting involved a metamorphosis at visceral and perceptual levels. This kind of "kinetic invocation" demanded a re-ordering of the senses in order to quell an animal's fear of approaching a shaman (Abram 2010:239). Having spent toilsome weeks engaged in being attentive to ravens, Abram became more conscious of how avian rhythms sensuously interwove with his body. Abram's practices came to a surprising *telos* one day when he came upon a raven picking at a dead animal. Each time the raven pecked at the carcass he felt a sensation at the back of his neck. Similarly, as the raven loosened chunks of meat from the carcass Abram felt his body becoming lighter. It was as though the raven's eating pattern found its analogue in Abram's body (Abram 2010:250). It seemed that Abram's body had undergone a metamorphosis, where it became increasingly attuned to the "unfolding patterns" of a sensuous cosmos (Abram 2010:298).

### Conclusion

This paper has explored the religious imagination and human connectedness with the non-human world. In many cultures, the human body provides a cartography of the cosmos and mediates between the visible and hidden worlds, the domestic and wild domains. Additionally, the body offers a way of embodying the non-human and sacred Other, thereby enabling the cultivation of "compassionate responsive modes of relating" to the biosphere (Harries-Jones 2005:69). For Bateson, sacredness was the wellspring of Mind – the illimitable and immanent matrix of interconnectedness between all living organisms. In Bateson's worldview, life is predicated on embracing patterns of relatedness that are recursive and maintain biomes. I have argued how the religious imagination merges cosmological and experiential elements of human existence via sensuous engagement with the non-human world – the origin of all and the mother of patterns – the Meta-pattern. Certainly, this kind of intimate engagement is biophilic since it is based on a reverence for the non-human world and a desire to merge with it, so that all bodily thought and action emanate the Sacred.

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## LE DEVELOPPEMENT DURABLE : PRINCIPE D'UN NOUVEL HUMANISME EUROPEEN ?

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**ABSTRACT.** The sustainable development has to be an ethical and cultural purpose in order to become an economic and political project. It supposes a humanist trust in the human responsibility. But Europe lives nowadays a contradictory relationship in the humanism. Maybe the European humanism is partially forgotten and contains resources which can give to the idea of sustainable development ethical, cultural and spiritual foundations. It is the reason why it is possible to rediscover the humanistic Kantian cosmopolitanism in the light of two contemporary questioning.

The overtaking of the ecology is essential for the Kantian morality, because its supreme end consists in the moral destination of the quite whole human race, for which the personal effort is not enough. According to Kant, there is "a duty of the mankind towards itself": it has to contribute to the promotion of the supreme good, understood as the common supreme good of the whole mankind. So, the Kantian idea of sublimation of the ends of our action can be compared to the ontological theory of the responsibility for the other by Lévinas: in both cases, ethics became a supra-individual foundation of the action in the world.

**Key words:** *Europe; humanism; ecology; responsibility; sublimation*

Le développement durable doit être un but éthique et culturel digne d'être partagé si l'on veut qu'il devienne aussi un projet économique et politique. Cela suppose une confiance humaniste dans la responsabilité humaine. Mais l'Europe vit actuellement un rapport à l'humanisme qui est contradictoire.

Du fait de la critique heideggerienne de l'humanisme, le deuxième moitié du XXème siècle a vécu sur une caricature de l'humanisme, un humanisme identifié à un bilan négatif de la civilisation européenne : les deux caractéristiques de l'humanisme que sont le progressisme et l'universalisme se fonderaient en dernier ressort sur un anti-naturalisme ; quand on dit « anti-naturel » on suppose que l'homme est l'ennemi

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de la nature, qu'il veut la dominer dans le but de la nier et de la détruire ; et c'est ainsi que l'écologie, la *deep ecology*, peut devenir à son tour l'ennemie de la civilisation de l'Europe, accusée d'avoir été « trop humaniste ». Un moralisme anti-européen est ainsi devenu l'ennemi intérieur de la culture européenne en incitant l'Europe à faire du rejet de son humanisme un signe de tolérance et d'ouverture au monde, comme si son auto-négation était l'ultime témoignage de l'universalisme de ses valeurs.

Toutefois, le problème se complique aujourd'hui avec l'apparition de nouvelles formes d'antihumanisme dont on peut craindre les dérapages, quand on entend dire que « l'immaîtrise est le nouvel idéal régulateur<sup>2</sup> » des recherches scientifiques, que la thèse de l'« exception humaine », fondée sur la liberté, sur la dignité et sur la créativité de l'homme devient intolérable au nom des droits de la nature, ou encore quand on finit par se demander si la vie d'un grand singe en bonne santé ne vaut pas mieux que celle d'un humain handicapé : « tous les êtres humains, et eux seulement, doivent-ils être protégés par le droit alors même que certains animaux non humains leur sont supérieurs en intelligence et ont des vies émotionnelles plus intenses<sup>3</sup> ». En songeant au fait que Hitler lui aussi récusait l'idée d'exception humaine au motif que l'humanité est soumise comme tout ce qui vit à la nature qui veut que la force écrase la faiblesse, on comprend qu'un naturalisme anti-humaniste puisse devenir l'alibi d'un monstrueux cynisme.

Une autre voie mérite d'être explorée : peut-être l'humanisme européen est-il en partie oublié. Peut-être contient-il des ressources capables de donner à l'idée de développement durable des fondations éthiques, culturelles et spirituelles qui sont à repenser.

C'est la raison pour laquelle je me propose de redécouvrir l'humanisme cosmopolitique kantien à la lumière de deux interrogations contemporaines.

- En quoi le nouveau type de rapport à la nature est-elle une étape de la culture ?
- Sur quelle éthique fondatrice faire émerger un humanisme cosmopolitique ?

Le premier niveau de réflexion fait référence à Manuel Castells et à son livre sur *La Société en réseaux*. Le deuxième niveau de réflexion fait référence à Yves-Charles Zarka et à ses récents ouvrages (*L'inappropriabilité de la terre* et *Refonder le cosmopolitisme*) concernant une responsabilité éthique plus originaire que l'intention personnelle. Il met en évidence la complexité du rapport entre cosmopolitisme et modernité.

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<sup>2</sup> Jean-Michel Besnier, *Demains les post-humains*, Fayard, 2010, p. 199.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Singer, *Comment vivre avec les animaux ?*, Le Seuil, Les Empêcheurs de penser en rond, 2004, p. 115.

*Premier développement* : qu'est-ce que penser culturellement la nature ?

*Deuxième développement* : quelle fondation d'une solidarité cosmopolitique est possible au-delà de la politique ?

## I

### **Penser culturellement la nature**

Comment penser culturellement la nature en relation avec l'éthique ?

### **La culturalité du naturel**

Le point de départ de la réflexion est donné par l'ouvrage de Manuel Castells, *La société en réseaux* :

« Nous abordons une nouvelle étape dont la caractéristique est que la Culture renvoie à la Culture: nous avons à ce point supplanté la Nature que celle-ci se trouve aujourd'hui artificiellement ressuscitée (« protégée ») comme forme culturelle. Reconstruire la Nature comme forme culturelle idéale, tel est d'ailleurs le sens profond du mouvement écologique... Cela ne veut pas dire que l'histoire est en voie d'achèvement sous l'effet d'une réconciliation heureuse de l'humanité avec elle-même. C'est en réalité tout le contraire qui s'opère sous nos yeux l'histoire ne fait que commencer, si par « histoire » nous entendons le moment où, après des millénaires de lutte préhistorique contre la Nature, pour survivre d'abord, pour la conquérir ensuite, notre espèce a atteint le niveau de savoir et d'organisation sociale susceptible de lui permettre de vivre dans un monde principalement social. » Manuel Castells, *La société en réseaux*, (Fayard, 2001, Conclusion).

La thèse ici exposée est simple : notre espèce a connu trois âges : dans le premier, la nature nous domine, dans le second, nous dominons la nature, dans le troisième, celui qui caractérise notre époque, le rapport à la nature est devenu entièrement culturel. Ce qui retient d'emblée l'attention est l'idée que la relation que nous allons entretenir avec la nature est devenue une nouvelle étape de la culture. Castells, pour sa part, interprète cette autonomisation de la culture comme une justification du règne de l'information, où l'homme n'a plus affaire qu'à l'homme lui-même, où la culture n'a plus affaire qu'à la culture. A ce titre, l'histoire commence...

On peut retenir de cette simplification des rythmes de l'histoire humaine, l'idée que la protection de la nature, souci écologique contemporain, ne réclame pas nécessairement un retour au naturel contre le culturel ni une sacralisation de la nature contre l'homme. C'est, au contraire, par une élévation de nos capacités culturelles que nous serons amenés à inventer une relation plus « naturelle » à la nature, plus « culturellement » naturelle s'entend.

Il serait trop facile et trop rapide de voir dans ces prédictions une transposition du cosmopolitisme kantien. En revanche, l'idée d'une culturalité du naturel nous enjoint à repenser l'idée quelque peu mystérieuse de la moralisation de notre espèce, qui termine, selon Kant, les trois étapes de la culturalisation de l'espèce humaine.

### **De la civilisation à la moralisation**

Kant, lui aussi, résume et simplifie l'histoire culturelle du genre humain. La première étape correspond à la sortie de la nature, la deuxième est la civilisation des mœurs au sens du XVIII<sup>ème</sup> siècle, la troisième, encore non advenue, est celle de la moralisation : « nous sommes civilisés... mais il s'en faut encore de beaucoup que nous puissions nous tenir pour moralisés, car l'idée de moralité, elle aussi, fait partie de la culture » (IHU, prop. 7 AK VIII, 26, ligne 23).

Si on lit cette histoire de manière empiriste, causaliste et déterministe, elle se discrédite spontanément elle-même par sa naïveté. Mais si on lit de manière critique et kantienne ce parcours, on s'aperçoit que la naïveté vient de nous ; c'est nous qui regardons naïvement le progrès comme une suite d'étapes qui s'engendreraient successivement les unes les autres. Comme s'il suffisait d'avoir inventé un outil pour devenir civilisé et d'avoir inventé la civilisation pour devenir moralisé. Si cela était, il faudrait admettre que chaque cause produit son contraire : que la nature produit la culture et que la technique produit la morale. Selon ce schéma, la moralisation ne serait finalement que le résultat d'une évolution causalement déterminée. Elle ne serait qu'un aboutissement et non un moteur de l'histoire.

L'erreur de ce raisonnement est de comprendre la moralité comme une causalité, alors qu'elle ne peut œuvrer que comme une finalité. On peut supporter des causes ; mais il faut vouloir des fins. Une fin ne peut agir que comme un motif. Comment expliquer ce mystère, sinon par le fait que l'homme est culturel par nature, qu'il est l'être où la nature elle-même se culturalise. Si l'humanité n'était pas naturellement moralisable, la production de la morale à partir de la civilisation serait incompréhensible et impossible.

La même observation vaut pour le cosmopolitisme. Si le cosmopolitisme n'était pas culturellement naturel, il serait impensable. Kant n'ignore pas que la civilisation comprise comme socialisation politique de l'espèce humaine, repose sur l'hyper-développement de la technique, laquelle produit une « brillante misère » (CFJ, § 83 ; AK, V, 432, ligne 25). Et il est le penseur qui refuse de dériver la moralité de la technicité, la raison pratique de l'entendement calculateur. Or la possibilité de cette mutation est l'œuvre de la nature elle-même : c'est l'homme qui voudrait que son bonheur résulte d'une technicité toujours plus grande, d'une exploitation toujours plus performante de la nature ; c'est l'homme qui ne voit dans la nature qu'une

somme d'objets techniquement exploitables. Mais la nature sait mieux que lui ce qu'il lui faut : elle le déniaise de ces illusions paresseuses en l'obligeant à créer entre lui et elle des relations finales et non pas des relations causales : paradoxalement, *la nature elle-même empêche les hommes de se servir de la nature comme d'un alibi*. Quand ils veulent la concorde (l'illusion de paix identifiée au confort), elle leur oppose la guerre (la rivalité) ; quand ils veulent la discorde (les haines privées), elle les contraint à s'associer face à un péril plus grand (la disparition de l'espèce). Elle transforme, dans les individus et dans les peuples, les causes de survie en fins de l'action. Elle oblige les individus à devenir des acteurs créateurs et non de simples causes reproductrices.

“Pour découvrir en quoi nous devons placer, pour l'homme tout au moins, cette *fin dernière* de la nature, nous devons rechercher ce que la nature peut effectuer pour le préparer à ce qu'il doit faire pour être une fin dernière et *le séparer de toutes les fins* dont la possibilité repose sur des conditions que l'on peut seulement attendre de la nature” ... “la nature, en vue de cette fin dernière qui lui est extérieure, peut s'y prêter et cela peut alors être considéré comme sa fin dernière propre” (CFJ, § 83. AK, V, p. 431, ligne 12-17 et 27-28).

Ce qui ne se comprend que par la méthodologie réfléchissante que Kant adopte en philosophie de l'histoire. Kant emploie l'expression : « La nature a voulu... ». Qu'a bien pu vouloir la nature ? Que l'homme invente les moyens de son existence (IHU, proposition 3. AK, VIII, p. 19, ligne 18); que la guerre transporte le genre humain sur toute la surface de la terre (PPP, premier supplément. AK, VIII, p. 363, ligne 3-4) ; que les sociétés humaines sortent de la violence par des institutions ; en un mot, la nature a voulu que l'humanité produise elle-même les moyens de sa condition cosmopolitique. Rien de moins irréaliste et de moins « belle âme » que cette vision des choses. C'est seulement par l'abandon du narcissisme sanglant des communautarismes qui croient faire l'histoire alors qu'ils l'empêchent de commencer que le cosmopolitisme deviendra vraisemblable. L'expérience de leurs malheurs historiques fait comprendre aux hommes que les souffrances qu'ils endurent sont de leur fait et de leur responsabilité, et qu'il leur appartient de changer leur manière de penser et de vouloir. En termes contemporains, on pourrait traduire de la façon suivante : la guerre, la misère, la souffrance et l'inégalité persisteront tant que l'on croira possible de leur échapper en produisant mécaniquement, techniquement les moyens d'un bonheur tiré de l'exploitation de la nature ; mais la peur d'un gouvernement mondial, d'un côté, la peur des atrocités des guerres, d'autre, change les mentalités et les fait passer *du désir d'efficacité au besoin de responsabilité*. En termes kantien, on peut dire : en comprenant que le désir individuel de puissance est une cause illusoirement naturelle, les esprits regarderont enfin comme une cause finale réaliste l'union juridique en vue d'une coopération forcée, mais salutaire et féconde. C'est seulement quand il saura viser le cosmopolitisme comme une finalité

planétaire, comme un but qui doit être voulu comme un but et non comme un produit fabriqué par l'ambition, la peur ou le calcul que le cosmopolitisme aura pour raison d'être la fin naturelle ultime de l'humanité : à savoir la moralisation de la civilisation, le dépassement du stade technique par le stade éthique de la civilisation. L'humanisme cosmopolitique contredit toute logique de domination qui voudrait se justifier par l'efficacité.

## II

### **Fonder une solidarité cosmopolitique**

Les analyses d'Yves-Charles Zarka mettent en évidence la nécessité de fonder le cosmopolitisme sur une solidarité cosmopolitique et non l'inverse ; si le cosmopolitisme n'est que le projet de mettre en ensemble des bonnes volontés, il n'est qu'un conglomérat ; un humanisme cosmopolitique a besoin de liens originaires.

### **Refonder le cosmopolitisme**

La condition spécifiquement éthique de cette refondation est le dépassement du subjectivisme moral : c'est la voie lévinassienne de la responsabilité pour autrui qu'Y-C Zarka privilégie dans son ouvrage *L'Inappropriabilité de la terre* (p. 42-43).

« Le pré-originaire est cette dimension de notre être plus fondamentale, irrécusable, en deçà de l'origine, qui ne dépend donc ni de la subjectivité, ni de la volonté, ni de la liberté. Or, ce pré-originaire, Levinas le pense comme responsabilité pour autrui. Une responsabilité qui nous constitue comme subjectivité passive : une subjectivité en deçà de la subjectivité égologique. Dans la relation dissymétrique avec l'autre, avant de dire « moi », avant même d'être moi, il y a l'autre. Le pré-originaire est la dimension la plus profonde de ce que nous sommes, elle est d'ordre métaphysique et morale (...) notre rapport à la Terre est pré-originaires inappropriable. Ce rapport n'engage plus simplement la relation à un autre singulier et présent, mais à l'ensemble de l'humanité actuellement existante et même future, c'est-à-dire à des êtres non présents et non-encore existants. Il s'agirait du même coup de passer de la responsabilité pour autrui à la responsabilité pour l'humanité et même pour l'ensemble du monde vivant, commis à la responsabilité humaine. »

Cette manière d'analyser indique l'existence d'une dimension méta-politique de la solidarité humaine, et donc d'une dimension métapolitique du cosmopolitisme<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ce qui est dit dans *Refonder le cosmopolitisme*, page 59 : « passer du politique au métapolitique. Cela suppose qu'il y ait une dimension de l'existence individuelle et collective antérieure et plus fondamentale que l'existence sociale et politique »

On ne peut qu'acquiescer à ce constat : une solidarité fondatrice est originaire ou n'est pas, elle ne se fabrique pas. La chose est claire.

Mais l'analyse fait valoir d'autres enjeux. Rechercher chez Lévinas une autre conception de la responsabilité, ce n'est pas seulement dépasser les limites du subjectivisme, c'est vouloir entretenir avec l'humanisme un nouveau type de relation, et il y a là une grande différence historique avec le cosmopolitisme kantien. Pour Kant, le cosmopolitisme dont il s'agit d'annoncer la venue sera le fruit de la culture européenne elle-même dans sa continuité, il résultera d'une élévation de la culture européenne, devenue le foyer d'un rayonnement capable de préfigurer l'advenue d'une condition planétaire du développement humain moral. Pour Kant, l'Europe est traversée par un universalisme qui la dépasse pour se faire cosmopolitique.

Mais pour les penseurs contemporains, l'idée cosmopolitique d'aujourd'hui se construit en partie sur le rejet de l'universalisme occidental, ou du moins, sur la base de soupçons à l'égard de la modernité politique. Avec l'idée d'une re-fondation du cosmopolitisme, le cosmopolitisme d'aujourd'hui doit se penser aussi contre lui-même, contre son propre héritage : il ne veut pas être une suite, mais un nouveau commencement.

Toutefois, d'un autre côté, il faut aussi lutter contre de nouvelles formes d'anti-humanisme dont on peut craindre les débordements quand il s'agit de fonder sur un nouveau culte nature une certaine haine de l'homme. La complexité du problème conduit à se demander s'il n'y a pas aussi dans le cosmopolitisme kantien des ressources qui permettent de penser une responsabilité pour l'humanité ?

### **La solidarité cosmopolitique selon Kant**

Il existe une pensée kantienne d'une solidarité humaine originaire. On la trouve dans le droit, l'anthropologie et la religion. L'aspect juridique et anthropologique sont connus. En revanche, le point de vue religieux est plus rarement exploité quand il s'agit de cosmopolitisme.

Si l'on s'en tient au versant juridique de la pensée kantienne, il faut rappeler que les droits de l'humanité l'emportent sur les droits de l'homme (DD, § 17 Remarque. AK, VI, p. 270, lignes 16-22 et 19-20) ; le subjectivisme des droits de l'homme est indirectement dénoncé dans le fait que le corps humain lui-même n'est pas un objet manipulable : la dignité humaine n'est pas objet d'appropriation subjective, parce que chacun « *est responsable de l'humanité dans sa propre personne* » (*Ibid.* lignes 19-20)

Si l'on consulte l'anthropologie, on apprend que la solidarité humaine la plus originaire tient à la destination morale de notre espèce, destination collective et originaire qui est inscrite dans l'inachèvement des dispositions et des œuvres humaines. Le concept kantien de perfectibilité caractérise implique la solidarité

indestructible de l'espèce humaine, car cette solidarité l'associe à elle-même dans le meilleur comme dans le pire de son histoire.

La question la plus difficile est d'inclure la nature elle-même dans le devenir cosmopolitique de l'espèce humaine ; autrement dit : comment peut-on trouver dans le kantisme l'analogie d'une responsabilité pour l'humanité qui passe par la nature ? C'est dans la philosophie kantienne de la religion que l'on peut trouver un traitement de la dimension métaphysique et métapolitique du cosmopolitisme.

Le dépassement de l'égologie est indispensable la morale kantienne puisque sa fin suprême est la destination morale de l'espèce humaine tout entière, à quoi l'effort personnel ne suffit pas. Il s'agit d'un « devoir du genre humain envers lui-même », devoir de travailler à l'avancement du bien suprême en tant que bien commun, sachant que « le bien commun moral suprême ne se réalise point par l'effort d'une personne en particulier en vue d'accomplir sa propre perfection, mais exige au contraire l'union en une totalité en vue du même but » (*Religion*, Vrin p. 132. AK, VI, p. 197, lignes 18-19 et 21-24), ce qui conduit à l'idée du destin collectif d'un « peuple moral » (Vrin, 135. AK, VI, p. 100, ligne 29). Comment se représenter un peuple moral, une communauté humaine universelle orientée par des règles éthiques? La pensée critique de la religion administre rationnellement la dimension spirituelle de la solidarité humaine. *C'est par la voie du devoir, c'est-à-dire par la voie de la **sublimation** de ses propres raisons d'agir qu'une responsabilisation collective est pensable.* Ainsi, c'est en regardant ses devoirs comme des commandements divins que l'ego surmonte le risque de narcissisme moral, œuvrant alors à l'intérieur d'un monde régi par des lois de vertu, analogue à un « Etat divin » (Vrin, 258. AK, VI, p. 198, ligne 19) dont la finalité éthique ultime est supra-individuelle. Le traitement kantien est entièrement herméneutique, il consiste à traduire dans un vocabulaire éthique la force symbolique des commandements religieux pour y trouver ce qui, dans la religion, dépasse la religion elle-même : à savoir « quelque chose qui élargit la manière de penser étroite, égoïste et intolérante des hommes, notamment en matière de religion, jusqu'à l'idée d'une « communauté morale cosmopolitique » (Vrin, 259. AK, VI, p. 199, ligne 37), transposant ainsi à l'échelle des vivants passés et futurs ce que chaque communauté vit dans la proximité comme un simple « amour fraternel » (*ibid.*.p. 200, ligne 2).

Le même thème est traité téléologiquement dans la CFJ comme une reprise critique de la théologie morale. Pour que notre action vers un bien suprême commun intègre la nature entière, il faut considérer l'ensemble des hommes et des êtres naturels comme le tout d'une création orientée vers un but final. Cela veut dire qu'un accord entre l'éthique et la nature fait nécessairement l'objet d'une **foi**, car aucune science ne peut associer des causes naturelles à des finalités morales. Seule la foi sert de condition de possibilité à l'application de normes éthiques à la réalité naturelle,

puisque créer l'harmonie entre la morale et la nature outrepassé totalement la compétence humaine. (CFJ, Vrin page 260 et svtes. AK, V, p. 454, lignes 12 et suivantes).

Il n'est pas absurde de conclure en disant que le besoin d'une foi dans une destination cosmopolitique équivaut au besoin de confiance dans la créativité humaine. Ce que la philosophie kantienne de la religion ajoute à la philosophie de l'histoire, c'est qu'il existe une dimension spirituelle, culturellement spirituelle du cosmopolitisme, qui excède toute technicité politicienne.

Il serait intéressant de développer plus longuement la différence entre la fondation de la responsabilité dans une ontologie pré-subjective (la voie de Lévinas) et sa fondation dans une sublimation inachevable (la voie de Kant).

La voie de la sublimation me paraît plus proche de la culture morale européenne que la voie de la peur, rendue célèbre par Hans Jonas, mais qui empêche l'esprit de créer un nouveau rapport à la nature en vue d'une fin à laquelle il pourra participer par un nouvel âge du dépassement de soi, qui ne sera plus seulement politique (et donc à la mesure d'une nation) mais éthique (et donc à la mesure de l'humanité entière dans son destin terrestre). Une « communion des fins » serait autre chose qu'une communauté religieuse et autre chose qu'une idolâtrie de la nature, ce pourrait être une sorte d'éducation esthétique de l'humanité au sens poétique et philosophique que donnait Schiller à cette idée.

L'éthique n'est pas seulement ce qui impose des devoirs ; elle est ce qui dépasse la technicité des rapports à la vie. Certes, la vie prend une valeur selon les fins que l'humanité lui donne, une humanité éthique, dont la valeur inconditionnelle ou « sublime » est au-delà de toute utilité. La dimension téléologique de la vertu étend ainsi l'exigence des fins au-delà des effets utiles de l'action. C'est pourquoi l'on peut dire aussi que l'éthique élargit les principes de la cohabitation au-delà des rapports de droit, elle les augmente d'un surplus d'activité volontaire qui met le pardon au-dessus de l'offense (DV, Vrin, 138. AK, VI, § 36, c, p. 461), l'estime au-dessus de la coutume (DV, 142. AK, VI, § 40, p. 464 lignes 16-20), le don au-dessus de la compassion (DV, 135. AK, VI, § 34, p. 457).

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## IS CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY EXPECTED IN THE ORGANIC FOOD MARKET?

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**ABSTRACT.** The paper presents how Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has been receiving, during the last decades, more attention from companies, authorities and consumers, reflected both by its increasing practical implementation, related awareness and research focused on it. Our study aimed to reveal if consumers of organic products expected organic producers to implement CSR actions related to environment protection and to consumer protection. We found that more than half of the tested consumers expect environment (66% of them) and consumer related (75% of them) CSR actions. We found no differences between men and women in terms of their expectation levels for CSR actions for environment protection, or for consumer protection and no difference in the time spent in the countryside until the age of 20 of people who expect CSR actions for consumer protection and those who do not expect them ( $p>0.05$ ). Results showed a statistically significant difference in the time spent in the countryside until the age of 20 of people who expect CSR actions for environment protection and those who do not ( $p<0.05$ ). We also observed a direct relationship between levels of expectation for environment protection CSR actions and levels of expectation for consumer protection CSR actions ( $r=0.718$ ,  $p<0.001$ ).

**Key words:** *Corporate Social Responsibility, consumers' expectations, environment protection, consumer protection, organic food*

### Introduction

The modern concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has its roots in Howard Bowen's book *Social Responsibilities of the Businessman* published in 1953.

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Bowen's belief was that power is held by several very large businesses, whose decisions have a great impact on society and, therefore, they become responsible, to some extent, for its welfare (Carroll, 1999, p. 269). The initial definition emerged from this idea and stated the following: "It [social responsibility] refers to the obligations of businessmen to pursue those policies, to make those decisions, or to follow those lines of action which are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of our society" (Bowen, 1953, p. 6). Bowen did not say the social responsibility would be the remedy for society's problems, but he foresaw that it would certainly be a guiding line and an important concern in the future (Carroll, 1999, p. 270). Keith Davis (1960, p. 71) added that "social responsibilities of businessmen need to be commensurate with their social power" and that "the avoidance of social responsibility leads to gradual erosion of social power" (Davis, 1960, p. 73). Besides, "the substance of social responsibility arises from concern for the ethical consequences of one's acts as they might affect the interests of others" (Davis, 1967, p. 46). Carroll (1979, p. 500) says that businesses are, indeed, economic actors expected to produce goods and services and make a profit, but all must abide by society's legal system. Moreover, businesses and managers must go beyond the law and comply with society's ethical norms, which must be reflected in the company's daily activities. At the top of the four-level pyramid (Bottom level: Economic responsibilities=Be profitable, Second level: Legal responsibilities=Obey the law, Third level: Ethical responsibilities=Be ethical, Fourth level: Philanthropic responsibilities=Be a good corporate citizen) there is philanthropic responsibility, a voluntary role that a business may assume and for which the society does not provide a clearly stated expectation, but is left to corporations' choice, and is increasingly strategic (Carroll, 1999, p. 284).

CSR can be differently perceived by managers and stakeholders, in which case such programs are due to fail. What is needed is to align society's expectations with managers' understanding of their responsibility towards society (European Commission, 2006, p. 18-19). Recently, studies have focused on detailed examination of factors, internal and external, that affect these two perspectives and shape organizational and consumer behaviour.

Freshfields, an international law firm, conducted a research that consisted primarily in analyzing 78 crises that occurred between August 2007 – 2012, with the main purpose of determining the effects they had on the companies. A final report was published in 2013, Freshfields Crisis Management Study 2013, which identified 4 types of crises: operational, behavioural, corporate and informational. Operational crises are CSR-related, while behavioural crises refer to unethical conduct such as illegal actions. Corporate crises like lack of liquidity or technology negatively influence a company's financial situation. Informational crises affect the company's IT and may include system failure, hacking, etc. The analysis shows that the fastest to recover

from are corporate crises, while informational crises *have only a moderate effect on shares*. On the other hand, behavioural crises have the fastest negative impact, especially on investors, causing shares to crash by 50% or even more when they become public. Operational crises have a smaller impact during the first 48 hours of a crisis breaking, but *cause the greatest long-term effect on share price*: 6 months after the crisis the share price of large international businesses was still lower by 15% than before and 25% of the corporations had share prices lower than the pre-crisis ones even after one year. Commenting crises, Chris Pugh, global head of disputes at Freshfields said: "Executives at firms affected by a behavioural issue should typically prepare for an up-front hit on their share prices whereas those dealing with an operational matter are probably going to be in repair mode for the long term." (<http://www.freshfields.com/...>).

Pugh's statement is confirmed by the results of a study conducted by Cone Communications in 10 countries around the world on consumers' CSR-related perceptions and behaviour. It revealed that in case of company misconduct, consumers would boycott (90% of the sample) and refuse to purchase (55% of the subjects have already done it). 85% of the subjects say they do not expect a company to be perfect, but it should definitely be honest about its efforts, that is communicate correct and reliable information and avoid corporate scandals and improprieties, which now easily spread especially on social media and can tarnish a company's image, which can take long to rebuild. Consumers (91%) are eager to know more about companies' CSR efforts, but they believe the information that is shared does not reflect the truth as companies make public only positive aspects about their activities. Buying is no longer just a transaction. Consumers feel the need to be empowered and purchasing is their way of contributing to causes they believe in. Conscientious shopping conquers ground as consumers become more responsible and aware of their power and the change they can bring (Cone Communications/Echo, 2013, p. 23).

Another study run in 2013 by Reputation Institute, the world's leading reputation management consultancy, shows that consumers respond positively to companies involved in CSR actions, being willing to recommend them if they perceive they deliver good CSR. The research covered 15 countries in Europe, Asia Pacific, North America and Latin America, where more than 100 000 consumers were interviewed in order to identify what makes a company's strong global reputation and *how leading companies are perceived*. The results show that consumers attach more importance to reputation in 2013 than in 2012, a trend that is considered to ascend more and more in the following years. It was also revealed that 73% of the sample would recommend to others a company perceived as doing quality CSR. 71% of the consumers would say something good about such companies. Companies considered

to be doing poorly on CSR would be recommended by only 17% of the respondents and only 19% of the sample would say something good about them. Consumers worldwide seem to agree that CSR is an important factor in building a good reputation. Companies that are aware of this and dedicate time and effort *to creating a positive perception of their CSR* activities built a strong image on the market and increase their economic performance (Reputation Institute, 2013).

Consumers are willing to reward CSR not only by recommending them, but also by buying more products made by responsible companies. A global study conducted by The Nielsen Company shows that 50% of the interviewed consumers would even pay more for goods and services coming from CSR-involved companies. The trend appears to be ascending as the percentage is higher in 2013 than in 2011 by 5%. Surprisingly, males are willing to pay the price premium more than women. According to age group, 55% of consumers between 21-24 years old, 56% from 25-29 years old group, and 53% of consumer between 30-39 years old agree to spend more on products and services of responsible companies. Consumers over 65 years are less interested in motivating responsible companies: only 34% of the respondents falling in this age category said that they would pay more for products and services offered by companies actively involved in CSR programs. Consumers from countries in South and East Asia seem to have an increased awareness of CSR, as well as of the long-term benefits of such actions. They are the most willing to spend more on products from responsible companies: 75% of the respondents from India, 71% of the respondents from the Philippines, 68% of the respondents from Thailand and 66% of the respondents from Indonesia agree to spend more on these products. In contrast, Europe is at the bottom of the list, the consumers least interested in products from socially-responsible companies being the Estonians (only 27% of the total respondents from Estonia agreed to spend more on the fore-mentioned products), Belgians (28%), Croatians, Finns, Dutch and French (31%). Romanian consumers appear to give more importance to such products as 42% of the respondents from our country agreed to spending more. Of the European countries where the study was run, Bulgaria is the most interested in CSR. Apparently Bulgarians and Romanians believe in CSR actions more than people from Western and Northern Europe. However, there seems to be a rather huge gap between Bulgarians' willingness to spend more and self-reported purchasing: while 53% are willing to pay more, only 31% actually did so (Nielsen, 2013, p. 10).

A related study was carried out by the European Commission in the 27 EU member countries and Croatia in December 2012. It revealed that 77% of the subjects are willing to pay more for environmentally-friendly products if they had the certainty that the information printed on the labels was true. Germans and Romanians in particular are very skeptical about eco labels. 54% of the interviewed consumers

do not trust companies' environmental performance reports, saying that the information contained in these reports is misleading or exaggerated (European Commission, 2013, p. 6).

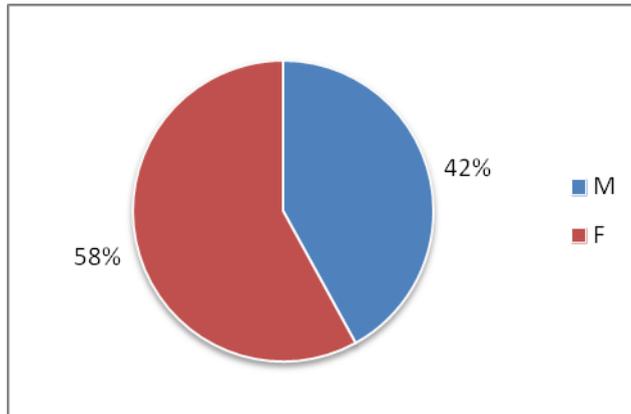
### **Material and Method**

The general objective of the study presented here was to determine consumers' perceptions of corporate responsibility of companies that activate in the organic sector. The terms organic, ecological (eco) and bio in relation to food are used here as synonyms. The results discussed here are partial results generated by a survey sample of 290 persons, within a broader (in terms of sample size and data collected) research focused on consumers of organic food. The geographical coverage of the main research included the six counties that form the NW Region of Romania: Cluj, Bihor, Bistrita-Nasaud, Maramures, Satu Mare, Salaj. Consequently, the universe population was composed of persons over 18 years old from these counties, consumers of organic food. The time frame of the research was 2013-2014. The population of the NW Region was divided into groups, based on gender and age, according to the data provided by the most recent Census (2011) ([www.recensamantromania.ro/wp-content/uploads/2013/.../sR\\_Tab\\_31.xl...](http://www.recensamantromania.ro/wp-content/uploads/2013/.../sR_Tab_31.xl...)). Then, we calculated the share held by each group within the total NW Region population. These shares were implemented in our survey in order to have the same structure of the sample as the universe population from gender and age point of view. We chose randomly the first subject within a given area and then we interviewed each 3rd person on that building/street. The research method was the survey, the method used for the data collection was face-to-face structured interview, conducted by a trained survey operator, and the instrument was structured questionnaire, with closed-ended and open-ended questions. The face-to-face interview was preferred to self-administered questionnaire due to the length and complexity of the questionnaire; they made necessary the presence of a skilled operator to guide the interviewed subject through the list of questions while keeping interview's attention and interest focused on the questionnaire, without, of course, making any comments that would affect the truthfulness of the answers. The structured type was chosen in order to obtain the same category of data regarding a given subject, to guide the subjects to provide similar type of data, necessary to fulfill the objective of the study. Data analysis was carried out using the software Excel and SPSS version 21. For comparison of differences regarding an ordinal variable, between two groups, we used the Mann-Whitney U test. The level of statistical significance was set at  $p < 0.05$ . The relationship between two ordinal variables was investigated using Spearman's Rank Order Correlation. The level of statistical significance was set at  $p < 0.05$ .

## Results and discussions

The objectives of the study described in this paper was to determine if organic food consumers expected companies in the organic field to adopt CSR actions and to identify possible differences between groups of consumers according to the studied variables. We focused on consumers of organic food as we considered them a special group of consumers that had already made a decision concerning their dietary habits by choosing organic over conventional food. As science advanced and generated more knowledge about health, nutrition etc., as consumers became more interested in following a healthy lifestyle, including through their eating habits, and gained broader access to information, their behaviour changed to comply with this interest (Dragan, Petrescu, 2013 p. 284; Tîrhaş, 2013, p. 56; Vesa et al 2008, p. 140-141; Vesa et al, 2009, p. 4-5). At the same time, sustainable solutions, such as organic agriculture, conquer more ground and raise more awareness in authorities, academia, consumers (Burny, 2012, p. 180; Petrescu-Mag, 2013, p. 8-11; Petrescu-Mag et al, 2013, p. 295-298; Pin Koh, Ming Lee, 2012, p.3; Power et al, 2013, p. 227; Stoenescu, 2012, p.2; Tschardtke, 2012, p. 53). The studied variables were: (a) consumers' expectations regarding the adoption by companies in the organic field of responsibilities to a higher degree than what the law requires concerning environment protection, (b) consumers' expectations regarding the adoption by companies in the organic field of responsibilities to a higher degree than what law requires concerning consumers' well-being and protection, (c) gender, (d) time spent in the countryside until adulthood. The research questions for this study were: (1) What is consumers' perception regarding companies' self-assumed obligations (understood as CSR actions) for environment protection?, (2) What is consumers' perception regarding companies' self-assumed obligations (understood as CSR actions) for consumers well-being and protection?, (3) Is there a difference according to gender regarding the two previously mentioned variables? (4) Is there a difference according to time spent in the countryside until adulthood regarding the two previously mentioned variables? (5) Do subjects with high levels of expectation for environment protection CSR actions declare high levels of expectation for consumer protection CSR actions?

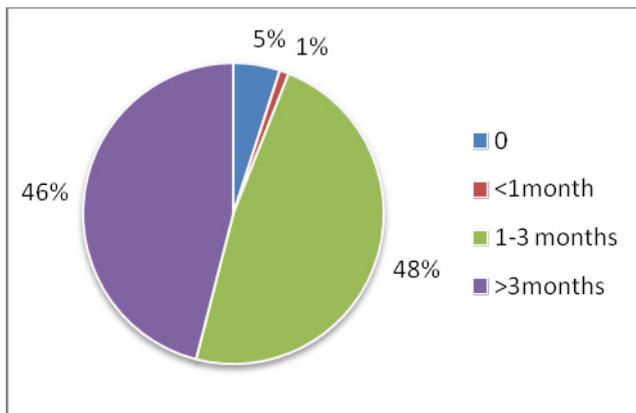
The sample was roughly divided in half by gender (using question/request no. 1: "*Indicate your gender: a) M, b) F*"), as showed in Figure no. 1.



**Fig. 1.** Sample structure by gender (% of consumers of total sample)  
Source: authors' elaboration based on survey data

Family is a factor that has one of the strongest influences on consumer behaviour (Kotler, p. 242). The family of orientation (formed by parents, siblings) gives a person direction regarding religion, politics, economics, values, including those associated with natural environment, social behaviour (including how they consider the others – friends, companies, authorities, etc. – should behave), etc. For instance, a study on sustainable food consumption behaviour revealed that respondents who shared a stronger belief in the sustainability claims of the product, were more guided by social norms (compared to those who did not believe that the product was sustainable – i.e. unconfident consumers) and that they were more likely to follow social norms instigated by friends and family (Vermeir, Verbeke, 2007, p. 7-8). Another study on the role of social influences regarding sustainability in households showed that sustainable behaviour (individual and family recycling, e-consumption behaviours) was more influenced by people that the individual/family knew, such as family, than by outside factors such as government or advertising campaigns (Goldsmith, Goldsmith, 2011, p. 117). Children acquire traits from their families and cultures, so the first part of someone's life (childhood, adolescence) usually has a strong influence on the way of thinking and acting in their adulthood. To spend time in the countryside is usually a decision influenced or imposed by family in the case of children and teenagers. We considered that time spent in the countryside until the age of 20 may be an influencing factor on adult behaviour related to natural environment issues (such as the belief that ecological products are tastier and healthier than conventional ones, the belief that nature is precious and has to be protected, the habit of protecting the nature through actions like keeping the

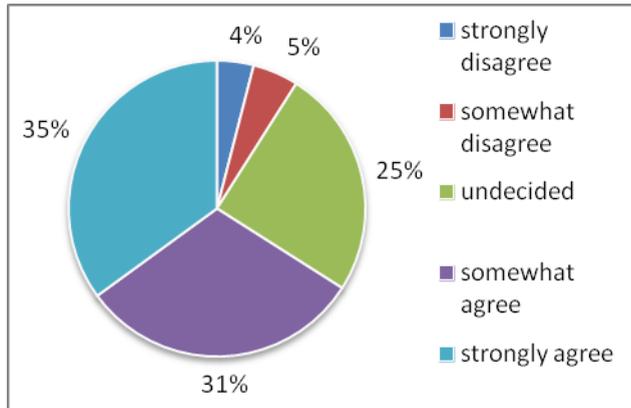
surroundings clean of garbage and so on). We wanted to know how much time consumers spent in the countryside until the age of 20 and how this time influenced their beliefs. We asked question no 2: *“How many months per year did you spent (on average) in the countryside when you were a child, adolescent and very young (before the age of 20 years)?”* (Figure no. 2)



**Fig. 2.** Time spent in the countryside by the age of 20 (%)  
 Source: authors' elaboration based on survey data

Almost half of the subjects (46%) spent a significant amount of time in the countryside until the age of 20, and another 48% spent moderate time there, between 1-3 months, either due to holidays or weekends there or because they lived in the rural area.

In order to determine consumers' expectations related to the adoption by companies in the organic field of CSR actions concerning environment protection, we used request no. 3: *“State your agreement/disagreement with the following statement: Producers of organically certified products must do more than what they are required by law for environmental protection (they must use cleaner technologies, plant trees, clean waters, etc.) (answer options: strongly disagree, somewhat disagree, undecided, somewhat agree, strongly agree)”* (Figure no. 3).



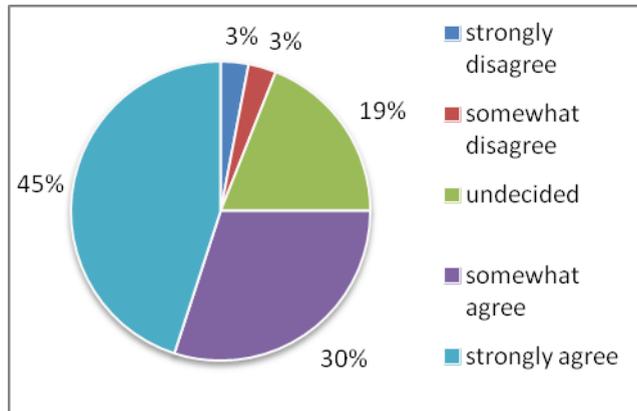
**Fig. 3.** Consumers' expectations regarding the adoption by companies in the organic field of CSR actions concerning environment protection (%)  
 Source: authors' elaboration based on survey data

More than half of the subjects (66%) declared they expected organic producers to assume CSR responsibilities for environment protection. If they showed this belief in the market by rewarding the companies that protected the environment more than others through their buying decisions, the producers would have an incentive to adopt a more sustainable behaviour.

We investigated if men and women differed in terms of their expectations regarding CSR actions for environment protection; we obtained  $p=0.150$ . Therefore, there is no statistically significant difference in the levels of expectations regarding CSR actions for environment protection of men and women.

We investigated if people who expected environment protection CSR actions and those who did not differed in terms of their time spent in the countryside until the age of 20. We obtained  $p=0.003$ , which means there is a statistically significant difference in the time spent in the countryside until the age of 20 of people who expect CSR actions for environment protection and those who do not.

In order to determine consumers' expectations concerning the adoption by companies in the organic field of CSR actions related to consumer protection we used request no. 4: *"State your agreement/disagreement with the following statement: Producers of organically certified products must do more than what they are required by law for consumer protection and welfare (to inform them about the role of organic products for health, to organize tastings of organic products etc.) (answer options: strongly disagree, somewhat disagree, undecided, somewhat agree, strongly agree)"* (Figure no. 4).



**Fig. 4.** Consumers' expectations regarding the adoption by companies in the organic field of CSR actions concerning consumer protection (%)

Source: authors' elaboration based on survey data

Three quarters of the subjects (75%) declared they expected organic producers to assume CSR responsibilities for consumer protection.

We investigated if men and women differed in terms of their expectations for CSR actions for consumer protection and we found no statistically significant difference ( $p=0.076$ ).

We investigated if people who expected CSR actions for consumer protection and those who did not differed in terms of their time spent in the countryside until the age of 20 and we found no difference ( $p=0.247$ ).

The strength and direction of the linear relationship between the two ordinal variables (expectation levels for CSR actions for environment protection and expectation levels for CSR actions for consumer protection) was described through correlation analysis. The research question was: Do subjects with high levels of expectation for environment protection CSR actions declare high levels of expectation for consumer protection CSR actions?

The relationship between levels of expectation for environment protection CSR actions and levels of expectation for consumer protection CSR actions was investigated using Spearman's Rank Order Correlation. There was a strong, positive correlation between the two variables [ $r=0.718$ ,  $p<0.001$ ], with high levels of expectation for environment protection CSR actions associated with high levels of expectation for consumer protection CSR actions.

Providing more information about market characteristics in general, and consumers, in particular, raises success chances of CSR strategy adoption and implementation. Therefore, this study should be continued by complementary

research that would compensate for the limitations of the present one, such as those mentioned further on. The survey targeted organic food consumers, but a comparison with convention food consumers can facilitate a deeper insight into consumer behaviour and how to promote sustainable solutions (like consumption of organic food, preference for environment concerned companies etc.) more efficiently. The respondents were real or self-assumed consumers of organic food, as showed the answers to the filter question asking if they had consumed organic food during the past twelve months. This means that they believe they eat organic products, but it doesn't necessarily mean this food is organic, as they might not know the real meaning of organic or because the food provider might mislead them. The study focused on consumers' declared expectations. There may be a gap between declaration and action, so further research should investigate how the existence or absence of CSR influenced consumers' past and present behaviour.

## Conclusions

In affluent markets, burdened with environmental problems, CSR is more and more important to consumers. They use it to protect themselves (for consequences of environmental damages, for consumer abuse, etc.), to make a statement, to differentiate among the numerous suppliers in the market.

The study presented here aimed to reveal if consumers of organic products (real or self-assumed) expected organic producers to implement CSR actions related to environment and consumer protection.

More than half of the tested consumers expected environment and consumer related CSR actions from organic producers, but the share of consumers expecting consumer protection CSR actions was significantly higher than the share of consumers expecting environment protection CSR actions (75% and 66% respectively).

We found no differences between men and women in terms of their expectations for CSR actions for environment or for consumer protection.

Results showed a statistically significant difference in the time spent in the countryside until the age of 20 of people who expect CSR actions for environment protection and those who do not ( $p < 0.05$ ). There was no statistically significant difference in the time spent in the countryside until the age of 20 of people who expected CSR actions for consumer protection and those who did not ( $p > 0.05$ ).

We observed a strong direct relationship between the levels of expectation for environment protection CSR actions and those for consumer protection CSR actions ( $r = 0.718$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

When consumers consider CRS actions should be assumed by companies, they will use the existence/absence of CRS activities as a criterion to differentiate among various offers on the market. Present day high competition and technical advances make products easy to copy. Globalization, product abundance, aggravation of environmental problems along with consumers' increasing awareness of these issues, broad access to information and high purchasing power allow customers to make informed choices, to raise demands, to use their power in the marketplace. Therefore, other distinctive features of an offer, like exceptional service and CSR actions, can be more successful in creating a competitive advantage (than an intrinsic or technical characteristic of a product). At the same time, CSR contributes positively to nature protection in a world seeking for solutions, as it involves integrating environmental objectives in business operations. Consumers expect companies to do more than the law requires for environment and consumer protection and this is a good market reason for companies to start developing CSR strategies. From these perspectives (responsible, concerned, ethical, rational) CSR is a wise option to boost economic, as well as social and environmental benefits.

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## COMPOSITIONALITY AND SEMANTIC FLEXIBILITY (II)

MIHAI HÎNCU<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT.** The principle of compositionality models the way in which an agent determines the meaning of a complex expression depending on the meanings of its parts. It is often considered that the agents' flexibility in interpreting the linguistic expressions and the pragmatic intrusions in determining their meanings justify leaving the compositionality out. In this article I show that even if pragmatic factors intervene in the process by means of which the meaning of an expression is determined, it is possible to formulate more complex versions of the principle of compositionality which are compatible with the data offered by the pragmatic theories of meaning. This is the second part of a two-part article.

**Key words:** pragmatic processes, conceptual structure, merger representation, saturation, modulation, compositionality, semantics.

In the first part of the present paper, I have shown how the composition operation of meaning of a natural language expression is standardly conceived. Based on cases which cannot be addressed by the standard semantic analyses of a language's compositionality, I have highlighted the semantic flexibility of the way an interlocutor processes the information that a speaker conveys by uttering a sentence. In this regard, I have drawn some distinctions between the different pragmatic operations that intervene in the process by means of which the semantic value of an expression is determined.

In this second part, I will show that it is possible to formulate more complex versions of the principle of compositionality which are compatible with the data offered by the pragmatic theories of meaning. After I present, in the first section, a contextualist answer offered by Pagin and Pelletier to the problem of how compositional semantics can make room for primary pragmatic processes of modulation, I will outline, in the second section, the solution offered by Jaszczolt's default semantics to accommodate the contextual input while preserving the principle of compositionality.

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## Compositionality and modulation

In what follows, I will understand by the grammar of a natural language  $\mathbf{L}$  an algebra  $(\mathbf{E}, \mathbf{A}, \Sigma)$  built up from a set  $\mathbf{A}$  of atomic expressions of  $\mathbf{L}$ , a set  $\Sigma$  of syntactic operations and a set  $\mathbf{E}$  whose elements are expressions resulted from applying elements from the set  $\Sigma$  to elements from the set  $\mathbf{A}$ . Given an  $n$ -tuple of  $\mathbf{L}$ 's expressions, where  $n \geq 1$ , a syntactic operation is a partial function  $\sigma: \mathbf{E}^n \rightarrow \mathbf{E}$  by means of which an expression  $E = \sigma(e_1, \dots, e_n)$  is generated. Since any  $\sigma \in \Sigma$  is a partial function, it results that the structure  $(\mathbf{E}, \mathbf{A}, \Sigma)$  will be a partial algebra [Hodges 2001: 8]. If we have a set  $\mathbf{V}$  of semantic values, we can now define a function  $\mu$  which assigns elements from  $\mathbf{V}$  to well-formed expressions from  $\mathbf{E}$ . The function  $\mu: \mathbf{E} \rightarrow \mathbf{V}$  is also a partial function.

The compositionality principle states that the semantic value of an expression  $E$  is determined by the semantic values of the sub expressions of  $E$  and by their syntactic order. This can be captured by using a function  $f: \mathbf{V}^n \rightarrow \mathbf{V}$  by means of which we can construct, as I have shown in the first part of the present paper, the following formalized version of the principle of compositionality:

$$[\mathbf{C}] \quad \mu(\sigma(e_1, \dots, e_n)) = f_\sigma(\mu(e_1), \dots, \mu(e_n))$$

In the natural languages, it is not uncommon to come across cases in which semantic values of expressions are determined by appealing to the extralinguistic context in which they are uttered. Nevertheless, versions of the principle of compositionality can also be formulated for these cases which often render the formal treatment applied to the language difficult. Thus, if the semantic value of an expression  $E$  is sensitive to the context of utterance  $c$  and is determined by the syntax of  $E$  and by the semantic values that its subexpressions  $e_1, \dots, e_n$  receive in the context  $c$ , a solution is to introduce, at the level of the representation of the composition operation of meaning, the context  $c$  as an argument of the function  $\mu$  [Pagin & Westerstahl 2010a: 259; 2010b: 392]. In this regard, the formal version of the principle of compositionality will have the following format:

$$[\mathbf{C}_1 + \mathbf{c}] \quad \text{For every syntactic operation } \sigma \in \Sigma, \text{ there is a composition operation } f_\sigma \text{ such that, for every context } c, \text{ if } \sigma(e_1, \dots, e_n) \text{ has a semantic value in } c, \text{ then } \mu(\sigma(e_1, \dots, e_n), c) = f_\sigma(\mu(e_1, c), \dots, \mu(e_n, c)).$$

In addition to the cases previously mentioned, in the natural languages there are also cases in which the semantic value of an expression  $E$  is determined by the syntactic constraints which  $e_1, \dots, e_n$  must satisfy in order for the expression  $E$  to constitute a well-formed expression of the language  $\mathbf{L}$ , by the semantic values which  $e_1, \dots, e_n$  receive in  $c$ , but also by the context  $c$  in which  $E$  is uttered. In these

situations, the composition operation of meaning is sensitive to the context in which the expression  $E$  is uttered and, in order to properly represent the way in which the semantic values of the subexpressions  $e_1, \dots, e_n$  determine the semantic value of  $E$ , we have to supplement the arguments of the function  $f$  with an argument for the context [ibidem, 260; ibidem, 393]. A formal version of the principle of compositionality adjusted to treat these latter cases can be formulated as follows:

[C<sub>2</sub> + c] For every syntactic operation  $\sigma \in \Sigma$ , there is a composition operation  $f_\sigma$  such that, for every context  $c$ , if  $\sigma(e_1, \dots, e_n)$  has a semantic value in  $c$ , then  $\mu(\sigma(e_1, \dots, e_n), c) = f_\sigma(\mu(e_1, c), \dots, \mu(e_n, c), c)$ .

These two versions which modify the classical format in which the principle of compositionality is presented share one aspect: given an expression  $E = \sigma(e_1, \dots, e_n)$ , both are formulated by means of an  $n$ -ary function  $f$  whose theoretical role is to represent the operation by which the semantic value of  $E$  is determined based on the syntax and on the semantic values of  $E$ 's subexpressions. There is however no constraint which can prevent us from representing the composition operation of meaning by a function with the arity  $n + 1$ . In other words, we can define the function  $f$  on the set  $\Sigma$  and consider that the value of this function, for an argument  $\sigma \in \Sigma$ , is in its turn a function  $f(\sigma)$  from the set of the semantic values of the subexpressions of an expression  $E$  to the set of the semantic values of  $E$  [Pagin & Pelletier 2007: 46]. I will adopt the latter convention until the end of the paper, treating the syntactic operation  $\sigma$  as an argument of the composition operation.

As we have seen in the first part of the present study, the value of the function  $\mu$  by which is represented the semantic value of a declarative sentence  $s$  of the natural language  $\mathbf{L}$  is a proposition  $p$ , that is, a theoretical construct whose role is to accurately represent the situation described by  $s$  [Hîncu 2013: 219]. The proposition  $p$  is considered to be the standard semantic value of the sentence  $s$ . However, in the interpretation process of a sentence  $s$  which  $\mu$  models, we can isolate an intermediary stage at which the conceptual structure of  $s$  is displayed [Pagin & Pelletier 2007: 46]. In this case, the conceptual structure of the sentence  $s$  constitutes the immediate value of the function  $\mu$ , a value which is different from the standard semantic value that  $\mu$  assigns to  $s$ . As an interpolated element in the process of determining what proposition is expressed by a sentence  $s$ , the conceptual structure of  $s$  serves as support for the standard interpretation of  $s$ . In a more general way, given an expression  $E$ ,  $E$ 's conceptual structure is an  $(n + 1)$ -tuple made up of the semantic values received by  $E$ 's subexpressions  $e_1, \dots, e_n$  in the context in which  $E$  is uttered and of the value of the function  $f$  for an argument  $\sigma \in \Sigma$ . In order to represent the conceptual structure of an expression of  $\mathbf{L}$ , Pagin and Pelletier introduce a function  $\mu'$  which they define as follows [ibidem, 47]:

$$\begin{aligned}
 [C'_1 + c] \quad (1) \quad & \mu'(e, c) = \mu(e, c), \text{ if } e \in \mathbf{A} \\
 (2) \quad & \mu'(\sigma(e_1, \dots, e_n), c) = \langle f(\sigma), \mu'(e_1, c), \dots, \mu'(e_n, c) \rangle
 \end{aligned}$$

To facilitate the understanding, let us take as an example the sentence:

[10] Michael laughs.

We can represent the syntactic structure of the sentence [10] in the following way:

[11] [<sub>S</sub> [<sub>NP</sub> Michael] [<sub>VP</sub> laughs]]

The conceptual structure of the sentence [10] will be built by using a function  $\sigma_1$  which corresponds to the syntactic operation by means of which the sentence [10] is generated from the VP and the NP, as well as the functions  $\mu$ ,  $\mu'$  and  $f$  defined above. If we deliberately omit the contextual argument of function  $\mu'$ , the conceptual structure of sentence [10] can be represented as follows:

$$\begin{aligned}
 [12] \quad & \mu'(\sigma_1(\text{Michael}, \text{laughs})) = \langle f(\sigma_1), \mu'(\text{Michael}), \mu'(\text{laughs}) \rangle \\
 & = \langle f(\sigma_1), \mu(\text{Michael}), \mu(\text{laughs}) \rangle
 \end{aligned}$$

We have seen above that if in the set of  $L$ 's well-formed expressions we have a declarative sentence  $s$  which expresses a proposition  $p$ , the value of the function  $\mu'$  for the argument  $s$ , with respect to a context  $c$ , is a conceptual structure. The standard interpretation of  $s$  is generated on the basis of its conceptual structure. In order to represent this, we need a standard evaluation function  $E_s$  which determines, on the basis of the conceptual structure of sentence  $s$ , the semantic value of  $s$ , that is, the proposition  $p$ . In other words, the value of the function  $\mu'$  for an argument  $s$  and for a context  $c$  constitutes the argument of the evaluation function  $E_s$  by which a standard interpretation is assigned to  $s$ . The function  $E_s$  which determines the composition of the standard evaluations of the subexpressions  $e_1, \dots, e_n$  of an expression  $E$  relative to a context  $c$ , is defined by Pagin and Pelletier as follows [ibidem, 48]:

$$\begin{aligned}
 [E_s] \quad (1) \quad & E_s(\mu'(e)) = \mu'(e), \text{ if } e \in \mathbf{A} \\
 (2) \quad & E_s(\langle f(\sigma), \mu'(e_1, c), \dots, \mu'(e_n, c) \rangle) \\
 & = f(\sigma)(E_s(\mu'(e_1, c)), \dots, E_s(\mu'(e_n, c)))
 \end{aligned}$$

Primary pragmatic processes frequently interfere in the process by means of which the semantic value of an expression is determined. This has led many theorists to consider that modulation, one of the processes described in the first part of the present study, represents a counterexample to the principle of compositionality [Hîncu 2013: 222-227]. However, is there a way to render the principle of compositionality compatible with the data offered by the pragmatic theories of language? In what follows, I will show that the answer to this question is affirmative.

In order to show that the intrusion of pragmatic operations in determining the semantic value of an expression does not violate the principle of compositionality, Pagin and Pelletier outline two possible routes which I will abbreviate to “PP<sub>1</sub>” and “PP<sub>2</sub>” in the derivations I will offer below. I will also use the abbreviation “FA” for the functional applications involved in the derivations presented below.

A first option would be to locate the effect of the primary pragmatic process of modulation in the interval between the conceptual structure offered by the function  $\mu'$  and the standard interpretation offered by the evaluation function  $E_s$  [Pagin & Pelletier 2007: 49]. Considering that  $E_s$  is, as so far, the standard evaluation function and that  $E_m$  is a new evaluation function which captures the modulation of the information in the context in which an expression is uttered, the modulation process can be represented as an operation whose *operandum* is the function  $E_s$  and which gives the function  $E_m$ . Thus, the conceptual structure of an expression  $E$  determined by the function  $\mu'$  becomes an argument of the function  $E_m$  which generates a modulated interpretation of  $E$  (i.e., a semantic value in the determination of which the context plays a decisive part) which is different from the standard interpretation which would result from applying the evaluation function  $E_s$ .

In what follows, I will illustrate this strategy with an example of a sentence inspired by a paper by Nunberg [Nunberg 1979: 149]. Let us consider the following scenario. One day Irene has lunch in the restaurant where  $a$  is a waiter. Unlike  $a$  who does not know Irene,  $b$ ,  $a$ 's colleague, who manages the bar of the restaurant, is an old friend of Irene's. Let us assume next that it is common knowledge that, on the day this scenario describes, Irene is the only customer who ordered a cheese omelet. In the context where Irene conveys to  $a$  the information that she wants a coffee,  $a$  lets  $b$  know by uttering the following sentence:

[13] The omelet wants a coffee.

In order to highlight the fact that the first determiner-phrase occurring in the sentence [13] receives a modulated semantic value in the context in which [13] is uttered, I will treat this phrase as a syntactic unit *per se*, even though its syntactic structure involves a noun-phrase and a head which dominates it. Therefore, I will not introduce a new function  $\sigma$  which corresponds to the syntactic operation by means of which the first determiner-phrase of [13] is formed and I will adopt this convention with respect to all the formulas presented below in which the phrase occurs. By using the variable  $c$  which represents the context, the functions  $\sigma_1$ ,  $\sigma_2$  and  $\sigma_3$  which correspond to the syntactic operations by which sentence [13] is generated and also the functions  $\mu$ ,  $\mu'$  and  $f$  defined above, I will build the conceptual structure of sentence [13] as follows:

$$\begin{aligned}
[14] \quad & \mu'(\sigma_3(\text{the omelet}, \sigma_2(\text{wants}, \sigma_1(\text{a, coffee}))), c) \\
& = \langle f(\sigma_3), \mu'(\text{the omelet}, c), \langle f(\sigma_2), \mu'(\text{wants}, c), \\
& \quad \langle f(\sigma_1), \mu'(\text{a, c}), \mu'(\text{coffee}, c) \rangle \rangle \rangle
\end{aligned}$$

By using a function  $O$  which assigns to the specialties of a menu the persons who order them, I will represent the modulated evaluation induced by the context in which the sentence [13] is uttered in the following way:

$$\begin{aligned}
[15] \quad & E_m(\langle f(\sigma_3), \mu'(\text{the omelet}, c), \langle f(\sigma_2), \mu'(\text{wants}, c), \\
& \quad \langle f(\sigma_1), \mu'(\text{a, c}), \mu'(\text{coffee}, c) \rangle \rangle \rangle, c) \\
& = f(\sigma_3)(O(E_m(\mu'(\text{the omelet}, c))), f(\sigma_2)(E_m(\mu'(\text{wants}, c))), \\
& \quad f(\sigma_1)(E_m(\mu'(\text{a, c}), E_m(\mu'(\text{coffee}, c))))) \quad [\text{PP}_1] \\
& = f(\sigma_3)(O(E_m(\mu'(\text{the omelet}, c))), f(\sigma_2)(E_m(\mu'(\text{wants}, c))), \\
& \quad f(\sigma_1)(\mu'(\text{a, c}), \mu'(\text{coffee}, c)))) \quad [\text{FA}] \\
& = f(\sigma_3)(O(E_m(\mu'(\text{the omelet}, c))), f(\sigma_2)(\mu'(\text{wants}, c), \\
& \quad f(\sigma_1)(\mu'(\text{a, c}), \mu'(\text{coffee}, c)))) \quad [\text{FA}] \\
& = f(\sigma_3)(\mu'(\text{Irene}, c), f(\sigma_2)(\mu'(\text{wants}, c), \\
& \quad f(\sigma_1)(\mu'(\text{a, c}), \mu'(\text{coffee}, c)))) \quad [\text{FA}] \\
& = f(\sigma_3)(\mu'(\text{Irene}, c), f(\sigma_2)(\mu'(\text{wants}, c), \\
& \quad f(\sigma_1)(\mu(\text{a, c}), \mu(\text{coffee}, c)))) \quad [\text{c}'_1 + \text{c}(1)] \\
& = f(\sigma_3)(\mu'(\text{Irene}, c), f(\sigma_2)(\mu(\text{wants}, c), \\
& \quad f(\sigma_1)(\mu(\text{a, c}), \mu(\text{coffee}, c)))) \quad [\text{c}'_1 + \text{c}(1)] \\
& = f(\sigma_3)(\mu(\text{Irene}, c), f(\sigma_2)(\mu(\text{wants}, c), \\
& \quad f(\sigma_1)(\mu(\text{a, c}), \mu(\text{coffee}, c)))) \quad [\text{c}'_1 + \text{c}(1)]
\end{aligned}$$

Another way of showing that the principle of compositionality is compatible with the existence of pragmatic processes of modulation which interfere in determining the interpretation of an expression  $E$  of the language  $\mathbf{L}$ , implies representing the modulation operation by a function which, when applied to the value of the function  $\mu'$ , has a modulated conceptual structure as a value [Pagin & Pelletier 2007: 49]. As an argument of the function  $E_s$ , the modulated conceptual structure of the expression  $E$  constitutes the support of the evaluation which determines the standard interpretation of  $E$ . In order to materialize this idea, Pagin and Pelletier supplement the number of clauses by which the evaluation function  $E_s$  is defined. Given an arbitrary function  $h$  provided by the context in which an expression  $E$  is uttered, the new condition added to the definition of the standard evaluation  $E_s$  has the following form [ibidem]:

$$[E_s] \quad (3) \quad E_s(h(\mu'(e))) = h(E_s(\mu'(e)))$$

In what follows, I will illustrate this strategy based on the example [13] mentioned above. This time I will represent the modulated evaluation induced by the context in which the sentence [13] is uttered in the order in which [13] is syntactically generated by means of the operations  $\sigma_1$ ,  $\sigma_2$  and  $\sigma_3$ . The derivations offered below show that the above contextualist strategy, designed by Pagin and Pelletier to provide an answer to the problem of how compositional semantics can make room for the pragmatic inferences based on contextual input, is apt enough for this task. With regard to sentence [13], the modulated evaluation will be now represented as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} [16] \quad & E_m(\langle f(\sigma_1), \mu'(a, c), \mu'(\text{coffee}, c) \rangle, c) \\ & = E_s(\langle f(\sigma_1), \mu'(a, c), \mu'(\text{coffee}, c) \rangle) \quad [PP_2] \\ & = f(\sigma_1)(E_s(\mu'(a, c)), E_s(\mu'(\text{coffee}, c))) \quad [E_s(2)] \\ & = f(\sigma_1)(\mu'(a, c), \mu'(\text{coffee}, c)) \quad [E_s(1)] \\ & = f(\sigma_1)(\mu(a, c), \mu(\text{coffee}, c)) \quad [c'_1 + c(1)] \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} [17] \quad & E_m(\langle f(\sigma_2), \mu'(\text{wants}, c), \langle f(\sigma_1), \mu'(a, c), \mu'(\text{coffee}, c) \rangle \rangle, c) \\ & = E_s(\langle f(\sigma_2), \mu'(\text{wants}, c), \langle f(\sigma_1), \mu'(a, c), \mu'(\text{coffee}, c) \rangle \rangle) \quad [PP_2] \\ & = f(\sigma_2)(E_s(\mu'(\text{wants}, c)), E_s(\langle f(\sigma_1), \mu'(a, c), \mu'(\text{coffee}, c) \rangle)) \quad [E_s(2)] \\ & = f(\sigma_2)(E_s(\mu'(\text{wants}, c)), f(\sigma_1)(E_s(\mu'(a, c)), E_s(\mu'(\text{coffee}, c)))) \quad [E_s(2)] \\ & = f(\sigma_2)(E_s(\mu'(\text{wants}, c)), f(\sigma_1)(\mu'(a, c), \mu'(\text{coffee}, c))) \quad [E_s(1)] \\ & = f(\sigma_2)(\mu'(\text{wants}, c), f(\sigma_1)(\mu'(a, c), \mu'(\text{coffee}, c))) \quad [E_s(1)] \\ & = f(\sigma_2)(\mu'(\text{wants}, c), f(\sigma_1)(\mu(a, c), \mu(\text{coffee}, c))) \quad [c'_1 + c(1)] \\ & = f(\sigma_2)(\mu(\text{wants}, c), f(\sigma_1)(\mu(a, c), \mu(\text{coffee}, c))) \quad [c'_1 + c(1)] \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} [18] \quad & E_m(\langle f(\sigma_3), \mu'(\text{the omelet}, c), \langle f(\sigma_2), \mu'(\text{wants}, c), \\ & \quad \langle f(\sigma_1), \mu'(a, c), \mu'(\text{coffee}, c) \rangle \rangle \rangle, c) \\ & = E_s(\langle f(\sigma_3), O(\mu'(\text{the omelet}, c)), \langle f(\sigma_2), \mu'(\text{wants}, c), \\ & \quad \langle f(\sigma_1), \mu'(a, c), \mu'(\text{coffee}, c) \rangle \rangle \rangle) \quad [PP_2] \\ & = f(\sigma_3)(E_s(O(\mu'(\text{the omelet}, c))), E_s(\langle f(\sigma_2), \mu'(\text{wants}, c), \\ & \quad \langle f(\sigma_1), \mu'(a, c), \mu'(\text{coffee}, c) \rangle \rangle)) \quad [E_s(2)] \\ & = f(\sigma_3)(E_s(O(\mu'(\text{the omelet}, c))), f(\sigma_2)(E_s(\mu'(\text{wants}, c)), \\ & \quad E_s(\langle f(\sigma_1), \mu'(a, c), \mu'(\text{coffee}, c) \rangle))) \quad [E_s(2)] \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned}
 &= f(\sigma_3)(E_s(O(\mu'(\text{the omelet}, c))), f(\sigma_2)(E_s(\mu'(\text{wants}, c)), \\
 &\quad f(\sigma_1)(E_s(\mu'(\text{a}, c)), E_s(\mu'(\text{coffee}, c)))) \quad [E_s(2)] \\
 &= f(\sigma_3)(E_s(O(\mu'(\text{the omelet}, c))), f(\sigma_2)(E_s(\mu'(\text{wants}, c)), \\
 &\quad f(\sigma_1)(\mu'(\text{a}, c), \mu'(\text{coffee}, c)))) \quad [E_s(1)] \\
 &= f(\sigma_3)(E_s(O(\mu'(\text{the omelet}, c))), f(\sigma_2)(\mu'(\text{wants}, c), \\
 &\quad f(\sigma_1)(\mu'(\text{a}, c), \mu'(\text{coffee}, c)))) \quad [E_s(1)] \\
 &= f(\sigma_3)(O(E_s(\mu'(\text{the omelet}, c))), f(\sigma_2)(\mu'(\text{wants}, c), \\
 &\quad f(\sigma_1)(\mu'(\text{a}, c), \mu'(\text{coffee}, c)))) \quad [E_s(3)] \\
 &= f(\sigma_3)(O(\mu'(\text{the omelet}, c)), f(\sigma_2)(\mu'(\text{wants}, c), \\
 &\quad f(\sigma_1)(\mu'(\text{a}, c), \mu'(\text{coffee}, c)))) \quad [E_s(1)] \\
 &= f(\sigma_3)(\mu'(\text{Irene}, c), f(\sigma_2)(\mu'(\text{wants}, c), \\
 &\quad f(\sigma_1)(\mu'(\text{a}, c), \mu'(\text{coffee}, c)))) \quad [\text{FA}] \\
 &= f(\sigma_3)(\mu'(\text{Irene}, c), f(\sigma_2)(\mu'(\text{wants}, c), \\
 &\quad f(\sigma_1)(\mu(\text{a}, c), \mu(\text{coffee}, c)))) \quad [\text{C}'_1 + \text{c}(1)] \\
 &= f(\sigma_3)(\mu'(\text{Irene}, c), f(\sigma_2)(\mu(\text{wants}, c), \\
 &\quad f(\sigma_1)(\mu(\text{a}, c), \mu(\text{coffee}, c)))) \quad [\text{C}'_1 + \text{c}(1)] \\
 &= f(\sigma_3)(\mu(\text{Irene}, c), f(\sigma_2)(\mu(\text{wants}, c), \\
 &\quad f(\sigma_1)(\mu(\text{a}, c), \mu(\text{coffee}, c)))) \quad [\text{C}'_1 + \text{c}(1)]
 \end{aligned}$$

At a more general level, it can be considered that even though the semantic value of an expression  $E$  of  $\mathbf{L}$  is the one a standard evaluation function  $E_s$  assigns to it, the conceptual structure of  $E$  is modulated. Since, in the latter case, the modulation operation has no effect on  $E$ 's interpretation, as this is its standard semantic value, the modulation operation is null. This can be expressed by using a set of functions  $h$  provided by the context and by considering that the elements of a subset of this set are functions that have fixed points. Using the fixed-points functions in order to express the idea of null modulation, I will formulate, based on the relations described above, the following variants of defining the modulated evaluation:

$$\begin{aligned}
 [E_{mh}] \quad &E_m(< f(\sigma), \mu'(e_1, c), \dots, \mu'(e_n, c) >, c) \\
 &= E_s(< f(\sigma), E_m(\mu'(e_1, c), c), \dots, E_m(\mu'(e_n, c), c) >) \\
 &= E_s(< f(\sigma), h_1(\mu'(e_1, c)), \dots, h_n(\mu'(e_n, c)) >) \\
 &= f(\sigma)(E_s(h_1(\mu'(e_1, c))), \dots, E_s(h_n(\mu'(e_n, c)))) \\
 &= f(\sigma)(h_1(E_s(\mu'(e_1, c))), \dots, h_n(E_s(\mu'(e_n, c))))
 \end{aligned}$$

Considering that  $c$  is an extralinguistic context in which a complex expression  $E$ , whose components are  $e_1, \dots, e_n$ , is uttered, the primary pragmatic processes of modulation can interfere in two ways in determining the semantic value of  $E$  in  $c$ . Thus, if the modulation's *operandum* is an element  $\mu'(e_i, c)$  from  $E$ 's conceptual structure, element which corresponds to a subexpression  $e_i$  of the expression  $E$ , where  $1 \leq i \leq n$ , we can speak about a pragmatic operation of *local* modulation. In this case, the standard evaluation function  $E_s$  assigns an interpretation to  $e_i$  based on the modulated element, while the interpretations  $E_s$  assigns to the other subexpressions of the expression  $E$  are determined by the non-modulated elements  $\mu'(e_1, c), \dots, \mu'(e_{i-1}, c), \mu'(e_{i+1}, c), \dots, \mu'(e_n, c)$  from  $E$ 's conceptual structure. All the examples above illustrate this case. However, when in a context  $c$ , in which the expression  $E$  is uttered,  $E$ 's conceptual structure is modulated, the modulation process operates globally. For the latter case, Pagin and Pelletier proposed the following definition [ibidem]:

$$\begin{aligned}
 [E_m] \quad (1) \quad E_m(\mu'(e)) &= \mathcal{M}(E_s(\mu'(e))), \text{ if } e \in \mathbf{A} \\
 (2) \quad E_m(\langle f(\sigma), \mu'(e_1, c), \dots, \mu'(e_n, c) \rangle, c) \\
 &= \mathcal{M}(E_s(\langle f(\sigma), E_m(\mu'(e_1, c), c), \dots, E_m(\mu'(e_n, c), c) \rangle))
 \end{aligned}$$

Adopting this suggestion, I will further provide, based on example [13] above, the first steps of a representation of the way in which the modulated conceptual structure of an expression constitutes the support of the evaluation which determines its standard interpretation. Thus, for sentence [13], whose first determiner-phrase has a modulated semantic value in the context of the utterance, the representation will have the following format:

$$\begin{aligned}
 [19] \quad E_m(\langle f(\sigma_3), \mu'(\text{the omelet}, c), \langle f(\sigma_2), \mu'(\text{wants}, c), \\
 \langle f(\sigma_1), \mu'(\text{a}, c), \mu'(\text{coffee}, c) \rangle \rangle \rangle, c) \\
 = \mathcal{M}(E_s(\langle f(\sigma_3), E_m(\mu'(\text{the omelet}, c), c), E_m(\langle f(\sigma_2), \mu'(\text{wants}, c), \\
 \langle f(\sigma_1), \mu'(\text{a}, c), \mu'(\text{coffee}, c) \rangle \rangle, c) \rangle)) \quad [E_m(2)] \\
 = \mathcal{M}(E_s(\langle f(\sigma_3), E_m(\mu'(\text{the omelet}, c), c), \mathcal{M}(E_s(\langle f(\sigma_2), E_m(\mu'(\text{wants}, c), c), \\
 E_m(\langle f(\sigma_1), \mu'(\text{a}, c), \mu'(\text{coffee}, c) \rangle, c) \rangle)) \rangle)) \quad [E_m(2)] \\
 = \mathcal{M}(E_s(\langle f(\sigma_3), E_m(\mu'(\text{the omelet}, c), c), \mathcal{M}(E_s(\langle f(\sigma_2), E_m(\mu'(\text{wants}, c), c), \\
 \mathcal{M}(E_s(\langle f(\sigma_1), E_m(\mu'(\text{a}, c), c), E_m(\mu'(\text{coffee}, c), c) \rangle) \rangle) \rangle)) \rangle)) \quad [E_m(2)]
 \end{aligned}$$

A different and, this time, complete way of showing how the modulation process globally operates on the conceptual structure of the sentence [13] above will be illustrated as follows:

$$\begin{aligned}
 [20] \quad & E_m(\langle f(\sigma_3), \mu'(\text{the omelet}, c), \langle f(\sigma_2), \mu'(\text{wants}, c), \\
 & \quad \langle f(\sigma_1), \mu'(\text{a}, c), \mu'(\text{coffee}, c) \rangle \rangle \rangle, c) \\
 = & \mathcal{M}(E_s(\langle f(\sigma_3), E_m(\mu'(\text{the omelet}, c), c), E_m(\langle f(\sigma_2), \mu'(\text{wants}, c), \\
 & \quad \langle f(\sigma_1), \mu'(\text{a}, c), \mu'(\text{coffee}, c) \rangle \rangle, c) \rangle)) \quad [E_m(2)] \\
 = & \mathcal{M}(E_s(\langle f(\sigma_3), E_m(\mu'(\text{the omelet}, c), c), E_s(\langle f(\sigma_2), \mu'(\text{wants}, c), \\
 & \quad \langle f(\sigma_1), \mu'(\text{a}, c), \mu'(\text{coffee}, c) \rangle \rangle) \rangle)) \quad [PP_2] \\
 = & \mathcal{M}(E_s(\langle f(\sigma_3), E_m(\mu'(\text{the omelet}, c), c), f(\sigma_2)(E_s(\mu'(\text{wants}, c)), \\
 & \quad E_s(\langle f(\sigma_1), \mu'(\text{a}, c), \mu'(\text{coffee}, c) \rangle) \rangle) \rangle)) \quad [E_s(2)] \\
 = & \mathcal{M}(E_s(\langle f(\sigma_3), E_m(\mu'(\text{the omelet}, c), c), f(\sigma_2)(E_s(\mu'(\text{wants}, c)), \\
 & \quad f(\sigma_1)(E_s(\mu'(\text{a}, c)), E_s(\mu'(\text{coffee}, c)))) \rangle) \rangle)) \quad [E_s(2)] \\
 = & \mathcal{M}(E_s(\langle f(\sigma_3), E_m(\mu'(\text{the omelet}, c), c), f(\sigma_2)(E_s(\mu'(\text{wants}, c)), \\
 & \quad f(\sigma_1)(\mu'(\text{a}, c), \mu'(\text{coffee}, c))) \rangle) \rangle)) \quad [E_s(1)] \\
 = & \mathcal{M}(E_s(\langle f(\sigma_3), E_m(\mu'(\text{the omelet}, c), c), f(\sigma_2)(\mu'(\text{wants}, c), \\
 & \quad f(\sigma_1)(\mu'(\text{a}, c), \mu'(\text{coffee}, c))) \rangle) \rangle)) \quad [E_s(1)] \\
 = & \mathcal{M}(E_s(\langle f(\sigma_3), E_s(O(\mu'(\text{the omelet}, c))), f(\sigma_2)(\mu'(\text{wants}, c), \\
 & \quad f(\sigma_1)(\mu'(\text{a}, c), \mu'(\text{coffee}, c))) \rangle) \rangle)) \quad [PP_2] \\
 = & \mathcal{M}(E_s(\langle f(\sigma_3), O(E_s(\mu'(\text{the omelet}, c))), f(\sigma_2)(\mu'(\text{wants}, c), \\
 & \quad f(\sigma_1)(\mu'(\text{a}, c), \mu'(\text{coffee}, c))) \rangle) \rangle)) \quad [E_s(3)] \\
 = & \mathcal{M}(E_s(\langle f(\sigma_3), O(\mu'(\text{the omelet}, c)), f(\sigma_2)(\mu'(\text{wants}, c), \\
 & \quad f(\sigma_1)(\mu'(\text{a}, c), \mu'(\text{coffee}, c))) \rangle) \rangle)) \quad [E_s(1)] \\
 = & \mathcal{M}(E_s(\langle f(\sigma_3), \mu'(\text{Irene}, c), f(\sigma_2)(\mu'(\text{wants}, c), \\
 & \quad f(\sigma_1)(\mu'(\text{a}, c), \mu'(\text{coffee}, c))) \rangle) \rangle)) \quad [FA] \\
 = & \mathcal{M}(f(\sigma_3)(E_s(\mu'(\text{Irene}, c)), E_s(f(\sigma_2)(\mu'(\text{wants}, c), \\
 & \quad f(\sigma_1)(\mu'(\text{a}, c), \mu'(\text{coffee}, c)))))) \quad [E_s(2)] \\
 = & \mathcal{M}(f(\sigma_3)(E_s(\mu'(\text{Irene}, c)), f(\sigma_2)(E_s(\mu'(\text{wants}, c)), \\
 & \quad E_s(f(\sigma_1)(\mu'(\text{a}, c), \mu'(\text{coffee}, c)))))) \quad [E_s(2)] \\
 = & \mathcal{M}(f(\sigma_3)(E_s(\mu'(\text{Irene}, c)), f(\sigma_2)(E_s(\mu'(\text{wants}, c)), \\
 & \quad f(\sigma_1)(E_s(\mu'(\text{a}, c)), E_s(\mu'(\text{coffee}, c)))))) \quad [E_s(2)] \\
 = & \mathcal{M}(f(\sigma_3)(E_s(\mu'(\text{Irene}, c)), f(\sigma_2)(E_s(\mu'(\text{wants}, c)), \\
 & \quad f(\sigma_1)(\mu'(\text{a}, c), \mu'(\text{coffee}, c)))))) \quad [E_s(1)]
 \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned}
&= \mathcal{M}(f(\sigma_3)(E_s(\mu'(\text{Irene}, c)), f(\sigma_2)(\mu'(\text{wants}, c), \\
&\quad f(\sigma_1)(\mu'(\text{a}, c), \mu'(\text{coffee}, c)))))) \quad [E_s(1)] \\
&= \mathcal{M}(f(\sigma_3)(\mu'(\text{Irene}, c), f(\sigma_2)(\mu'(\text{wants}, c), \\
&\quad f(\sigma_1)(\mu'(\text{a}, c), \mu'(\text{coffee}, c)))))) \quad [E_s(1)] \\
&= \mathcal{M}(f(\sigma_3)(\mu'(\text{Irene}, c), f(\sigma_2)(\mu(\text{wants}, c), \\
&\quad f(\sigma_1)(\mu(\text{a}, c), \mu(\text{coffee}, c)))))) \quad [c'_1 + c(1)] \\
&= \mathcal{M}(f(\sigma_3)(\mu(\text{Irene}, c), f(\sigma_2)(\mu(\text{wants}, c), \\
&\quad f(\sigma_1)(\mu(\text{a}, c), \mu(\text{coffee}, c)))))) \quad [c'_1 + c(1)] \\
&= \mathcal{M}(f(\sigma_3)(\mu(\text{Irene}, c), f(\sigma_2)(\mu(\text{wants}, c), \\
&\quad f(\sigma_1)(\mu(\text{a}, c), \mu(\text{coffee}, c)))))) \quad [c'_1 + c(1)] \\
&= f(\sigma_3)(\mu(\text{Irene}, c), f(\sigma_2)(\mu(\text{wants}, c), f(\sigma_1)(\mu(\text{a}, c), \mu(\text{coffee}, c))))
\end{aligned}$$

In conclusion, we can say now that the existence of cases in which primary pragmatic operations interfere in the process by means of which the expressions receive their semantic values, does not justify the rejection of the principle of compositionality. It is obvious that the classical version of the principle of compositionality is not sufficiently robust to treat cases of this type. However, as we have seen, more complex versions of the principle of compositionality can be formulated to handle these cases. Thus, the supplementation of the arguments of the functions  $\mu$  and  $f$ , functions by means of which the semantic values of the expressions, and respectively, the composition operations of meaning, are represented, with an argument which captures the contextual contributions, constitutes the contextualist answer to the problem of how a semantic theory which preserves the principle of compositionality can accommodate the contextual inputs, thus making room for modulation operations. A second solution will be presented in the next section.

### Compositionality and merger representations

The unit of analysis of the standard semantic theories is the *sentence*, understood as an object made up only of linguistic material and not the act of communication performed by means of an *utterance* in which the linguistic and non-linguistic material used by the speaker to convey a piece of information is combined [Jaszczolt 2005: 9]. Since the focus of the semantic analyses is on the sentences, it is usually considered that only a sentence  $s$  of a natural language  $L$  has truth-conditions and that, regarding the utterance  $u$  made by a speaker who uses the sentence  $s$  in a context, it makes no sense to speak about the truth-conditions of an utterance. For any sentence  $s$  of a natural language  $L$ ,  $s$ 's logical

form is constructed by an agent  $a$  based on the information  $a$  extracts from the surface syntactic structure of  $s$ . Thus, the logical form of  $s$  is the output of  $a$ 's syntactic processing. In standard semantic theories, the logical form plays a central role. In the process of interpreting an utterance  $u$ , the logical form of the sentence  $s$  constitutes an autonomous level at which operates the principle of compositionality of the semantic value of sentence  $s$ , a level which is insulated from the semantic value of the utterance  $u$  [ibidem, 10]. What is not located at the level of the logical form of a sentence  $s$ , that is, what goes beyond  $s$ 's truth-conditions, is usually thought of as being a pragmatic appendix, a part of a theory of meaning, but a minor one.

In the logical space of semantic theories, minimalism is the theory according to which the main object of study is the minimal semantic content expressed by a sentence [Jaszczolt 2009: 2]. In the first part of the present study, we have seen how the semantic locality constraint and the semantic closure constraint determine the minimal semantic content of an expression [Hîncu 2013: 218]. According to the semantic locality constraint, the semantic value of a complex expression is determined only by the information derived from the parts of the expression [Dever 2006: 634]. According to the semantic closure constraint, the semantic value of a complex expression is determined only by the semantic information [ibidem]. Satisfying these constraints is what guarantees the compositionality of the semantic value of an expression of the natural language. From a methodological point of view, the two constraints constitute a map of the semantic territory in which there is no place for the contextual input: the semantic content of a sentence is a minimal proposition, that is, a semantic value determined only on the basis of lexical information and of syntactic structure. Thus, it can now be seen that the minimalist strategy is to focus on the logical form of a sentence recovered from the sentence's surface syntax, to assign to this theoretical construct a semantic value (i.e., a minimal proposition), and consequently, to ascribe truth-conditions to the minimal proposition the sentence expresses.

One of the theoretical virtues of the contextualist semantic strategy presented in the previous section, compared to minimalism, is that it can offer an enriched semantic content by adding a contextual input to the output of the grammatical processing. As we have seen, the contextualist theory accommodates the pragmatic inference by placing a variable for the context in the formal representation of the composition operation of meaning. Proceeding this way, a contextualist semantic theory could make room for primary pragmatic processes of modulation. This time, the strategy was to disregard the sentence's original logical form derived from its surface syntax. Instead, the focus was on the developed logical form of the uttered sentence or, more precisely, on the modulated conceptual structure associated with the sentence uttered in a specific context, structure about which the truth-conditions are predicated [Jaszczolt 2010: 2900].

One of the problems of the contextualist semantic strategy is that it fails to do justice to all cases of communication. Very often, in a situation of linguistic interaction, the extended logical form of a sentence uttered by a speaker in a context does not correspond to the main proposition the speaker intends to communicate [Jaszczolt 2009: 12].

Another problem of the contextualist strategy presented above concerns the situations in which the context is semantically inert. As Kasia Jaszczolt would put it, even though

... [the] context is always present in the situation of discourse interpretation, ... it is not always employed. [Jaszczolt 2006: 21]

In cases like these, the decision to formally represent the operation of composing the meaning by means of variables whose theoretical role is to capture the contextual inputs is not of any help.

The main problem of the contextualist account concerns its reliance on the centrality of a sentence's syntax in providing an adequate representation of the semantic content of its corresponding utterance [Jaszczolt 2009: 11]. Generally, in order to obtain the extended version of the logical form of a sentence, or the modulated conceptual structure associated with it, we first have to take into consideration the underlying syntactic structure of the sentence from which the simple version of the logical form of the uttered sentence, or the unmodulated conceptual structure associated with it, is derived. From this point of view, it can now be seen that both the minimalist and contextualist semantic theories share the same dogma: the syntactic structure of a sentence constitutes the main indispensable guide to its semantics. On the minimalist account, the surface syntax of a sentence provides the sentence's logical form to which a semantic value is assigned. In contrast, on the contextualist account, as we have seen in the previous section, the simple logical form provided by the surface syntax of a sentence is replaced by an extended and modulated version to which a semantic value is assigned. Both ways of thinking the interface between the semantic domain and the pragmatic domain often neglect the fact that the logical form of a sentence is *only* a theoretical construct exploited by the theorist. In this respect, Kasia Jaszczolt writes:

... [the] logical form is at best a theoretical construct devised for explanatory purposes rather than a viable stage in processing meaning. [Jaszczolt 2005: 21]

The take-home lesson is that, on both accounts, the compositionality is not freed from its syntactical ties. The remedy is to drop, when we are approaching semantics, the syntactic bias which dominates the way we think of the composition operation of the overall semantic value. This is what the default semantics does.

In default semantics, the information that helps the interlocutor to interpret a sentence uttered by the speaker in a particular context comes from different sources. Beyond the linguistic information offered by the lexicon and the surface syntax of sentences, we also have, in this framework, information provided by the world knowledge, the situation of discourse, the design of human inferential system, and the stereotypes and presumptions about society and culture [Jaszczolt 2009: 7].

The sources of information which interact during the interlocutor's interpretation of the speaker's utterance and which contribute to the interlocutor's construction of the semantic content of the utterance, have been successfully tested on various linguistic constructions (e.g., propositional attitude reports, definite descriptions) and on various natural languages (e.g., Thai, Korean, English) [Jaszczolt 2010: 2900]. The sources of information are mapped onto a range of processes whose interaction in the circumstances in which the uttered sentence is interpreted generates the semantic content of the utterance. The range of processes responsible for the primary meaning of the utterance includes cognitive defaults, social and cultural defaults, world-knowledge defaults and conscious pragmatic inference [Jaszczolt 2009: 8-9].

In the framework of default semantics, the *primary meaning* of the utterance is a theoretical construct corresponding to *what is said* by the uttered sentence, an equivalent of the real information conveyed by the utterance [Jaszczolt 2010: 2900]. This information the interlocutor interpreting an utterance often obtains independently of the information encoded by the words of the uttered sentence and of the syntactic structure of the sentence, constitutes the *merged proposition* expressed by the utterance. The merged proposition generated by the interaction of various processes during the interpretation of the utterance, is formally represented in default semantics with the help of a theoretical construct called, in this semantic framework, a *merger representation* of the utterance [ibidem]. In this regard, Kasia Jaszczolt writes:

Merger representations are theoretical constructs that 'generalize' over the strategies used by a hearer in interpreting the speaker's act of communication... They are not representations of sentences. They are representations of acts of communication that are performed by means of linguistic utterances. [Jaszczolt 2005: 74]

As structures representing the semantic contents of utterances, the merger representations are held to be compositional. Leaving the formal details aside for reasons of space, the composition operation of the semantic content expressed by an utterance is represented in the theoretical framework of default semantics through the various sources of information contributing to the merger representation of the

utterance and through the processes whose interaction, during the interpretation of the utterance, generates its primary meaning [Jaszczolt 2009: 7]. Thus, a principle of compositionality for the representation at the level of which interacts and merges the information about the utterance's meaning which is provided by the linguistic and non-linguistic sources, can be formulated as follows [Jaszczolt 2005: 72]:

[DS] The meaning of an utterance is a function of the meaning of the words, the sentence structure, the defaults and the conscious pragmatic inference.

Since this time we no longer speak of compositionality at the level of the logical form, but only at the level of the merger representations, it follows that the principle of compositionality is no longer understood in a restrictive sense. Having truth-conditions and being compositional, the merger representations allow us to capture the semantic contents of the utterances. In other words, they offer us a representation of the information which the speaker intends to convey by an utterance  $u$  of a sentence  $s$ , representation which includes the information about the constituents of  $u$ 's semantic content, which are unarticulated in the surface syntax of sentence  $s$ . On the basis of the merger representations, an interlocutor  $b$  reconstructs, at the level of his cognitive architecture, by exploiting the available linguistic and non-linguistic material, the information which a speaker  $a$  intends to convey to him by using the sentence  $s$ . In the process of interpreting an utterance in which the interlocutor  $b$  is engaged, the level of the merger representations, relative to which the compositionality is preserved, constitutes the only real level from a psychological viewpoint and the only relevant level for  $b$ 's comprehension and for the behaviours the latter performs [ibidem, 83-84].

It is now obvious that the picture drawn by the standard semantic theories of the compositionality of a natural language offers us an image in which the role of the context and of the pragmatic input in the interlocutors' information processing is underestimated and often neglected. In this picture, the compositionality is accomplished at a linguistic level, as the fundamental role is played by the logical form of a sentence  $s$ , understood as the output of the syntactic processing about which the truth-conditions are predicated. In this regard, it is considered that the logical form of a sentence  $s$  helps determine the proposition which  $s$  expresses, that is, its semantic content  $\mathbf{c}_1$ , and that the truth-value of  $\mathbf{c}_1$  can be determined only if this content is semantically complete. The pragmatic processes are allowed to intervene only if the content  $\mathbf{c}_1$  expressed by the sentence  $s$  is semantically incomplete and therefore we cannot determine, independently of the context, the proposition expressed by  $s$  and its truth-value. In this sense, the pragmatic input is an imperative, but a *semantic* one: the appeal to context is induced by the context-sensitive elements (i.e., indexicals and demonstratives) from the surface syntax of the sentence  $s$ . In this case, the context has the role to provide semantic values to the context-dependent syntactic elements

in  $s$ , thus contributing to the completion of the semantic content which  $s$  expresses. Similarly, if  $s$  is a sentence which contains a verb from the class of verbs denoting a  $n$ -ary relation with fixed arity, whilst in the surface syntax of  $s$  are profiled  $n - 1$  argument places of the predicate which lexicalizes the relation, the context provides semantic values to the variable by means of which it is represented, at the level of  $s$ 's logical form, the argument place which is not syntactically filled in  $s$ . The pragmatic processes involved in these cases are *saturation* processes by means of which the intrusions of the pragmatic inputs into the truth-conditions of sentences are linguistically controlled [Recanati 2004: 23].

There is no serious reason to prevent us from conceiving a semantic theory in which the main unit of analysis is the utterance  $u$  made by a speaker who uses a sentence  $s$  in a specific context, utterance about which we can predicate truth-values. Therefore, it can be considered that the utterance  $u$ , unlike the sentence  $s$ , has truth-conditions and that the linguistically uncontrolled pragmatic information has a significant contribution to its truth-conditional content.

We have seen above that in a theory in which a sentence  $s$  of a natural language  $L$  has truth-conditions, the principle of compositionality of the semantic value of  $s$ , that is, of the semantic content  $c_s$ , operates at the level of the logical form of  $s$ . In this respect, the semantic closure constraint and the semantic locality constraint are valid only if the complex expression, whose semantic value is determined only by the semantic information derived from its subexpressions, is a declarative sentence  $s$  of a natural language  $L$ .

However, as it is now obvious, satisfying the semantic closure constraint and the semantic locality constraint presented above does not guarantee the compositionality of the semantic value of an utterance  $u$ . In this regard, in order to determine the semantic value of an utterance  $u$  made by a speaker who uses a sentence  $s$  of  $L$  in a context, we have to consider, beyond the semantic information extracted from the subexpressions of  $s$ , the contextually provided pragmatic information as well. Admitting now that the semantically optional pragmatic information has a contribution to the truth-conditional content of an utterance, it follows that the logical form of a sentence no longer plays the privileged role of being the basic unit in the interpretation of an utterance, unit about which the compositionality is predicated [Jaszczolt 2005: 19].

As the considerations above make it obvious, the strategy to loosen the principle of compositionality, strategy which implies understanding the composition operation of meaning in a broader sense, at the level of the merger representations which capture information from linguistic, and non-linguistic sources as well, instead of understanding the composition operation in a narrower sense, at the level of the logical form that constitutes the output of the syntactic processing, is on the right track.

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## WHAT IS EXISTENTIALISM? A REVISION OF CONTEMPORARY DEFINITIONS

ȘTEFAN BOLEA<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT.** In the following paper we provide a personal definition of the existential philosophy and the existential subject. Before that we explore other historical definitions of existentialism. We were mainly interested in the relation between existentialism and nihilism, the focus of existential philosophy on the individual and the situation of the studied philosophical trend on the 1950's zeitgeist. The definition of existentialism as a form of trans-rationalism and its capacity to become a practical alternative to contemporary academic philosophy were also emphasized.

**Keywords:** *existentialism, nihilism, postmodernism, practical philosophy, literature, individualism, irrationalism, trans-rationalism, death, anxiety*

### Introduction

We would like to take into consideration some of the most important definitions of existentialism (before providing a personal definition, which analyzes the relations between the studied philosophical trend, nihilism and postmodernism) in order to understand its position in the history of philosophy. The first phase of existentialism is represented by Søren Kierkegaard, who publishes his most influential works in the 1840's Denmark. Its second chapter is mainly German and refers to the activity of thinkers like Friedrich Nietzsche, Edmund Husserl, Karl Jaspers and Martin Heidegger, who conceived their works between 1880 and 1940. Its third phase and its most recognizable one is the French version of existentialism that became the dominant philosophical trend between 1930 and 1970. Albert Camus, Gabriel Marcel, Simone de Beauvoir, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and especially Jean-Paul Sartre are the most visible French existentialists.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For more on this chronology, see for instance Denis Huisman, *Histoire de l'existentialisme*, Editions Nathan, Paris, 1997, pp. 7, 122.

To understand the fundamental meaning of the concept of *existence*, a concept both vague and palpable in its everyday connotation, we must refer to a classical quote from Samuel Coleridge, which directs our existential sensibility in a splendid way. The Romantic poet observed in an essay from *The Friend*:

Hast thou ever raised thy mind to the consideration of EXISTENCE, in and by itself, as the mere act of existing? Hast thou ever said to thyself, thoughtfully, IT IS! heedless in that moment whether it were a man before thee, or a flower, or a grain of sand? ... The very words, There is nothing! or, There was a time, when there was nothing! are self-contradictory ... Not TO BE ... is impossible: to BE, incomprehensible. If thou hast mastered this intuition of absolute existence, thou wilt have learnt likewise, that it was this, and no other, which in the earlier ages seized the nobler minds, the elect among men, with a sort of sacred horror.<sup>3</sup>

This sample of being-phenomenology, which precedes the ontological difference and the distinction between essence and being (discussed mainly by Heidegger and Sartre), represents a sort of originary existentialism (one could also call it *Urexistenzialismus*), which considers that intuition and the pre-understanding of existence are a source of both philosophical enthusiasm and religious fascination. Coleridge, whose work belongs to a zeitgeist that precedes the activity of the principal forerunner of existentialism (i.e. Kierkegaard), writes about the impossibility of non-existence and the incomprehensibility of existence, starting from the poetical revelation of the totality and actuality of the almost inaccessible being.

### **From Nihilism To Existentialism**

This fundamental direction towards existence once revealed, we can try to define existentialism, in its whole. Hans Jonas (1952) asserted in his book *The Gnostic Religion* the similarity between existentialism and nihilism (maybe as a consequence of the 1950's zeitgeist, which did not provide a working definition of existentialism): "More than two generations ago, Nietzsche said that nihilism, 'this weirdest of all guests,' 'stands before the door.' Meanwhile the guest has entered and is no longer a guest, and, as far as philosophy is concerned, existentialism is trying to live with him. Living in such company is living in a crisis."<sup>4</sup>

This psychological portrayal of existentialism, considered a trend, which tries "to live with" nihilism, is captivating. In order to do co-exist with it, existentialism must "hijack" the purpose of nihilism, inventing a meaning where nihilism presents only meaninglessness. This more than 60 years old definition provided by Jonas makes us think of the effective task of existentialism that had to bring over meaninglessness and to create value and meaning in a specific moment in which those had to be

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<sup>3</sup> Samuel Coleridge, *The Friend*, Chauncey Goodrich, Burlington, 1831, pp. 450-451.

<sup>4</sup> Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, Beacon Press, Boston, 2001, p. 322.

reconstructed. The aforementioned definition has a strong historical connotation: the world after Auschwitz and Hiroshima seemed to have reached the "climax" of nihilism. Existentialism becomes the soul doctor of a "nihilism-infected" world and has to find solutions where the chaotic dimension of the society proves explosive.

Gary Cox (2009) re-thinks this relation between existentialism and nihilism: "Existentialists are nihilists because they recognize that life is ultimately absurd and full of terrible, inescapable truths. They are anti-nihilists because they recognize that life does in fact have a meaning: the meaning each person chooses to give his or her own existence."<sup>5</sup> Existentialism emphasizes the inherent creativity of the human subjects, who must find their "personal truths" and have to invent meaning, even though they are living in a world where absurdity is unavoidable. To observe the difference between the two philosophical trends, one must only refer to their conceptions regarding death:

a) For existentialism, *death is viewed from the perspective of life*. This conception intends to stimulate the individual to realize his destiny, to achieve his life. One must construct a meaning, despite finitude. To live without the quest of a personal truth is to refuse self-awareness; more exactly, it is to refuse to live at all.

b) For nihilism, *life is viewed from the perspective of death*, life is an useless struggle. As many meaning wells we "drilled", we would be discouraged by our undeniable finitude. Our effort amounts to nothing because our achievements do not accompany us beyond death's door. From the reductive perspective of nihilism, which presupposes the appeal to a brutal lucidity, our resourcefulness and creativity are, to put it plainly, *lies*. Our beings are crushed and leveled by a death that acknowledges no merit.

Existentialism could reply to nihilism that the human being could prosper on the brink of abyss, could *live with death*, even though finitude is unavoidable. With death pressed against his heart, the individual can find a desire to go beyond himself and to build something amazing from his life. Therefore, existentialism opposes an affective truth ("I love this finite and unique life") to a mental truth ("the fact that death ends us is the background of our lives: compared to nothingness, our being is mainly appearance"). The mental truth requires a heroic lucidity; however, it could encourage the evasion of responsibility towards the "low" (i.e. passive) zones of nihilism, where truth and paralysis are identical.

Walter Kaufmann (1960) noted that "the existentialists have tried to bring philosophy down to earth again like Socrates"<sup>6</sup>, and Wartenberg (2008) added that

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<sup>5</sup> Gary Cox, *How to Be an Existentialist or How to Get real, Get a Grip and Stop Making Excuses*, Continuum, London, New York, 2009, p. 15.

<sup>6</sup> Walter Kaufmann, *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, Meridian Books, New York, 1960, p. 51.

"existentialism is arguably the only contemporary form of philosophy that remains true to the conception of philosophy first articulated over two and a half millennia ago in Ancient Greece. For the Greeks, philosophy was ... the expression of a way of life, a mode of conduct"<sup>7</sup>. One should study existentialism as a contemporary initiation to philosophy, because it emphasizes action over intention: it is the way of thought harmoniously combining with the way of being. The mind-body dualism (the Cartesian reminiscence) is abandoned in favor of the quest for a practical philosophy, which tends to alter existence and reform it according to personal commandments (existentialism is akin to stoicism in this practical aspect).

The fact that existentialism expressed itself so fluently in literature (from Camus to Beckett, from Kafka to Sartre) is one of its advantages. The literary existentialism could convince even a philosophically unspecialized audience, with a philosophical pre-understanding through direct access to everyday life. The distance between the academic philosophy and the great affective problems of the contemporary human being (anxiety, absurd, meaninglessness, authenticity, death) is enormous: existentialist philosophy proposes a different approach: more personal and more direct. Existentialism should be studied, as we have mentioned, as an introduction to contemporary philosophy (along postmodernism –we have a pre-understanding of postmodernism while being immersed in contemporary society–), having an increased efficiency as a recovery after the essentialist mind games of the academic philosophy, which has lost contact with unmediated existence.

### **Towards A Historical Definition of Existentialism**

William Barrett (1962) reveals an important piece of the existentialist discourse: the central subject of the existential philosophers is "the unique experience of the single one, the individual"<sup>8</sup>. The focus on the individual is emphasized not only by Macquarrie<sup>9</sup> (1972) but also by contemporary authors like Earnshaw<sup>10</sup> (2006) and Flynn<sup>11</sup> (2006). We have thus a philosophy of the individual extracted from the serial mass, but not a new solipsism: the way the individual interacts with others or how he is immersed in social life, his effort to build an authentic existence, interest us

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<sup>7</sup> Thomas E. Wartenberg, *Existentialism*, Oneworld, Oxford, 2008, pp. 4-5.

<sup>8</sup> William Barrett, *Irrational Man. A Study in Existential Philosophy*, Anchor Books, New York, 1962, p. 13.

<sup>9</sup> "For the existentialist the subject is the existent in the whole range of his existing." (John Macquarrie, *Existentialism. An Introduction, Guide and Assessment*, Penguin Books, London, 1972, pp. 14-15).

<sup>10</sup> "Existentialism is a philosophy that takes as its starting point the individual's existence." (Steven Earnshaw, *Existentialism. A Guide for the Perplexed*, Continuum, London New York, 2006, p. 1.)

<sup>11</sup> "It is commonly acknowledged that existentialism is a philosophy about the concrete individual. This is both its glory and its shame." (Thomas R. Flynn, *Existentialism: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, 2006, p. X.)

greatly. However, existentialism begins with Kierkegaard's reaction to the Hegelian "absolutist" and "totalitarian" system, which tries to obliterate individual attributions. Texts like Kierkegaard's *Øjeblikket*, in which the subject needs to fight against conformism in his effort to establish an authentic society or Nietzsche's *Beyond Good And Evil*, in which the modern European must extract himself from the huge leveling process of history and civilization to become an exceptional individual, are constitutive for the existential individual ethos. The individual needs to go beyond the leveling and the conformism of the social life to find his true measure.

One should note that this existentialist focus on individual was under severe scrutiny. For example, Guido de Ruggiero (1947), found the existentialist exploitation of the theme of the individual highly disharmonious:

The existentialist philosophy ... gives a pathological development to the individual and contingent element of existence by lifting it to a ruling position and making it the measure of all values. The suffering of the individual, his preoccupation, his anguish, his defeat, his jump into nothing or into life beyond, have become absolute criteria of judgment, without any consideration being given to what the individual actually accomplishes in his passing through life.<sup>12</sup>

Actually, this criticism operates from the Hegelian position of impersonal objectivity, recording the very *anti-essentialism* of existentialism and that is exactly the author blames "contingency". One could answer the Italian philosopher that *anxiety, suffering, nothing* are concepts that belong to the philosophical existential heritage, active not only in postmodern philosophy but also in existential psychotherapy. To quote only Appignanesi (2001): "Could it be that the residue popularity of Existentialism today continues from a legacy of words that still have a power to *scandalize*? Anguish, despair, anxiety, the absurd, authenticity, nothingness, and so on, are literary features that have almost have the status of genuine 'categories'."<sup>13</sup>

Barrett gives two definitions of existentialism that exploit its historical dimension:

a) "Existential philosophy ... is ... a product of bourgeois society in a state of dissolution."

b) " Existentialism is the philosophy of the atomic age."<sup>14</sup>

An historical situation of existentialism is provided by Herbert Marcuse (1948):

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<sup>12</sup> Guido De Ruggiero, *Existentialism: Disintegration of Man's Soul*, Kessinger Publishing, NewYork, 2004, p. 13.

<sup>13</sup> Richard Appignanesi, Oscar Zarate, *Introducing Existentialism*, Totem Books, New York, 2001, p. 14.

<sup>14</sup> William Barrett, *op.cit.*, pp. 34, 65.

'The following pages deal with the sentiment of absurdity which prevails in our world.' This opening sentence of Albert Camus' *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* conveys the climate in which Existentialism originates. Camus does not belong to the existentialist school, but the basic experience which permeates his thought is also at the root of Existentialism. The time is that of the totalitarian terror: the Nazi regime is at the height of its power; France is occupied by the German armies, the values and standards of western civilization are coordinated and superseded by the reality of the fascist system.<sup>15</sup>

Terry Eagleton's version (2009) of the zeitgeist argument appeals to the same "sentiment of absurdity", experienced by a whole generation in the critical moments of WW2:

It is surely not irrelevant to the arguments of Heidegger's *Being and Time* that the book was written in just such a period of historical tumult, appearing as it did in the wake of the First World War. Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, which also explores such momentous issues, was published in the midst of the Second World War ... Maybe all men and women ponder the meaning of life; but some, for good historical reasons, are driven to ponder it more urgently than others.<sup>16</sup>

These two historical definitions of existentialism are attacked by David E. Cooper (1999), who observed that it "is quite wrong, first, to regard existentialism as the expression of post-war 'dishevelment', despair or malaise. To do so rather obviously confuses existentialism as a philosophy and existentialism as a vogue. All the best-known existentialist works, it should be noted, were written before the war began or before it ended"<sup>17</sup>. The British philosopher makes two valuable points: both *Being and Time* (1927) and *Being and Nothingness* (1943) were published before 1945; because of this fact existentialism (at least in its lab phase) should be regarded as an interwar philosophical trend. Moreover, its extended temporal validity<sup>18</sup> suggests that existentialism is relatively prosperous even today, in psychology, in pop culture and in everyday life (the immanence of existentialism in our lives is revealed through the fact that choice is primordial in our lives, moreover, that we live in a culture of choice).

However, the post-war zeitgeist obviously belongs to existentialism, not so much as a "vogue", but as a dominant philosophy. This temporal identification cannot invalidate existentialism; on the contrary, we learn more about the existential theoretical principles studying the 1940's and the 1950's. Our starting

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<sup>15</sup> Herbert Marcuse, "Remarks on Jean-Paul Sartre's *L'Être et le Néant*", in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 8, No. 3, March 1948, International Phenomenological Society, p. 309.

<sup>16</sup> Terry Eagleton, *The Meaning of Life: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, 2008, p. 18

<sup>17</sup> David E. Cooper, *Existentialism. A Reconstruction*, Blackwell Publishing, Malden, Oxford, 1999, p. 13.

<sup>18</sup> "To describe existentialism as an expression of an age ... is to suggest that its claims could be only temporarily and locally valid." (David E. Cooper, *op.cit.*, *id.*)

point was Hans Jonas' ambiguous definition, which inferred the similitude between existentialism and nihilism. The determined zeitgeist makes us better understand the critics of existentialism, Guido de Ruggiero, Herbert Marcuse and even Pope Pius XII, who wrote in the *Humani Generis* encyclical (1950): "Such fictitious tenets of evolution which repudiate all that is absolute, firm and immutable, have paved the way for the new erroneous philosophy which, rivaling idealism, immanentism and pragmatism, has assumed the name of existentialism, since it concerns itself only with existence of individual things and neglects all consideration of their immutable essences."<sup>19</sup>

Another trait of the existential philosophy often revealed by its exegetes is its irrationalism. Mark Tanzer (2008) considers existential philosophy as a reaction to the pervasive rationalism of Continental philosophy: "In opposition to the Platonist claim that things in the world are in accordance with rationalist, unambiguous principles, that the world is rational ...; the existentialist claims that ... there are no unambiguous principles constituting that world – the world, for the existentialist, is irrational."<sup>20</sup> This irrational (or even antirational) dimension of existentialism is analyzed by Paul Tillich (1944) in his article on *Existential Philosophy*. The text of the existential theologian is one of the first interpretations of existentialism, taking into account the German cultural space and including (besides consecrated existentialists as Nietzsche and Kierkegaard) a few philosophers that usually belong to other philosophical trends, such as Schelling, Marx and Dilthey. Paul Tillich wrote:

What all philosophers of Existence oppose is the 'rational' system of thought and life developed by Western industrial society and its philosophical representatives. During the last hundred years the implications of this system have become increasingly clear: a logical or naturalistic mechanism which seemed to destroy individual freedom, personal decision and organic community; an analytic rationalism which saps the vital force of life and transforms everything, including man himself, into an object of calculation and control; a secularized humanism which cuts man and the world off from the creative Source and the ultimate mystery of existence.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Pius XII, *Humani Generis*, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/pius\\_xii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-xii\\_enc\\_12081950\\_humani-generis\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xii/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_12081950_humani-generis_en.html) (consulted on 17.03.2014).

<sup>20</sup> Mark Tanzer, *On Existentialism*, Thomson Wadsworth, Belmont, 2008, pp. 2-7.

<sup>21</sup> Paul Tillich, "Existential Philosophy", in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 5, No. 1, Jan. 1944, University of Pennsylvania Press, p. 66.

We must note that the existential philosopher refers mostly to the German brand of existentialism (or *Existenzphilosophie*), because the works of the French existentialists were relatively unknown in 1944.

We can answer this accusation of the irrationalism of existential philosophy in at least three different ways:

a) It is true that existentialism is oriented, foremost, to affects, understood as "vehicles of understanding"<sup>22</sup> and not as the residues of a clear and cold mind. Kierkegaard and Heidegger show that anxiety is a fundamental and ontological affect which reveals the world in its entirety. We find that the "intelligence of emotions" (the expression belongs to Robert Solomon) is one of the essential discoveries of existentialism, a discovery that does not veer towards irrationalism and that aims to understand the human life in its entirety.

b) Kierkegaard, Shestov, Camus but also Cioran, Ionesco and Kafka meet with the problem of the absurd, understood as a limit of the human rationality. Their apparent irrationalism is at the same time a struggle against meaninglessness and an effort to generate alternative meanings and reasons. We should describe their thought as a deeper and larger (also more subversive) trans-rationalism.

c) The forerunners of existentialism, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche go beyond the narrow Hegelian rationality (the so called identity between reality and reason), analyzing despair, anxiety, the possibility of the suspension of ethics, on one hand, the will to power, the death of God, the destruction of the morals, on the other. But their discourse, undermining the Western rationality is technically built through the methodology of the same rationality: synthesizing, their irrationalism (or what we better named trans-rationalism) creates a new thought territory, a new philosophical field, which widens and completes the heritage of Western rationalism. Moreover, this accusation is tempered in the writings of Cooper<sup>23</sup> and Solomon<sup>24</sup>, who, discussing existential phenomenology, observe the coherence and even the systematization of the philosophical trend, which in this way becomes a harmonious part of the history of philosophy. To call existentialism "nihilistic", "rebellious" or "irrational" is to be ignorant of the elegance and discipline of thinkers like Heidegger or Merleau-Ponty .

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<sup>22</sup> David E. Cooper, *op.cit.*, p. 17.

<sup>23</sup> "Existentialism ... is not a mood or a vocabulary, but a relatively systematic philosophy." (David E. Cooper, *op.cit.*, p. 9)

<sup>24</sup> "The dramatic ethical and literary masterpieces of the existentialists are first the products of a serious and technical development within traditional Western epistemology and Husserl's phenomenology." (Robert C. Solomon (Ed.), *Phenomenology and Existentialism*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, 2001, p. 38.)

## Conclusion

Summarizing, the traits of existential philosophy are:

- a) a recuperation and a transgression of nihilism (Hans Jonas, 1952);
- b) an understanding of philosophy that reminds us of the Socratic meaning (Walter Kaufmann, 1960, Thomas Wartenberg, 2008);
- c) a focus on the individual (William Barrett, 1962, Macquarrie, 1972, Earnshaw, 2006, Flynn, 2006);
- d) although belonging to postwar zeitgeist, it has an extended temporal validity (Cooper, 1999);
- e) it can be seen as ambiguous and irrational (Mark Tanzer, 2008), it is – we have argued – in fact a form of *trans*-rationalism.

Considering that there are at least five ways of accessing the problem of existentialism, we believe that the most important traits are the recuperation and transformation of nihilism, the focus on the individual and the fact that existential philosophy expresses *par excellence* the postwar zeitgeist. Our personal definition of existentialism follows: existentialism is the alternative to the reductive manner of nihilism and to the fragmentary method of postmodernism, endorsing the existent individual in its entirety, an individual immersed in a universe, which offers mostly meaninglessness and discontinuity.

The existentialist can be characterized through his capacity of facing anxiety, pursuing authenticity and recuperation of death. The attitude of the existentialist towards choice, decision and responsibility is exemplary. The existentialist knows the founding value of the choice, which has an open horizon and must be kept in pure potentiality. The decision that follows after choice, although narrowing the horizon of the existential subject, must be respected and brought in the field of continuity. Immersed in a culture of irresponsibility (in which the society, fate, God, the genes are always to blame), the existentialist will comprehend that the assignment of guilt, with all its seductive appearance, is ineffective, covering up the truth.

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## THE TAXONOMY OF NEGATION IN PLOTINUS

DANIEL JUGRIN<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT.** The problem of negation in the Greek thought was defined by three technical terms: privation (*steresis*), abstraction (*aphairesis*) and negation itself (*apophasis*). Plotinian negative theology is based on a method of systematic critique of the layers belonging to physical existence, which overlap the essential beginning. Their removal will result in our true knowledge of the essence: *aphairesis* brings forth a way of knowing. Privation employs alpha privative – through which something composite is denied: *steresis* is associated with a substratum which sustains affirmation. In Plotinus, negative theology and abstraction are epistemological problems, while privation has an ontological applicability.

**Keywords:** Plotinus, negation, abstraction, privation, negative theology, the One.

Negative theology<sup>2</sup> is an epistemological tool which emphasizes the value of negating what is given as a way of grasping transcendent entities<sup>3</sup>. It may be understood as a systematic removal of the specific attributes of a thing, until its defining and transcendent quality is discovered: the mechanism whereby thought purifies itself of any sensible representations<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> On the problem of negative theology, see A.-J. Festugière, *La Revelation d'Hermès Trimegiste, vol. IV: Le Dieu et la Gnose*, Librairie Lecoffre, 1954; J. Vanneste, *Le mystère de Dieu: essai sur la structure rationnelle de la doctrine mystique du Pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite*, Desclée de Brouwer, 1959; S. Lilla, „La teologia negativa dal pensiero greco classico a quello patristico e bizantino”, in *Helikon* (Rivista di tradizione e cultura classica dell'Università di Messina), vol. XXII, XXVII (1982-1987), p. 211-279 (I parte); vol. XXVIII (1988), p. 203-280 (I parte – continuazione); vol. XXIX-XXX (1989-1990), p. 97-186 (I parte – continuazione); vol. XXXI-XXXII (1991-1992), p. 3-72 (I parte – continuazione e fine); R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence, vol. 2: The Way of Negation, Christian and Greek*, Hanstein, 1986; Deirdre Carabine, *The Unknown God: Negative Theology in the Platonic Tradition: Plato to Eriugena*, W. B. Eerdmans, 1995; D. Turner, *The Darkness of God. Negativity in Christian Mysticism*, Cambridge University Press, 1995; M.A. Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying*, Chicago University Press, 1996; Ysabel de Andia, *Henosis, L'Union a Dieu chez Denys l'Areopagite*, E.J. Brill, 1996; Janet P. Williams, *Denying Divinity. Apophasis in the Patristic Christian and Soto Zen Buddhist Traditions*, Oxford University Press, 2000.

<sup>3</sup> R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence, vol. 2: The Way of Negation*, p. 13.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 18.

Negative theology is one of the most fascinating traditions whose sources can be traced back to Late Antiquity and the early Christian period; its first culmination is the Neoplatonic philosophy and theology that dominated the third century A.D. and long afterwards. Its most radical expression is to be found in the late Middle Ages mystical thinking<sup>5</sup>.

The Greek tradition developed three technical concepts which circumscribe negative theology and they are all related to negation: privation (στέρησις), abstraction (ἀφαίρεσις) and negation itself (ἀπόφρασις). The first two concepts are connected with “the removal of attributes”, while the latter stands for negation – though it is not very easy to decipher what this really is. Aristotle sees privation as a form of negation, and all three operations are equivalent with nothing more than a technique of “conceptual removal”. ἀφαίρεσις differs from ἀπόφρασις by denying a precise property to an entity, and by removing it effectively: thus the absence – that ἀπόφρασις cannot produce – is generated. ἀπόφρασις is associated with the attribution of non-being: it doesn’t create a conceptual emptiness, but it rather attributes the quality of alterity<sup>6</sup>.

In this study, we will try to delineate the differences between abstraction and privation in Plotinus, and to what extent the primary meaning of the term *aphairesis* is equivalent to negation. We will also try to bring more accurately into focus the function, the state and the value of negation as the ultimate device which prepares the soul to attain mystical union with the One.

### **The distinction between ἀφαίρεσις and στέρησις in Plotinus**

In Plotinus, abstraction is drawn starting from a specific vision about reality, implying the idea of a reality which appears from successive accumulations. The inferior level contains the superior one *in nuce* and, therefore, there is a multiplication of layers within the generation of reality. The self development of the accumulations is constantly added to the bulk of the sensible world: these obscure it, so that the luminosity of the essence is diminished. Moreover, this self-development of the accretions multiplies the reality, the latter being perceived as an incremental construct, layer by layer<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> See Ilse N. Bulhof, Laurens ten KateFlight, „Negative Theology – An Introduction”, in Idem (ed.), *Flight of the Gods. Philosophical perspectives on Negative Theology*, Fordham University Press, 2000, p. 1-57.

<sup>6</sup> See R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 1: *The Rise and Fall of Logos*, Hanstein, 1986, p. 126, 137 and 142.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 2: *The Way of Negation, Christian and Greek*, p. 55.

R. Mortley sustained the idea according to which we cannot have a proper understanding of abstraction as an epistemological instrument if we do not acquire an adequate perception on the generation of reality. Plotinian negative theology is founded on a process of systematic critique of the layers belonging to physical existence, which overlapped the essential beginning. Their removal will lead us to the true knowledge of the essence. This is the whole picture of the method and it is small wonder that in this discussion was introduced privation (στέρησις), as it implies the removal of the attributes<sup>8</sup>.

Nonetheless, what is the difference between abstraction and privation in Plotinus? Having as a reference point the Aristotelian view<sup>9</sup>, privation proves to be very close to abstraction – although they are not equivalent –, as abstraction indicates the deliberate use of removal for epistemological ends: it possesses a conceptual finality – which privation is lacking<sup>10</sup>. Privation makes use of alpha privative – through which an element from something composite is denied: according to Aristotle<sup>11</sup>, στέρησις is applied to a substratum which sustains affirmation (the subject of predication). Privation must be based on something which is complex enough to be deprived of an element. στέρησις is rather ontological, while ἀφαίρεσις necessitates an investigation, a way of knowing. Despite all these, it doesn't seem to be a very clear distinction between the two concepts in Plotinus<sup>12</sup>.

In *Enneads* 2.4.13.12, privation is not discussed in reference to qualities, and here it is laid down the model for the Neoplatonic debate on this point: privation is an ontological problem: “For anyone who is deprived (στέρησις) has a quality – a blind man, for instance.”<sup>13</sup> Plotinus wishes here to establish if privation itself could be a form of quality, as the usual qualities are: “being white”, “being warm” etc. Could the absence of something be considered as analogous to these? “For privation is a taking away, but qualification is a matter of positive assertion – ἄρισ γὰρ ἢ στέρησις, τὸ δὲ ποιὸν ἐν καταφάσει”<sup>14</sup>. Mortley distinguishes in this Plotinian declaration an appeal to the discussion dedicated to negative theology, because there is here an obvious contrast between “affirmation” (κατάφασις) and “privation” (στέρησις) – which is told about to be a suppression. The Greek word used here is ἄρισ – a

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 57.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1022b33, 1004a16 (W.D. Ross [ed.], 2 vols., Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1975).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. R. Mortley, *The Way of Negation*, p. 57.

<sup>11</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1004a16.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. R. Mortley, “Plotin – le langage de la negation”, in M. Fattal (ed.), *Logos et Langage chez Plotin et avant Plotin*, L'Hannattan, 2003, p. 249.

<sup>13</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads* 2.4.13.12-14 (trans. A.H. Armstrong, in Plotinus, *Ennead II*, Harvard University Press, 1990, p. 139).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem* 2.4.13.22-23 (trans. Armstrong, *Ennead II*, p. 139).

Greek common term about “negation”<sup>15</sup>. Though, in this context, the stake doesn’t appear to be an epistemological problem, but the debate returns again to the ontological level<sup>16</sup>.

In *Enneads* 1.8.11.1 *sq.*, it is examined the possibility of defining the evil from the Soul as privation of good: “But the nature which is opposed to all form is privation; but privation is always in something else and has no existence by itself. So, if evil consists in privation, it will exist in the thing deprived of form and have no independent existence”<sup>17</sup>. Once again, it is transparent that privation is not represented here as a problem connected to knowledge. A refinement of this topic is to be met in the treatise 6.3(19), where Plotinus demonstrates the parasitic nature of privation, showing that it doesn’t have a definition in its right, but that it rather depends on what it denies for its definition<sup>18</sup>. This makes manifest the irrelevance of privation in relation to abstraction. Privation is deeply connected to the affirmations of certain qualities and it confirms that it cannot operate in their absence. The logic of privation is parasitic on the logic of affirmation and it is always intimately connected with a particular nature – which may appear either as a qualified form, either in a relation. Privation presupposes specific absences and it is determined by them. By contrast, abstraction is not forced into the situation of being limited by what it denies: and it neither constitutes the linguistic recorder of a state of being, but it implies a positive investigation, an incursion – through language – into the existent. Abstraction is a conceptual tool, a means of thought<sup>19</sup>: ἀφαίρεσις is a positive way of developing a concept of the highest principle, which is, in fact, negative in its character<sup>20</sup>.

H.-R. Schlette<sup>21</sup> insisted on including privation (στέρησις) into the equation of negative theology, bringing into attention that the idea of privation (*privatio entis*) and that of the absence of Good (*Abwesenheit des Guten*) furnishes the proper

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. *A Greek-English Lexicon*, compiled by H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, with a revised supplement, revised and augmented throughout by H.S. Jones, new (ninth) edition, Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 248.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. R. Mortley, *The Way of Negation*, p. 58.

<sup>17</sup> Trans. A.H. Armstrong, in Plotinus, *Ennead I*, Harvard University Press, 1989, p. 307.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. R. Mortley, *The Way of Negation*, p. 58.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 59. The main problem in the apprehension of the One is avoiding or annulling the multiplicity: to conceive the One as an object means to see it one among many. The common use of the Intellect implies predication, which introduces plurality, as the logic of predication presupposes a multiple structure of the subject and a predicated quality. Abstraction contains an opposite logic, because it rather implies subtracting from a subject, rather than adding to it. Cf. Idem, “Negative Theology and Abstraction in Plotinus”, in *The American Journal of Philology*, 4/ 1975, The Johns Hopkins University Press, p. 377.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 375 *passim*.

<sup>21</sup> See H.-R. Schlette, *Das Eine und das Andere: Studien zur Problematik des Negativen in der Metaphysik Plotins*, Max Hüber, 1966, p. 54-55.

metaphysical background for perceiving the power of negativity (*der Negativität*) in Plotinus. R. Mortley<sup>22</sup> criticizes this view as anachronistic, at least in two regards. Firstly, the formulation of the Plotinian negative theology is based mostly on abstraction (ἀφαίρεσις). He implants the term ἀφαίρεσις in order to explain his negative theology and keeps privation (στέρησις) for a specific approach – being discussed in the context of Matter or substratum, and in reference to epistemological problems<sup>23</sup>.

In *Enneads* 2.4.14, it is brought forward the problem of privation as a source of evil and to what extent privation must be dissociated from Matter from a conceptual point of view, the two being considered one by nature<sup>24</sup>. Plotinus directs the discussion towards the impossibility of separating between the definition of the substratum and that of privation. But here he doesn't go any further in developing his idea about στέρησις<sup>25</sup>.

Nonetheless, in *Enneads* 6.7.37, it is validated the idea that the logic of privation is totally improper for the thinking of the One. Here, Plotinus replies to those who pretended that privation of an activity would imply that the subject possesses in fact that activity or that function, the latter being just inactive in that particular instant: *e.g.*, to say of the One that, through privation (κατὰ στέρησιν<sup>26</sup>), “It doesn't think (μὴ νοῶν<sup>27</sup>)”, would mean that the One possesses that activity (*i.e.* thinking), but that it doesn't exercise it in the present moment. But – as Mortley warns us – this approach is as false as the predication of not practicing medicine in the case of a lawyer: in fact, the practice or not of medicine – in the privative form of negation – can be predicated only about a doctor. This is the specific logic of privation as a form of negation, and it proves to be completely inadequate applied to the One. Such a model of negation, within the discourse about the One, would implicitly attribute a series of qualities which the One doesn't possess<sup>28</sup>. But, the One “is sufficient and doesn't have to seek anything but himself who is above all things; for he suffices for himself and all else by being what he is”<sup>29</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> See R. Mortley, “Negative Theology and Abstraction in Plotinus”, p. 373-375.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 375: “abstraction is selected by Plotinus as the vehicle of his negative theology”. Even though Plotinus highlights ἀφαίρεσις, he still seems to appeal, in some place, to the way of privation (στέρησις). Cf. Idem, “Plotin – le langage de la negation”, p. 249. See also Idem, *The Way of Negation*, p. 57 sq.

<sup>24</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads* 2.4.14.3.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. R. Mortley, “Negative theology and Abstraction in Plotinus”, p. 374.

<sup>26</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads* 6.7.37.27.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem* 6.7.37.24.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. R. Mortley, “Negative theology and Abstraction in Plotinus”, p. 374.

<sup>29</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads* 6.7.37.29-31 (trans. A.H. Armstrong, in Plotinus, vol. VII, Harvard University Press, 1988, p. 203-204).

Because of all of these reasons, Mortley concludes, “Schlette’s attempt to link the negative process and privation is misconceived.” The same goes with the tendency of conceiving Negativity in the terms of an “alienating force” (where multiplicity and otherness are said to provide the metaphysical ground for Negativity)<sup>30</sup>, which is wholly unrelated – in Plotinus’ case – with the problem of the conceptualization of the One through abstraction. In Plotinus, negative theology and the problem of the conceptualization of the One through abstraction are epistemological problems, and privation is functional especially on an ontological level – improper for this kind of approach<sup>31</sup>.

### The distinction between ἀπόφασις and ἀφαίρεσις in Plotinus

If we cannot describe categorically the One, then it is necessary to make room for the three Middle Platonic ways that can lead to the One: *via remotionis*, *via analogiae* and *via eminentiae*<sup>32</sup>. But we need – as P.E. Meijer thinks – to precisely separate, in Plotinus’ case, *via negationis* (ἀπόφασις) – which is just a preliminary exercise and which leads solely to *trivium* – from *via remotionis* (ἀφαίρεσις)<sup>33</sup>.

If the use of ἀφαίρεσις by Plotinus and by others, applied in order to define their negative theologies, remained undisputed, there still arose a controversy<sup>34</sup> which took into consideration to what extent the primary meaning of the term abstraction (subtraction) is synonymous with negation.

In Albinus, ἀφαίρεσις is projected to suggest a process of conceptual removal or elimination, in order to focus on a fundamental unity. In Albinus’ case, this term can be distinguished from the broader logical notion of negation – ἀπόφασις. But it is problematic if Albinus understood ἀφαίρεσις *strictly* in terms of abstraction – based on the implicit rule of notional removal, in the process of identifying the supreme divinity – or in the terms of the more general notion of negation. Is the use of ἀφαίρεσις a technical one – “more restricted” –, or does this notion simply serve negation?<sup>35</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Cf. H.-R. Schlette, *Das Eine und das Andere*, p. 214: “die Vielheit als Anderheit als der metaphysische Grund der Negativität”. See also *Ibidem*, p. 206 sq. and p. 216.

<sup>31</sup> See R. Mortley, “Negative theology and Abstraction in Plotinus”, p. 374-375.

<sup>32</sup> On the debates concerning the three ways, see H.J. Kramer, *Der Ursprung der Geistmetaphysik. Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des Platonismus zwischen Platon und Plotin*, Grüner, 1967, p. 115-119, 343-351 and A.-J. Festugière, *La Révélation d’Hermès Trismégiste*, vol. IV: *Le Dieu Inconnu et la Gnose*, Librairie Lecoffre, 1954, p. 79 sq.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. P.E. Meijer, *Plotinus on the Good or the One (Enneads VI, 9). An analytical commentary*, J. C. Gieben, 1992, p. 184.

<sup>34</sup> For a review on this controversies, see J. Bussanich, *The One and its relation to Intellect in Plotinus. A commentary on selected texts*, E.J. Brill, 1988, p. 114 sq.; P.E. Meijer, *Plotinus on the Good or the One (Enneads VI, 9). An analytical commentary*, p. 184 sq. and D. Burns, “Apophatic Strategies in Allogenes (NHC XI.3)”, in *Harvard Theological Review*, 2/ 2010, Cambridge University Press, p. 168 sq.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. J.P. Kenney, *Mystical Monotheism*, Brown University Press, 1991, p. 84.

As we have already seen, the broader view was embraced by H.A. Wolfson<sup>36</sup>, while the more limited form was favored by J. Whittaker<sup>37</sup>. R. Mortley, in his extensive study dedicated to this tradition, adds to the problem an intimate association between the two concepts, so that “whilst there are some clear differences between abstraction and negation in this period, they dissolve under reflection”<sup>38</sup>. For J.P. Kenney, Albinus’ *Didaskalikos* reveals the more restrictive, abstractive understanding. In the text itself, the discussion is directed towards the analogical and the anagogic methods. The three are practiced as “correlative methods” in order to apprehend the First Principle. There is no direction towards a conceptual discontinuity or at least towards some tension among these approaches. Still, in the case of the more extensive reading, all the divine attributes must be forbidden, so that negative theology can be incongruous with the theory of analogy. According to the more restricted interpretation, abstraction can be perceived as the removal of those undignified views, and so it becomes compatible with analogy and *anagoge*. Kenney concludes that this type of conceptual architecture is the most reasonable in Albinus’ case<sup>39</sup>.

In regard to Plotinus, Wolfson<sup>40</sup> justifies his exegesis starting from an excerpt from the *Enneads*<sup>41</sup>, where it is said – as in Albinus’ text<sup>42</sup> – that one of the methods by which we can form a view about God is the way of abstractions (ἀφαίρεσις). Appealing to a second text – in which Plotinus replies to the interrogation concerning the way we should speak about God – Wolfson agrees that it would include an explanation of the term abstractions: “For we say what it is not, but we do not say what it is – Καὶ γὰρ λέγομεν, ὃ μὴ ἔστιν· ὃ δὲ ἔστιν, οὐ λέγομεν”<sup>43</sup>.

<sup>36</sup> See H.A. Wolfson, “Albinus and Plotinus on Divine Attributes”, in *The Harvard Theological Review*, 2/ 1952, Cambridge University Press, p. 115-130 and Idem, “Negative Attributes in the Church Fathers and the Gnostic Basilides”, in *The Harvard Theological Review*, 2/ 1957, Cambridge University Press, p. 145-156.

<sup>37</sup> See J. Whittaker, “Neopythagoreanism and Negative Theology”, in *Symbolae Osloenses*, 44/ 1969, Taylor & Francis, p. 109-125.

<sup>38</sup> R. Mortley, *The way of negation*, p. 19.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. J.P. Kenney, *Mystical Monotheism*, p. 85.

<sup>40</sup> See H.A. Wolfson, “Albinus and Plotinus on Divine Attributes”, p. 119 sq.

<sup>41</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads* 6.7.36.7.

<sup>42</sup> Albinus, *Didaskalikos* 10.5-6. (*Alcinoos: enseignement des doctrines de Platon*, introd., com. J. Whittaker, trans. P. Louis, Les Belles Lettres, 1990).

<sup>43</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads* 5.3.14.4-7 (trans. A.H. Armstrong, in Plotinus, vol. V, Harvard University Press, 1984, p. 121). Cf. also G.R. Rocca, *Speaking the Incomprehensible God. Thomas Aquinas on the interplay of positive and negative theology*, The Catholic University of America Press, 2004, p. 11: “Plotinus, like Albinus before him, also begins to associate *aphairesis* with apophatic predications about God. For example, the *aphairesis* of *Enneads* 6.7.36 seems to be the same as the process of saying what the One is not in *Enneads* 5.3.14.”

That the declaration from the second text (“what it is not”) was meant to be an explanation of the term “abstractions” could also result – according to Wolfson’s argument – from a third fragment, in which, focusing on the ways in which we can speak about God, Plotinus explicitly says that “everything else about it is said by means of abstraction – ἐν ἀφαιρέσει”<sup>44</sup>.

From the fact that the term ἀφαιρέσις would have been established by Plotinus as an explanation of the way in which we can predicate something about God as “that which it is not”, Wolfson<sup>45</sup> infers that the Neoplatonic thinker imagined it as an equivalent for the term ἀπόφρασις – used by Aristotle with the meaning of negation, in a logical proposition.

Starting from a few Aristotelian texts<sup>46</sup>, Whittaker<sup>47</sup> establishes that the terms germane for *via negationis* (ἀφαιρέω, περιαιρέω) refer to mental acts and less to negative declarations of a certain kind. There are also brought into light other similar sources<sup>48</sup> which are marked by Aristotle’s influence and which all illustrate abstraction as an act of thinking. On the side of this investigation, Whittaker<sup>49</sup> decrees that “there is no good reason to suppose that in Albinus the phrase κατὰ ἀφαιρέσιν has anything to do with negation as such”.

Nonetheless, in Plotinus’ case, the situation is a little different. His interest in regard to ἀφαιρέσις is not surprising, and – following the line of thought anticipated by the Middle Platonists – he made from abstraction a metaphysical instrument. As Mortley confirmed, ἀφαιρέσις was already such a device for Aristotle, and it is not at all sure in which way we can dissociate the outlook of the Neoplatonic metaphysics from the Aristotle’s, though it is usually said that the first is theological, while the second is not<sup>50</sup>.

In *Enneads* 6.7.36.7-8, the term ἀφαιρέσις is clearly used in the same sense as in Albinus and Plutarch: Plotinus synthetically describes “the current and familiar methods of conceiving the deity”, and, in this context, Whittaker says that “ἀφαιρέσις has nothing to do with negation”<sup>51</sup>. It is true that ἀφαιρέω is frequently

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<sup>44</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads* 6.8.11.34-35.

<sup>45</sup> H.A. Wolfson, “Albinus and Plotinus on Divine Attributes”, p. 121: “The implication of all these statements is that both Albinus and Plotinus use the term *aphaeresis* in the technical sense of Aristotle’s *apophasis*.”

<sup>46</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1061a28-36. Cf. 1029a16 sq. and 1036b1 sq.

<sup>47</sup> See J. Whittaker, “Neopythagoreanism and Negative Theology”, p. 122-123.

<sup>48</sup> See, e.g., Plutarch, *Platonicae Quaestiones* 1001e-1002a (*Plutarchi moralia*, vol. 6.1, ed. C. Hubert, Teubner, 1959) and Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata* 5.11 (Clemens Alexandrinus, *Stromata*, Buch I-VI, vol. II, 3rd edn., ed. O. Stählin, Akademie-Verlag, 1960).

<sup>49</sup> See J. Whittaker, “Neopythagoreanism and Negative Theology”, p. 123.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. R. Mortley, *The Way of Negation*, p. 53.

<sup>51</sup> J. Whittaker, “Neopythagoreanism and Negative Theology”, p. 123.

introduced by Plotinus in his accounts about *via negativa*, but, as Whittaker emphasizes, in those texts “that what Plotinus had in mind in such passages was not negation but a mental process of abstraction is obvious from the following”: “When you have put away all things (Ἀφελῶν πάντα) and left only himself, do not try to find what you can add (προσθῆς), but if there is something you have not yet taken away from him in your mind”<sup>52</sup>. In the present situation, the meaning of ἀφαιρέω is decided by the contrast with the verb προστίθημι: this term borrowed from mathematics cannot mean “to affirm” and, consequently, ἀφαιρέω cannot indicate “to negate”<sup>53</sup>.

Plotinus will tailor ἀφαιρέσεις after the traditional matrix of abstraction, because abstraction is rather an act of purification and refinement than just an act of negation. Abstraction indicates the abandonment of one notion for a subtler one: it determines thus an ascension, a step forward. To explain the mathematical example which underlies Plotinus’ thought, negation of the concept of line resides simply in “non-line”, while abstraction gives as a result the point<sup>54</sup>.

Even if ἀφαιρέσεις had its first abode within mathematical borders, its real use in Albinus and Plotinus, designated for divine predications, shows that it could be also conceived negatively. A mathematical term with the general meaning of elimination or removal, once translated into the logical sphere, can be easily extended to indicate a negative predication<sup>55</sup>.

In *Enneads* 6.8.11.34-35, as the λεγόμενα participle reflects, Plotinus is focused on the way by which we can make statements about the One. Though subsequently, as Wolfson<sup>56</sup> would be inclined to consent, the term ἀφαιρέσεις became accepted in the sense of negation, though it is in no way obvious that this was the path that Plotinus had in mind in this context: most probably, the Aristotelian use of the expression ἐν ἀφαιρέσει<sup>57</sup> – “by means of abstractions”<sup>58</sup> – was the one that inspired Plotinus. Nonetheless, we could admit – following Whittaker’s<sup>59</sup> line of inquiry – that, although the Plotinian combination “ἐν ἀφαιρέσει ... λεγόμενα” doesn’t refer to a precise equivalence of negations, still “it cannot be thought very far from it”<sup>60</sup>.

<sup>52</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads* 6.8.21.26-28 (trans. Armstrong, vol. VII, p. 297). See also *Enneads* 5.3.17.38 (Ἀφελε πάντα) and 5.5.13.11 (Πάντα ἄρα ἀφελῶν). Cf. *Enneads* 6.9.9.50-51 (ἀποθέσθαι τὰ ἄλλα δεῖ).

<sup>53</sup> Cf. J. Whittaker, “Neopythagoreanism and Negative Theology”, p. 123.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. R. Mortley, “Negative Theology and Abstraction in Plotinus”, p. 376.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. G.P. Rocca, *Speaking the Incomprehensible God*, p. 11, n. 17.

<sup>56</sup> H.A. Wolfson, “Albinus and Plotinus on divine attributes”, p. 129 sq. and Idem, “Negative attributes in the Church Fathers and the Gnostic Basilides”, p. 148 sq.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *De Anima* 429b18; 431b12; 432a5-6 (W.D. Ross [ed.], Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1961).

<sup>58</sup> Cf. trans. R. Polansky, in Aristotle, *De anima*, Cambridge University Press, 2007: „by abstractions” (p. 448).

<sup>59</sup> J. Whittaker, “Neopythagoreanism and Negative Theology”, p. 124.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. A.H. Armstrong (*Enneads*, vol. VII, p. 263) who translates ἐν ἀφαιρέσει by “negatively”.

It is true that, in the subsequent Greek theological literature<sup>61</sup>, ἀφαίρεσις has circulated interchangeable with the term ἀπόφρασις<sup>62</sup>. For example, in a writing belonging to Saint Gregory of Nyssa<sup>63</sup>, we notice the obvious intention of tracing a relation of symmetry between the two terms: “we either convey the idea of goodness by negation (ἀποφάσεως) of badness or vice versa by the remotion (ἀφαιρέσει) of the good we convey the idea of the bad”<sup>64</sup>. A similar view is to be found in one of Saint John Damascene’s works: “In the case of God, however, it is impossible to explain what He is in essence, and it befits us the rather to hold discourse about his remotion (ἀφαιρέσεως) from all things.”<sup>65</sup> Moreover, in another place, it is said that the discourse about God through removal is equivalent with the discourse “by means of negation (ἀποφαντικῶς)”<sup>66</sup>.

We could add to the list of these references a Latin author, Isidore of Seville, who, being inspired by Marius Victorinus, wrote:

The eighth species of definition in Greek is called κατὰ ἀφαίρεσιν τοῦ ἐναντίου, in Latin “by the privative of the contrary” (*per privantiam contrarii*) of that which is defined: “That is good which is not bad. That is just which is not unjust,” and the like. We ought to use this kind of definition when the contrary is known, as “If the good is what profits with decency, that which is not such a thing is bad.”<sup>67</sup>

Here ἀφαίρεσις explicitly refers to negation, though not necessarily in the Wolfsonian “restricted sense”<sup>68</sup>. Despite the fact that ἀφαίρεσις came to be perceived as a correspondent for negation, it is still hard to accept, as Whittaker<sup>69</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Wolfson mentions also Arabic, Hebrew and Latin texts. See H.A. Wolfson, “Albinus and Plotinus on Divine Attributes”, p. 129-130.

<sup>62</sup> E.g.: Gregory of Nyssa, *De anima et resurrectione* (in J.-P. Migne [ed.], *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 46, col. 40b); Dionysius the Areopagite, *De divinis nominibus* II.4 (in J.-P. Migne [ed.], *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 3, col. 641a); *De mystica theologia* II (in J.-P. Migne [ed.], *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 3, col. 1000b); John Damascene, *De fide Orthodoxa* I.4 (in J.-P. Migne [ed.], *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 94, col. 800b-c). Cf. G.P. Rocca, *Speaking the Incomprehensible God*, p. 11, n. 18.

<sup>63</sup> *Dialogus de anima et resurrectione*, in J.-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 46, cols. 40.18-24.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. H.A. Wolfson, “Negative Attributes in the Church Fathers”, p. 148.

<sup>65</sup> John Damascene, *De Fide Orthodoxa* I.4 (in J.-P. Migne [ed.], *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 94, col. 800b).

<sup>66</sup> Idem, *De Fide Orthodoxa* I.12 (in J.-P. Migne [ed.], *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 94, col. 845c). Cf. H.A. Wolfson, “Negative Attributes in the Church Fathers”, p. 150.

<sup>67</sup> *Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi, Etymologiarum sive Originum, De Rhetorica et Dialectica*, Liber II, XXIX, 9: “Octava species definitionis est, quam Graeci κατὰ ἀφαίρεσιν τοῦ ἐναντίου, Latini per privantiam contrarii eius, quod definitur, dicunt: «Bonum est, quod malum non est. Iustum est, quod iniustum non est», et his similia. Hoc autem genere definitionis uti debemus, cum contrarium notum est, ut: «Si bonum est quod prodest cum honestate, id quod tale non est malum est»”. Cf. trans. S.A. Barney, *et alii*, in *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 85.

<sup>68</sup> For the sense of the κατὰ ἀφαίρεσιν τοῦ ἐναντίου, cf. also Boethius, *Liber de diffinitione*, in J.-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 64, col. 902 and 904 sq.

<sup>69</sup> See J. Whittaker, “Neopythagoreanism and Negative Theology”, p. 125.

says, that it would have been conceived as an equivalent term for Albinus. Under these circumstances, it is not plausible that Plotinus ever agreed to it in a premeditated way, as referring to the notion of negation<sup>70</sup> – though such a tendency might have developed in his time<sup>71</sup>.

Following Whittaker's argumentative exposition, Mortley<sup>72</sup> seems to widen too much the difference between abstraction and negation<sup>73</sup>:

The value of the notion of abstraction is that it is at once positive and negative – it is more an act of refinement or purification of a concept than an act of negation. (...) Abstraction also implies the belief in continuity between the One and the lower results of its emanation. (...) The sheer negative would have emphasized the alien character of reality.

These remarks are generally true, but Mortley's conclusion "does some violence to the Plotinian conception of negative theology", as Bussanich<sup>74</sup> weighs:

Hence one may infer that for Plotinus negative theology is not radically "apophatic": it is clear that where negation in its strict sense is employed in the theological process, there can be no thought, and no progress. Negative theology becomes the stalemate of rational procedures, and this is not Plotinus' intention; he presents us with a method which is still moderate in character, and which is designed to be critical but productive<sup>75</sup>.

It is true that negative theology is meant to be productive and not nihilistic – Bussanich agrees –, but Plotinus' conviction seems to be that negative theology can be effective as the vehicle of the soul towards the mystical union with the One only if it transports the soul not only beyond reason, but also beyond perfect intellection – which is in itself a type of mystical knowledge: "Stripping away being and thought is not, on Plotinus' view, a moderate procedure"<sup>76</sup>.

Even though Whittaker's distinction<sup>77</sup> between abstraction and negation is probably right<sup>78</sup>, it could still explain, for Plotinus, just the fact that negative

<sup>70</sup> Cf. also P.E. Meijer, *Plotinus on the Good or the One (Enneads VI, 9). An analytical commentary*, p. 184: "After all that I just brought forward about negation in Plotinus, obviously negation must be held to be different from 'abstraction'".

<sup>71</sup> In this situation, as P.E. Meijer (*Plotinus on the Good or the One (Enneads VI, 9). An analytical commentary*, p. 189) suggest, in Plotinus' case, it could be changed the title of *theologia negativa* with *theologia aphairctica*. Moreover, the *theologia aphairctica* could be replaced by *henologia aphairctica*, because we do not have to deal with a theology, but rather with a doctrine about the One (henology).

<sup>72</sup> R. Mortley, "Negative Theology and Abstraction in Plotinus", p. 376.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. J. Bussanich, *The One and its relation to Intellect in Plotinus. A commentary on selected texts*, p. 114 and D. Burns, "Apophatic Strategies in Allogenes (NHC XI.3)", p. 168, n. 37.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. J. Bussanich, *The One and its relation to Intellect in Plotinus. A commentary on selected texts*, p. 114.

<sup>75</sup> R. Mortley, "Negative Theology and Abstraction in Plotinus", p. 376-377.

<sup>76</sup> J. Bussanich, *The One and its Relation to Intellect in Plotinus*, p. 114.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. J. Whittaker, "Neopythagoreanism and Negative Theology", p. 123.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. also R. Mortley, "Negative Theology and Abstraction in Plotinus", p. 375.

predicates<sup>79</sup> are not applicable to the One itself. On the other hand, the suppression of those positive predicates within the sphere of the understanding of the One implies negation of those concepts from somebody's mind<sup>80</sup>. In this way, negation is truly a radical procedure, whereof epistemological and existential implications were largely discussed by A.H. Armstrong<sup>81</sup>.

### The rational and existential aspects of negation

While *via negationis* can be related to semantics, the "way of abstraction" rather supports an ontological dimension of the problem. Ἀφαίρεσις, P.A. Meijer establishes, treats the mental abstraction<sup>82</sup> of the ontological aspects belonging to a thing. It is a procedure used largely in the field of mathematics<sup>83</sup>, and Plotinus<sup>84</sup> bestowed to it the same status: it indicates the reverse of movement, of Pythagorean inspiration, from the solid to the point: "we abstract from the corporeal the surface, from the surface the line, from the line the point. This seems to be a Euclidean method. In ch. 6 of 9, Plotinus applies the same method, and compares the abstraction that leads to the point with the abstraction that leads to the One."<sup>85</sup>

In the passage from *Enneads* 6.7.36.6-8, Plotinus balances the term ἀφαίρεσις ("abstractions") with διδάσκουσι ("teaches us") and, according to J. Bussanich's interpretation, the Neoplatonic philosopher might have had in mind here a procedure of "rational removal of attributes from our conceptions of the God and not the full force of the negative theology"<sup>86</sup>.

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<sup>79</sup> Plotinus also uses the negative proposition called *aphairesis* to express God's grandeur. This proposition may be negative both in form and meaning ("God is not temporal"); positive in form but with a negative predicate and thus a negative meaning ("God is timeless"); or even positive in form with a seemingly positive predicate ("God is simple"), though the actual meaning of the predicate is negative ("God is not composite"). Since Plotinus also claims that God is neither good nor not-good (*Enneads* 5.5.13), presumably because God is *hyperagathon* (above the good, *Enneads* 6.9.6), these negations also signify that God transcends the categories and predicates in question." See G.P. Rocca, *Speaking the Incomprehensible God*, p. 12 sq.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. also H.A. Wolsfon, "Negative Attributes in the Church Fathers", p. 146: "...with reference to God, both Albinus and Plotinus maintain that the negation of any predicate of God doesn't mean that its opposite can be predicated of God; it rather means the exclusion of God from the universe of discourse of the predicate in question."

<sup>81</sup> See A.H. Armstrong, "The Escape of the One. An investigation of some possibilities of apophatic theology imperfectly realised in the West", in *Studia Patristica*, 13/ 1979, Akademie Verlag, p. 77-89 and Idem, "Negative Theology", in *Plotinian and Christian Studies*, Variorum Reprints, 1979, p. 176-189.

<sup>82</sup> Maybe, more adequate, it inspires the process of substracting some ontological features, in the case of a composite entity.

<sup>83</sup> Vezi J. Whittaker, "Neopythagoreanism and Negative Theology", p. 122 sq.

<sup>84</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads* 6.9.5.

<sup>85</sup> P.E. Meijer, *Plotinus on the Good or the One (Enneads VI, 9). An analytical commentary*, p. 185.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. J. Bussanich, *The One and its Relation to Intellect in Plotinus*, p. 194.

The Soul must therefore remove all forms in order to enter into contact with the Good<sup>87</sup>. This concrete movement of removal (as the detachment of all affective attachments), which is essential for the mystical life, must not be confused – in P. Hadot’s opinion – with negative theology, which would be in fact just a rational method of knowing – at least in the text given previously from Plotinus<sup>88</sup>: “The negations tell us something about the Good, but the purifications actually lead us to it.”<sup>89</sup> Hadot<sup>90</sup> operates a series of distinctions which, he claims, are necessary in this area of negative theology.

Firstly, concerning the rational method of negation, Hadot dissociates between two procedures. The first, named “the method of abstraction”, was the one that mathematicians often appealed to when they defined the point – saying that it is not extended – and the line – saying that it doesn’t have a surface etc. Implemented in the special situation of the first principle from the Platonic tradition, it wouldn’t be necessarily a specific theological method, but a rational method<sup>91</sup>.

A second method (negation), Hadot specifies, is to be discovered in Plato’s First Hypothesis of the *Parmenides*<sup>92</sup>: when we postulate that the One is one, it is impossible to speak about it, as we couldn’t apply to it any other attribute, as long as we cannot even attribute to it being. No discourse and no knowledge about it are possible. This type of negative method is to be found in Plotinus<sup>93</sup>. Hadot concedes that it depends on the reflections concerning the notion of the One, and he interprets it as “an abstract method and a rational one, which puts us into contact with the One in concrete terms”. But these rational methods shouldn’t be confused with “the activity of discarding all forms, of renouncing everything, of detaching oneself from everything, which actually leads us to the One”<sup>94</sup>; thus appear the distinctions between the rational method of negative theology and the impossibility of the verbal articulation of the mystical experience: “But it is enough if the intellect comes into contact with it; but when it has done so, while the contact lasts, it is absolutely impossible, nor has it time, to speak; but it is afterwards that it is able to reason about

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Plotinus, *Enneads* 6.7.34.29; 6.9.11.7 și 7.22.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibidem* 6.7.36.6.

<sup>89</sup> Cf. P. Hadot, “Neoplatonist Spirituality. Plotinus and Porphyry”, in A.H. Armstrong (ed.), *Classical mediterranean spirituality: Egyptian, Greek, Roman*, Crossroad, 1986, p. 247.

<sup>90</sup> See *Ibidem*, p. 247.

<sup>91</sup> “In ascending through the hierarchical levels of reality, the soul passed through the stages of spiritual progress; that is to say, it brought about a radical transformation of its whole being. (...) It is not a theoretical journey undertaken by reason alone; rather, it is a movement in consciousness, which transforms its being, and an exercise in inner unification.” See P. Hadot, “Neoplatonist Spirituality. Plotinus and Porphyry”, p. 234.

<sup>92</sup> Plato, *Parmenides* 137c-142a (*Platonis opera*, vol. 2, ed. J. Burnet, Clarendon Press at Oxford, 1967).

<sup>93</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads* 6.7.38.1; 6.9.5.30; 5.3.13.4; 5.5.10.16; 5.5.11.5; 6.8.11.5-13.

<sup>94</sup> Cf. *Ibidem* 6.9.9.51; 6.7.34.3; 6.9.7.15 and 20.

it.”<sup>95</sup> In other words, it must not be confused the impossibility of speaking about the notion of the One – if we simply postulate it as One<sup>96</sup> – with the impossibility of talking about the experience we have as a consequence of the contact with the One. In the latter case, the experience itself is something inexpressible<sup>97</sup>.

Plotinus rallies to the type of separation initiated by Plato and Aristotle, and also to the premise that knowledge and thinking are seen as preparatory steps in the process of the “direct experience of super-sensible reality”. Nonetheless, it must be emphasized that Plotinus goes further and imposes a separation between two types of mystical experience<sup>98</sup> – which corresponds to the two transcendent levels of reality: a) the mystical union with the One – which is beyond being and thinking; b) the intuitive knowledge of the intelligible realm<sup>99</sup>.

J. Bussanich<sup>100</sup> prefers a less visible way of distancing and within not so inflexible boundaries, between rational negation and spiritual or existential purification, under the circumstances in which “both are integral parts of the negative theology”. In other words “the practice of negation has profound existential implications”, as it also transpires from the conclusion of the 49.17 treatise: “How then can this happen? Take away everything! – Πῶς ἂν οὖν τοῦτο γένοιτο; Ἄφελε πάντα.”<sup>101</sup>

Deirdre Carabine<sup>102</sup> also confirms the practical dimension of ἀφάιρεσις: she will draw an intimate relation between the abandonment of multiplicity and of all human preoccupation and the dimension of rigorous purification which takes place at the level of the Intellect<sup>103</sup>.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibidem* 5.3.17.26 sq. (trans. Armstrong, vol. V, p. 133).

<sup>96</sup> The First Hypothesis of *Parmenides*.

<sup>97</sup> The nature of this type of experience escapes every concept, every direct description and so it can be rendered just in an unsatisfactory way, viz. for the mind, which is naturally inclined towards detailed descriptions. See B. Schomakers, “Knowing through Unknowing. Some Elements for a History of a Mystical Formula”, in Nancy van Deusen (ed.), *Issues in Medieval Philosophy: Essays in Honor of Richard C. Dales*, The Institute of Mediaeval Music, p. 38-39.

<sup>98</sup> See P. Hadot, “Neoplatonist Spirituality. Plotinus and Porphyry”, p. 237-239.

<sup>99</sup> Cf. J. Bussanich, “Mystical Elements in the Thought of Plotinus”, in W. Haase, H. Temporini (ed.), *Auftieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* 36, Philosophie, Wissenschaft, Technik 7, 1994, p. 5301. See also A.H. Armstrong, “Tradition, Reason and Experience in the Thought of Plotinus”, in *Plotino e il Neoplatonismo in Oriente e in Occidente*, Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1974, p. 171-194.

<sup>100</sup> See J. Bussanich, *The One and its Relation to Intellect in Plotinus*, p. 195.

<sup>101</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads* 5.3.17.37-38 (trans. Armstrong, vol. V, p. 135). Cf. *Ibidem* 3.8.10.31-32: Εἰ δὲ ἀφελῶν τὸ εἶναι λαμβάνοις, θαῦμα ἕξεις.

<sup>102</sup> See Deirdre Carabine, *The Unknown God. Negative Theology in the Platonic Tradition. Plato to Eriugena*, Peeters Press, 1995, p. 132-133.

<sup>103</sup> Deirdre Carabine argues that H.A. Wolfson’s analysis (“Albinus and Plotinus on Divine Attributes”, p. 120-121) is too preoccupied with the sphere of predication, and she doesn’t seem convinced by the supposition that Plotinus transferred the Aristotelian meaning of *aphopasis* into the account of *aphairesis*.

This type of interpretation could justify A.H. Armstrong's opinion<sup>104</sup>, when he declares that:

If one doesn't find doing negative theology a fairly agonizing business<sup>105</sup>, one is not really doing negative theology at all. (...) Doing negative theology is painful because, for anyone brought up in the Hellenic tradition of dogmatic philosophy, it involves an uprooting of one's whole thought, a radical criticism of the assumptions on which all our philosophical talk and thinking are based.

Even though, as Bussanich demonstrates, in some Plotinian texts, negation could be understood as a rational procedure, still "cutting away everything" ("Ἀφελε πάντα!) – "the most apt phrase to define Plotinus' practice of the negative theology" – "is both intellectual and existential"<sup>106</sup>. The perseverant practice of this procedure is necessary because "it is only when divine thought breaks down that the Divine Intellect and ourselves in it can find what we want. Pure thought at its highest is an everlastingly unsuccessful attempt to think the unthinkable"<sup>107</sup>.

If, for R. Mortley, "the value of the notion of abstraction is that it is at once positive and negative"<sup>108</sup>, in P.E. Meyer's opinion, "the message of the *via aphairetica* has nothing positive to bring, but it has its preparatory contribution to make in establishing what the One is and it can be part of the preparation of the soul to empty it in order to wait for the arrival of the One"<sup>109</sup>. Nonetheless, it is our opinion that if we take into account the close relationship between *aphairesis* and *katharsis* in Plotinus, its positive and transforming effect on the soul engaged on the way towards the One is irrefutable.

<sup>104</sup> A.H. Armstrong, "Negative Theology", p. 184.

<sup>105</sup> Cf. also K. Corrigan, "Solitary Mysticism in Plotinus Proclus, Gregory of Nyssa and Pseudo-Dionysius", in *Journal of Religion*, nr. 1/ 1996, p. 33: "Stripping to a new radical nakedness (cf. 1.6.7) or cutting away everything (cf. 5.3.17) is a precondition of the ascent to union, and that ascent is painful, laborious, even terrifying (cf. 6.9.3.4 sq.)". P.E. Meijer doesn't understand why in Plotinus the *theologia negativa* would be in any respect "painful" as A.H. Armstrong contends ("Negative Theology", p. 184), supported by J. Bussanich (*The One and its Relation to Intellect in Plotinus*, p. 195): "a fairly agonizing business". "Negation doesn't hurt; although the *via aphaeretica* is not so easy, removal of attributes from our conceptions is more of a personal activity, but ultimately rather harmless." See P.E. Meijer (*Plotinus on the Good or the One (Enneads VI, 9). An analytical commentary*, p. 189, n. 547). What P.E. Meijer seems to ignore is exactly the effort on behalf of the one who engages on his way to the One to purify, to remove all layers overlapping the soul, which meddle with the direct view of the pure light, which is the One.

<sup>106</sup> Cf. J. Bussanich, *The One and its Relation to Intellect in Plotinus*, p. 145 *passim*. P.E. Meijer (*Plotinus on the Good or the One (Enneads VI, 9). An analytical commentary*, p. 189, n. 548) finds improper the expression "Ἀφελε πάντα" to designate the negative theology: "It certainly has to do with discarding all forms, but to call this 'existential' is not very illuminating." Passing over the existential dimension of negation, P.E. Meijer places itself into opposition with the sharp tone of P. Hadot ("Neoplatonist Spirituality. Plotinus and Porphyry", p. 247).

<sup>107</sup> A.H. Armstrong, "The Escape of the One", p. 81.

<sup>108</sup> R. Mortley, "Negative Theology and Abstraction in Plotinus", p. 376.

<sup>109</sup> P.E. Meijer, *Plotinus on the Good or the One (Enneads VI, 9). An analytical commentary*, p. 189.

Abstraction is not the highest form of intellection – which involves seeing all things at the one time and as a whole – but it is a route to the highest form of contemplation<sup>110</sup>. Plotinus adopts the idea that the One can be made close just if the aspirants become one – as much as it is possible, in soul and conscience – and ἀφαιρέσις is exactly the mechanism through which unity is created: it can be reclaimed as a preparation – necessary, but not sufficient or identical with the absorption by and the experience of the One<sup>111</sup>. While only the “way of abstraction” seems to play a positive role within the ascending itinerary of the soul towards the One, the other methods can hardly claim such a pretense. If on the “way of abstraction” it is prepared the road for the knowledge of the One, “the way of analogy”, “the way of knowledge through the inferior” and “the way of eminence” have just the privilege of furnishing us a certain teaching about the One<sup>112</sup>. *Via per analogiam*, *via per inferiora* and *via per eminentiam* can bring us nearer to the One, but ultimately, neither them, nor even *via aphairctica* can offer us the “ultimate contact with the One”. Plotinus clearly expresses this point: “We are taught (μάθημα, μαθεῖν, διδάσκουσι)<sup>113</sup> about it by ἀναλογία and ἀφαιρέσεις and knowledge of the things which come from it and certain methods of ascent by degrees<sup>114</sup>, but the ascension towards the One goes on another coordinates<sup>115</sup>: “but we are put on the way to it by purifications (καθάρσεις) and virtues and adorning and by gaining footholds in the intelligible and settling ourselves firmly there and feasting on its contents”<sup>116</sup>.

In the end, the noetic vision will be the one to lead us in the proximity of the One. But this vision also leaves an emptiness which must be surpassed: it is necessary the complete union<sup>117</sup>.

## Conclusions

In Plotinus, negative theology and the problem of the conceptualization of the One through abstraction are epistemological problems, while privation works on an ontological ground. Plotinus will outline *aphairesis* within traditional abstractive

<sup>110</sup> R. Mortley, *The Way of Negation*, p. 59.

<sup>111</sup> See B. Schomakers, “Knowing through Unknowing”, p. 39.

<sup>112</sup> Cf. P.E. Meijer, *Plotinus on the Good*, p. 190.

<sup>113</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads* 6.7.36.5-6. Cf. R. Mortley, “Negative theology and Abstraction in Plotinus”, p. 376.

<sup>114</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads* 6.7.36.6-8 (trans. Armstrong, vol. VII, p. 199).

<sup>115</sup> This clear distinction between the knowledge about the One and the progress towards it through moral purification and noetic experience is emphasized by A.H. Armstrong, “Tradition, Reason and Experience in the Thought of Plotinus”, p. 182-183.

<sup>116</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads* 6.7.36.6-10 (trans. Armstrong, vol. VII, p. 199).

<sup>117</sup> Cf. P.E. Meijer, *Plotinus on the Good or the One (Enneads VI, 9). An analytical commentary*, p. 189.

boundaries: it rather refers to an act of purification than to a simple act of negation. Abstraction implies the abandonment of one notion for a more subtle one: it marks an ascension, a step forward.

In Plotinus' thought, the use of negation must be perceived: a) within the sphere of explanation or argumentation and b) within the field of the mystical union of the soul with the One.

Negative theology can be efficient as the vehicle of the soul towards the mystical union with the One provided it transports the soul not only beyond reason, but also beyond intellection – which is itself a form of mystical knowledge.

All positive and negative discourse regarding the One ultimately operates in order to raise the soul to the state of mystical contact with the One. In this broader sense, the apophatic discourse possesses an explicative function, finally indicating the direction of the ascension towards the mystical union with the One.

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