

**FROM REASON TO RATIONALITY****Bogdan Popoveniuc**

**Resumé.** La philosophie roumaine a discuté beaucoup sur le rapport entre la raison et la rationalité.

Cette fois, on propose une analyse, qui, se revendiquant du concept de l'universalité non-générique constate qu'on peut parler d'une réorientation des préoccupations ontologiques contemporaines, vers la rationalité, qui, par sa nature, reste toujours plurale.

The contemporary world is confronted with an unprecedentedly intense phenomenon, that of globalization. The key element of this process is represented by the economic globalization closely followed by the political one. In spite of numerous criticisms, these two types of globalization seem to be the natural outcome brought about by the degree of development of human societies. Nevertheless, one cannot say the same thing about cultural globalization. The foretelling multi-culturalism proves to be rather a cultural "clash" than inter-culturalism, which is highly unexpected when thinking that globalization is orchestrated by the authoritarian Euro-Atlantic "rational" culture. Can the tension presently encountered at the cultural borders be the result of the fundamental incompatibility between cultures or is the conductor of this overture, the Euro-Atlantic culture, the one who facing a crisis? The champion of cultural development seems to have reached a

crossroad. Organizational ways and principles of the Euro-Atlantic civilisation, the paradigm on which it is founded, those leading to the system which ensured its preeminence in the relation with the other cultures, the market economy and the liberal democracy, seem to fail in their attempt of meeting the demands of their beneficiary. In the present article we are trying to show how the very principle of rationalism, which has ensured the evolution of the Euro-Atlantic society since the beginnings of the modern era, is the one that has caused the contemporary's man alienation from himself.

Our contemporary society paradigm which derives from the Euro-Atlantic culture constitutes a system within which three *ultimate* subsystems, each of them based on a rational efficiency structure: *the economy*, the subsystem producing goods which deal with people's needs, is based on the *production technique* which intensifies the outcome of human energy consumption; *the politics* is the one that provides the fundamental options with a sense of legitimacy; it is within the politics that *the administration* efficiently organizes the activities of the community; finally, *the spiritual culture* generates the grounds indispensable for the functioning of institutions as its assessment criteria are triggered by a *rationality* principle.<sup>1</sup>

There are countless theories that criticize these subsystems, among which the most severe is the one stating that since the way these subsystems are structured and works, they lead to the dehumanization of the human being. But Culture, Politics or Economy are neither good nor bad in themselves in the same way as the means chosen for their

## FROM REASON TO RATIONALITY

functioning - such as the reason, the administration or the technique - are neither good nor bad. They are creations deriving from the necessity of satisfying the even more numerous needs of human communities in the most efficient way. Since they have been created by man, they are human. Turning them into fetishes would be bad. A grave error is their autonomy concerning their creators who are at the same time their beneficiaries. This error was possible due to the attitude towards the rational structure that is the fundament of culture, economy and political system of the Euro-Atlantic civilization.

The modern period is the starting point of reason's interference into the structure of these subsystems. The economy is the frame within which biological and security needs are satisfied and the technique represents the means through which this is successfully done. Nevertheless, the very "concept of technical reason seems to be an ideology itself. Not only its administration but also the technique in itself stand for dominion (over nature and man), a systematic, scientific, calculated and subject to calculation dominion".<sup>ii</sup>

Following the same pattern, the political system is the frame within which the large human communities satisfy the social needs of its members and the administrative system stands for the means through which the political system can be co-ordinated and rendered effective. The modern national state "is unable of functioning unless it organizes a homogeneous multitude of identical objects - the citizens - whom it also has to produce through its institutions starting from the educational system and ending with the compulsory military probation."<sup>iii</sup>

Culture is the one that meets the aesthetic and cognitive superior needs of human communities and reason serves only as a means of reaching them. But in the European culture reason has become the very cultural ideal.

The universal validity of the European cultural system is only apparently guaranteed by the universality of reason, thus illusory since it is just one of the genuine forms of civilisation. However, rationality has become a way of life in Europe. "The rational animal" has succeeded in dominating man. The European paradigm was masterly expressed by Hegel: "everything that is Real is Rational and everything that is Rational is Real." These words express nothing but the hegemony it has acquired within culture. As King Midas, it turns everything within its reach into its truthful image and so, the culture that had been created to be it became inappropriate for living humans.

Consequently, this paradigm, disregarding man as a biological, social and cultural whole, which doesn't match it, begins to encounter difficulties following its glorious period. The human nature opposes "Procust's rational Bed" and civilisation enters in a critical era. The crisis of contemporary civilization may be described with the assistance of the following concepts<sup>iv</sup>: the *economic* crisis - that of public finances, the loss of balance between public poverty and private wealth, between well-off classes and the pauper ones - emphasized by the *technological* crisis which is determined mostly by its ecological effects - their efficiency being almost always in an inverse proportional ratio with the damage caused by the environment; the crisis of the political system *legitimacy* -underlined by the difficulty of the liberal democracy classical methods in justifying it as an important

## FROM REASON TO RATIONALITY

ingredient in the public institutions functioning within the context of globalization. The *administrative* crisis accompanies it, represented by the impossibility of peaceful and unitary organisation of world conflicts; the cultural *creativity* crisis is determined by the pre-eminence of consumption societies; the *identity* crisis is found in the fact that our personality as "world citizens" is far from being accomplished - *motivational* crisis is caused by the inability of so-called universal systems of replacing the old traditional systems. One can notice that the origin of Euro-Atlantic society "crisis" can be traced back to the *reason* crisis which is incapable of being more than it is now: an instrument. "When the idea of reason was developed it was supposed to be capable not only of regulating the connection between means and purpose but also as an instrument in understanding the purpose and determining it."<sup>v</sup> And it is not only about a crisis of understanding reason, as Husserl would have liked, but mostly of reading too much into the role of reason within the context of perceiving man as a biological, social and cultural identity. Bergson was right when he defined man as *homo faber*. Man not only made tools and tools for making tools but it also turned reason into a tool. Moreover, he came to the belief that reason was valuable in itself independently of its characteristic of being one of man's quality.

Rationalism was accused of<sup>vi</sup>: being incapable of reaching the uniqueness of the individual due to the rational universality the way of approaching reality has in view; failing to incorporate elements of reality anywhere but its own system - it can refer only to the whole, the general and not to the particular, the non-generic; offering only probable

predictions, poor from the perspective of the same reason which wants universality and accurate reference; impossibility to determine itself as the first premises of every reasoning cannot have a logical reason, thus every belief is irrational; escaping the evaluation of rival concepts compatible with any datum that may be available at that moment (Popper, Feyerabend); having as foundation of any science "absolute suppositions" or paradigms that cannot be analysed or compared (Collingwood, Kuhn); the process of thinking and the action are based in fact on unconscious entities such as will (Schopenhauer, Nietzsche) or the unconsciousness (Freud); the values and the purposes cannot be rationally valid (Hume); there is not only one discourse universe (Wittgenstein); the principles of verbal language are inaccessible to the consciousness (Chomsky); every language determines its own vision (Whorf, Sapir); the interrelated unity of ideas prevents correcting an error in any other way than randomly (Duhem); by nature values are incapable of subjecting themselves to evaluation (Berlin); the complexity and rapid changes within modern societies, the measurement of purposes and values does not allow "learning through experience" (Gellner); the continuity and the subtlety of societies and traditions are only accessible to those persons belonging to them (Oakeshott).

We can observe that the main argument that underlies this accusation list is that the reason claims a hegemonic and privileged position of unique designer and judge of the meanings of the human beings. But man cannot be reduced to reason alone. Man also belongs to the spheres of feeling and sociality, and reason has to gather in its essence the other sides of the human being - the uniqueness

## FROM REASON TO RATIONALITY

of the biologic and the community of the social. That is why it would be more appropriate to talk about rationality and not about reason. Rationality must be seen as the individual's ability of being aware of the purpose of the existence in such a way that it could be communicated to the others. We need a rationality which is alive, which surpasses the polarity of the categories and which is not opposed in its essence to the other characteristics of the human being.

It is difficult to (rationally!) acknowledge man's multiple unicity. However, "the self-criticism"<sup>vii</sup> 6 of the Euro-Atlantic culture proves that man is aware of his non-unitary and unique nature. This already shows that the crisis can be surpassed since identifying your limitations means going beyond them (Hegel). Subjectivity needs to be re-subjectivized (Heidegger), to be re-situating in relation to the world. We also need to re-instate the modern individual in his original position of biological, social and cultural unity aware in the world and we need to re-think, started for here, our social and cultural identities. But this re-evaluation must be achieved starting from rationality and not from reason, as man's unity is not generic. The fundamental heterogeneity of the biologic, of the social and of the cultural does not permit access to man's integration from one perspective alone, as Europe has attempted, that of rationality. And without understanding ourselves, that is without acknowledging our own identity, it is less likely to achieve a good comprehension of what belongs to the self, the social and cultural identities. Neither the paradigm of understanding the whole through its parts nor that of seeing the parts by means of the whole is capable of rendering a complete image of man's *multiple unity*, as both of them are limiting. Man is not

sensitivity alone, as Hume would have believed, he is not only reason, as the rationalists claimed, and he is not only a "social animal," as Aristotle thought, but all three together, a non-generic unity, and that is why it cannot be reached only by means of reason. The question about the human essence must be asked from a more complex point of view. What is left out is the fact that the *scarcity of the questioning* does not come from a so-called objective indisposition of learning from what is being questioned but exactly from the much too emphasized unique readiness of learning in only one way, that is rationally and objectively.



## FROM REASON TO RATIONALITY

## NOTES

---

<sup>i</sup> It is not so much about the fact that we live in a culture triggered by the principle of rationality but of that Illuminist thought according to which, as J. Habermas proved, the European Reason would include in itself the Will of Reason.

<sup>ii</sup> Marcuse H. *Scieri Jilosoifice*, (*Philosophical Writings*). Bucharest: Politics Publishing House, 1977, P. 282.

<sup>iii</sup> See: (*Probleme de legitimitare in capitalismul tarziu*) *Problems in the Legitimty of Late Capitalism* in: Habermas J. Probleme de legitimitare in capitalismul tarziu (*Knowledge and Communication*) Bucharest: Politics Publishing House, 1983; Marga A. *Filosofia unificarii europene* (Philosophy of European Unification). Cluj: Apostrof Publishing House, 1995 (in the chapter "Crisis of European Philosophy").

<sup>iv</sup> Antohi S. Foreword at Michel Foucault. *A supraveghea si a pedepsi* (*To Survey and Punishing*). Bucharest: Humanitas, 1997. P. 16.

<sup>v</sup> Horkheimer M. *Zur Kritik der instrumentation Vernunft*. Frankfurt am Main, 1974. P.21.

<sup>vi</sup> Geller E. *Rafiune si cultura* (*Reason and Culture*). Iasi: European Institute Publishing House, 2001. Pp. 186-189.

<sup>vii</sup> Morin E. *Penser l'Europe*. Paris, 1987. (translated into English *Concepts of Europe*), Holmes and Meier, 1991.