

THE HERMENEUTICS OF THE CONCEPTS: PHILOSOPHICAL, THEOLOGICAL AND PHILOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

WHY DIDN'T CONSTANTIN NOICA WRITE A GUIDEBOOK FOR THE YOUNG PEOPLE

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Abstract: Despite the fact that the Romanian philosopher Constantin Noica wanted, his entire life, to write something similar to a philosophical guide for the young people, his desire was never put into practice. The present study presents the particular causes of this strange fact, and, especially, whether this intention could have been possible, considering the biography and the philosophy of Noica.

Keywords: guide, young people, philosophy, biography, books.

In the last years of his life, Constantin Noica was obsessed with the idea of a philosophy designed exclusively for the young people. His late writings depict such an interest preponderantly. *I receive the visit of a young man who asks me: why don't you write a guidebook for the young people? I don't know*, answers Noica, *maybe because I gave too much advice that wasn't considered, the same as you wouldn't do it either*. Beyond the frankness of the answer, and the lack of such a commitment, the recording of this theme shows, first of all, sensitivity on addressing the issue.

The reason invoked there was, nonetheless, that of the real disappointment: what if such a guidebook, regarded, at first, from the perspective of the occasional advice, would not be taken into account, as such a guidebook ought to be, when written and arranged under the strict form of a logical and coherent material, a system of discipline and coercive order that any *guidebook* needs to provide? What would, then, be the purpose of such effort? For whom, or, better said, to whom would it be useful, if nobody was to follow the recommendations from it? Consequently, better not do it!, this is the conclusion of Noica, as confronted with the imperious request.

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Thus, does this answer truly represent his last thought? Did Noica really believe that such a guidebook was useless indeed and effort consuming in vain, due to the fact that his first reactions indicated towards pointlessness? Then, perhaps, in the contingency of those meetings and the afferent feelings, his answer was a sincere one: he was sceptical on addressing the usefulness of such creation. Only that such an answer could not represent his definitive belief. Noica was not indifferent to the education of young people and their attracting towards philosophy. He might have been disappointed with the attitude of the young, but not with the idea: such a guidebook, beyond a young person or another, maybe an entire generation, or even an era, had a purpose: the vocation of philosophy was that to constitute itself into pedagogy. Thus, it was not the pedagogy the last resort of the summons, but philosophy itself. It was the history of philosophy that pleaded for it, and Noica knew this better.

The first sign of commitment to such a direction was the choosing of words themselves. Noica expressed his preference clearly: a guidebook, not a textbook. The word guidebook (*îndrumar*) is an obsolete word in Romanian. In those years of end of a century and millennium, in the world of the Romanian lexis, the word was not worth it much. There were not many struggling to use it and there were even fewer trying to put it in the column of an atemporal pedagogical preference. Only Noica, with his remarkable sensitivity for the archaic and profound background of the Romanian language, did confer it signification. It was already representing the first attempt to start building his work. Such an endeavour ought to begin with the word itself: *îndrumar*. All the other words were left behind, the new-appeared lexis was ignored, and, from somewhere far behind, from the buried past of the language, a forgotten ancestral word would emerge. *Îndrumar*, the term preferred by the philosopher, emerged in front of all the other new ones.

But what is a *guidebook* after all, and what does it hold remarkable, and what do all the other, more alive words, which are present in the immediate language, lack? Firstly, there is the linguistic glow of a word that has shone his passage through history. Then, it is the preference for obsolescence itself, for the difference that confers style to a certain thing. And finally, owing to all the above mentioned, the construction of the idea itself. Certainly, the idea exposed, due to the difference, by guidebook (*îndrumar*), represents the ultimate word.

Thus, **what is a guidebook?** It is a textbook, not already formulated and at everyone's knowledge disposal. A guidebook does not oblige to anything. It is just a set of directions. The etymology shows its richness: it guides you on the way of any endeavour, the guide shows a route, path... It does not contain anything on addressing an epistemology of science, it offers neither science, nor knowledge, it represents the positioning on the path to, that leads towards... Nothing more than this!

Noica resented the idea of learning, of knowledge sealed by the seal of truth. *I dream of a school in which there is no teaching, none at all. In which to live peacefully and appropriately, on the outskirts of a city, and the young people, few*

young people of the world, to come there in order to free themselves from the tyranny of teaching. Because everything and everyone want to teach us something.¹ A page further reads: *The thought of the School, in which nothing is taught, obsesses me. States of mind, this is what we need to share: no contents, no advice, no teachings. That is why no one should preach. Not even to someone who requires them specifically, you shall not teach. /.../ The young people see you formulate an idea and they immediately formulate one themselves. I think this is what school should be made like*². In the same space of the two notes, in successive order, there are other few, on the identical subject: the young people. *The disciple comes to ask for your advice. It is your duty to tell them they have nothing to receive.*³ *The philosophical journal* approaches mainly the present subject. The end of the first *Journal* is eloquent from this point of view: *School. This school. I do not know if I will ever create it. But I would rejoice greatly if, at the end of my life, I could say: I did nothing else but this*⁴. A truly premonitory noting. His late thoughts lead him towards the same idea. Nonetheless, he confesses it in the other *journal*, the end of thought one⁵.

The school, the young people, the type of teaching...are among his obsessively met themes, and the confirmation for this subject, seizing him completely, comes from his last confession: *I look through the entire Journal again. What does it contain, after all? Only two approaches, two proper myths: the myth of the School and the myth of the (spendthrift) Brother.*

Thus, these two myths, which is actually just one: the young person and their avatars at the beginning of their lives. Because the parable of the lost son from the *Gospels* is precisely the story of a young man. And Noica was nonetheless intuitively intending to encompass, in his idea of School, the manner in which the destiny of the broken son could be avoided, his salvation from the mistake, because the *Gospel* depicts only the embellished version of the one saved from perdition. The story of the son, who, once left in the wide world, loses the chance to come back, forever wandering through the shadows of this, and probably the-other-side world, remains untold.

Noica, instinctively, through his obsession of school, was trying nothing more than a salvation guide.

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Why didn't he provide it? Evidently, not all his precautions from the *Journal* must be considered valid. Many of them should not be analysed *mot a mot*. The stylistic seduction sometimes moved in front of the idea. Consequently, the care of the interpreter is represented, presently, by the distinction made between the style and idea.

¹ Constantin Noica, *Jurnal filosofic*, Humanitas, 1990, p. 7.

² *Ibidem*, p. 9.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 8.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 124.

⁵ Constantin Noica, *Jurnal de idei*, Humanitas, 1990.

Why, on such a long time interval, between the first and the last *Journal*, didn't he find the opportunity to draft such a *guidebook* rigorously, or such a school that would free, once for all, the young man from the incidence of the lost son destiny, the son who lacked the chance and the fortune of salvation?

II

Why didn't Noica write the guidebook or create the school that he imagined? Indeed, if studying his work, one cannot find a piece of evidence that would approach the subject. There is not an expressed pedagogy, a minister curriculum or some specific textbooks. Nothing, nothing at all related to these...

Yet, attention should be paid, for the beginning, to the manner the idea is formulated. He always says: a *different* school, a *different* method, *different* pedagogy. Why would he insist on different? Why not *similar*? What was Noica's dissatisfaction on addressing the educational curriculum of the time that would determine him to dream another one, which he desired to be nothing but *different*?

It is obvious that, for such dissatisfaction, there could be found precedents. The most famous example is that of Descartes, to whom, in the same period, Noica dedicates an admirable monograph and two translations⁶. As one can remember from the introduction of *The Discourse on Method*, Descartes starts from the condition of dissatisfaction on addressing the pedagogical order of his time: everywhere there was *nothing not being under discussion, and under the doubt*.⁷ The consequence, in the case of Descartes, is: the founding of the modern rationalism, the discovery of the method, **the debut of the modernity itself has as a starting point this pedagogical refusal**: the dissatisfaction regarding the school of that time, the subject matters, the teaching ways, the results. The gesture of Noica reconsiders, three centuries later, the same scheme of the refusal: **the pedagogical dissatisfaction**.

Nevertheless, the difference is that: whereas Descartes, establishing firmly the starting point, commences on a new road and founds everything: by elaborating treaties of theology, philosophy, physics, mathematics and astronomy, in which all were approached and solved differently, Noica does nothing similar. He does not write another philosophy that would be different from the previous ones, neither a different physics, not metaphysics, nor theology. Then, where is his dissatisfaction continued? Within a simple revolt, recorded stylistically, and enclosed on the pages of a juvenile diary?

⁶ Constantin Noica, *Descartes, Două tratate filosofice*, Bucharest, Humanitas Publishing, 1992.

⁷ Descartes, *Discurs asupra metodei*, Bucharest, Scientific Publishing, 1957, p. 38.

III

Skimming through the work of Noica can prove to be an instructive effort, for solving the present problem.

In 1936, Noica writes *Open concepts in the history of philosophy in Descartes, Leibniz and Kant*, probably his most strange book. He says *concepts*, therefore the plural, leaving for interpretation the idea that he would regard, through a certain perspective, several concepts, met at the mentioned philosophers. Yet, he follows just one concept, *mathesis universalis* approached by the three philosophers. They were all interested, up to the point of identifying their own thinking, in such a concept: of the universal knowledge, of omniscience.

The particularity that assures the originality of Noica, along with his infidelity, resorts from the fact that, while Descartes, Leibniz and Kant provides this omniscience, *mathesis universalis*, the characters of a veritable concept, Noica struggles for extracting the omniscience from these characters. As any other concept, the present one is subjected to the closure of its determinations. The excellence of the concept is constituted by the fact that it ordines mentally the universal features of the empirical things⁸. Thus, a double closure takes place, within the concept. Without the operated closing, its emergence and utility are improbable⁹.

It is difficult to see what generated, in Noica's manner of thinking, such a digression from the logical canon. What was the thing that he was able to prevail himself of, so that he would be exposed to an excessive extravagance that would expose himself, in the end, to criticism, most of the time not justified. And, nonetheless, which is the use of a concept extracted from the closed notions that define it, and drifted into a variedly expressed openness?

The first result is obvious: the cancellation of the concept omniscience and its opening, in the perspective of accumulation and renewal. But the risk is also present: once the concept opened, the sum of the features that transform it into something stable is lost in favour of instability. The intention of Noica is also clear: the preserving of the concept acquisitions, and the disclaiming of any type of risk. The question that arises is whether such a thing is possible.

Yet, in our study, we are not interested in the risks triggered by the renouncing to logic and the keeping of the benefits, if this is possible. Nevertheless, it needs to be remembered the reason behind such an operation that can prove itself risky: the preoccupation for the idea of opening.

⁸ Dominique Lecourt (coordinator), *Dicționar de istoria și filosofia științelor*, Iași, Polirom Publishing, 2005, pp. 342–346.

⁹ Cf. Aristotel, *Organon*.

IV

This is the period when Noica translates from Descartes an even more consonant work with his project of the school. In 1935, it is published, in translation, *Rules of Guiding the Mind*, immediately accompanied, two years later, by an admirable monograph of Descartes, *Life and Philosophy of Descartes*, which is rather a work describing a searching Descartes, and, still in 1937, the translation of the major work of Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Maybe, the later one, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, was not in itself the interest of Noica, but its characters on the opening were. Indeed, in that era, once published, the *Meditations*, were followed by an avalanche of objections and, without discernment, of accusations. A historic proof is represented by the fact that Descartes answered to all of these, signalling through the opened dialogue that the problems and the solutions are not followed by silence, by the closing within the harsh walls of the concept captivity. Such a possibility of escape was what Noica was interested in. It ought to be noticed: he succeeded!

V

In 1969, five years after the releasing from detention, Noica continues his journey on inserting the pedagogy into reality. Now, it is published *Twenty-seven Levels of the Real*. The idea of the book is as simple as it can be: the real does not stop on any of its level of evolution: physical, chemical, spiritual biological. Not even in the last one, once with the acquisition of what seems to be the last level, there is no stopping. Once the spirit appears, it opens in the infant of its achievements, either religions, or philosophy, or arts.

In 1970, it is published *The Romanian Philosophical Utterance*, an inventory as an experiment of preparing the Romanian language for thinking and philosophy. A lot of words – the manner Noica chose them is unknown – illustrate such a possibility: *the self and the ego, the inside, the passage, the passing, the inward nature and the being, the mind and the mindless*, and many others.

In 1980, it is published *Narrations on Man*, retold after Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The accent falls not on the content of Hegel's *Phenomenology*, but on the fact of being told, extracted from its limitations and given to the world. It is, probably, from the stylistic point of view, the most successful work of Noica. It is, most certainly, the most beautiful from the entire Romanian philosophy.

Finally, in 1981, it is published his most important work, *Becoming into Being*, with an accent on the becoming, and less on the being. After he had denounced the time as being the most difficult problem for the philosophy, its curse of not being able to think of the being but only in connection with the time (Heidegger), Noica imagined that he managed to get the reward for saving the being from such a curse.

Yet, his acquisition is not the immobile being of Parmenide, identical with oneself in everything and, therefore, intangible, but the mobile being, in process of becoming and describing perfectly the way in which the things and the world functions, and especially the man. The being is the threefold unit of individuality, determinations, general.

Thus, everywhere, at Noica, there is the preoccupation for school, opening of the concept, becoming of the real, narrating as pedagogical and artistic act, becoming as becoming. All these serve, on different stages, which are ordered more or less ascendingly, to a lexis of the becoming, retrojection of the education and training: a philosophy that can be reverted and established as pedagogy in one of the most surprising means.

Evidently, all these works do not represent a firm and clear answer for the dissatisfaction on principle. From the assumed point of view, they are neither equivalents to the answer of Descartes to the same problem. Nonetheless, they represent everything that can be expressed. This partiality of the answer from the work is the impetus of going further.

Thus: how can such a procedure be convincing: to look for the traces or the fulfilment of a project into a work that is subordinated only in the subjective manner of the interpreter? And here we have the biography of Noica.

VI

*I do not have a biography. I have only books*¹⁰, was the confession of Noica. Which is not precisely true. Not everything that happened in the life of the philosopher can be reduced to books. And the books did not overwhelm him as the elements of nature, as the meteorology that he constantly incriminated. His books are the result of such a will that cannot be external to his biography. He had his books, wished them, wrote them, and, moreover, vowed before them with his will. And his determination cannot be excluded from his biography and introduced in the transcendent file of the books.

Yet, beyond the debatable fact of excluding the books from his biography, not everything that is registered during his life can be reduced to books. One of the facts is that he adhered to the Iron Guard ideology, for example. And this episode presents biographical evidence, it is not related to the books. His intense participation, in writing, to that ideology, is not reduced to a book, to the written text, to a newspaper article.

The participation of Noica to the legionary ideology cannot be distributed just to the exclusive character from the *books*. His opinions on addressing a fervent desire of changing the history represents, rather than the character of a book, his wish of involving himself biographically into history. The participation to an

¹⁰ Gabriel Liiceanu, *Jurnalul de la Păltiniș*, Bucharest, Cartea Românească Publishing, 1983, p. 14.

ideology signifies, regardless the subject and the ideology, the participation to history, that is, the political life of that present period, and its pedagogical dynamic.

It has been too little reflection on the profound implication of Noica to the legionary ideology. The episode has been regarded through the insinuating perspective that it was nothing but a passing mistake, neglecting contingency of a youth spirit. What if it was not such a severe fault or an equally grave pedagogical error?

Is ideology totally strange to pedagogy? It is definitely not, and a research on this respect must open the interpretation towards the understanding of ideology as historical pedagogy, a pedagogy in which the subject is not the young person anymore, but the history, in the broadest regard. This way, ideology becomes historical pedagogy. It is almost what the philosophers did when they understood history through the uneducated subject.

VII

The second significant fact from Noica's biography, after the legionary episode, was prison. Immediately after the war, not even a decade later, Noica was arrested. The content of his years of detention is the subject of his book *Pray for Brother Alexander*. It is the strange story that determines Gabriel Liiceanu to think, not without a good reason, that Noica did not know how to narrate his life, because, when he did, he ended praising the torturers. It might be possible.

The profound reason of the treatment that Noica applies to his biography is the separation of pedagogy from ideology. His years of detention did not represent, for Noica, the object of an intention to narrate historically, in which the facts to be positioned in exact identities. Such an approach was not his preoccupation, and, one may conclude, not the philosopher's either. From here emerged all the criticism, rather entitled, due to the fact that the expectations were addressing historical truth. Nonetheless, Noica did not intend the narration of such a truth. It was not his concern.

Then, what was his concern? It was that of the philosopher. His book starts and ends with the advice: Prey!, that is, a **pedagogy**.

VIII

Further on, on the path of constituting and reconstituting the biography of Noica, within the landmarks of the repudiated biography, and not the books, we can witness the episode of his reclusion, in the middle of the seventh decade, after his retiring from the Institute of Philosophy and Logics within the Romanian Academy (an episode that, briefly put, belongs to his biography too, to the participation to the institutional and social life of the city).

After his retirement, although married and with the residence in Bucharest, Noica retreats to Păltiniș. Why did he do it? There is no answer that the biographers can provide. Did he do it in order to write his work in peace? But then,

how much noise could the Bucharest of those years produce, frozen in the patriarchal canon of the communism, that would impede somebody from focusing on a great idea? Such a Bucharest, for an average intellectual westerner, would have been, undoubtedly, a paradise of serenity.

How can we explain the reclusion of Noica? From the demonstrative point of view? To demonstrate what, then? Old ways of living and writing works within such environments? The need of his own nature?

It was just a biographical option. Despite his refusal of a biography, it followed him his entire life.

IX

In his late years of his life, from the position of ascetic of his life, he wanders through the country in search of young performant people that would carry on the Romanian culture. On the other side, he was certain that, statistically, in a country with twenty-two million dwellers, there was a genius in one million. Twenty-two million dwellers would mean twenty-two genii. But these needed to be educated, and needed to be told what to do and what not to do. They needed pedagogy. And he was the pedagogue.

He starts wandering through the counties trying to convince the local authorities to make room for one or two promising young people, future genii. He did not ask for much. A quite position, modestly paid, and the work of the genius would show result. They were to enjoy a heaven of genii that the world would admire.

It does not matter that his work of genius exploration did not yield results. Almost nobody listened to him. The birth of the genii was delayed, and his pedagogy was not settled. What is amazing, in this pedagogical endeavour, is the effort of searching, the desire to train the youth, to help them, strongly believing that only they could save and expose the geniality of a nation.

Consequently, the last biographical effort is the pure search for the young people, the last pedagogical act. Freed from ideology, which was generally looking for education in history, Noica ends by looking for the individuals. His pedagogy moves to a new stage: from the general of the history, to the concrete individual.

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The biography of Noica, under the circumstances of its reconstruction, is a biography circumscribed to the pedagogical ideal.

*(From printing space reasons, the second part of this study, **Philosophy for the young people – a transcendental vision**, had to be put aside. It is to be published in the next issue of the current magazine).*