

HARMONIZING THE MAN WITH THE EXISTENCE IN NAE IONESCU'S VIEW

Mihai POPA*

Abstract: For Nae Ionescu, Romanian philosopher, logician and metaphysician, the problem of transcendence (the metaphysical issue) arises when man fails the connection with eternity and relapses into existence – in fact, he is heading for death. In his view, metaphysics is man's preoccupation with harmonizing with the existence when he has failed salvation. The Romanian thinker states that for man there is only one way to access the fullness of being, when alive, after having lived all possible experience: giving to the community in which one lives, and through this, restoring the communion with God. From the moment he wanted to know, the man differentiated himself from Creation. Moreover, knowledge has made man alone in the universe, made him believe that he can establish a new order, of his own, different and opposite to that of God. Knowledge is man's tendency to grasp existence in a logical concept or formula. Transcendence, however, cannot be seized normally through rational methods. It must be lived. Any system of metaphysics, says Nae Ionescu, is a lyrical offering, when man is pushed to the extreme limits of existence. The problem of metaphysics is an anthropological problem.

Keywords: being, harmonizing with the existence, knowledge, self-human-community, to devote oneself to something else.

Nae Ionescu (1890–1940), professor of philosophy at the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy of the University of Bucharest, taught courses in logic, the history of logic and of metaphysics, but also in the philosophy of religion.

Although he did not publish specialized studies, he was very active as a journalist, collaborating in the cultural magazines of the time, in which he supported or developed certain topics of his courses, sometimes in a polemical tone. Original and inconvenient for his discussion partners, as a teacher he managed to attract to his courses students from various fields, not only those from Philosophy or Letters. Many of them later became close collaborators, developing his ideas and suggestions, including metaphysical ones, as well as the paideic model, through which he distinguished himself. Known at that time as a very special personality, logician (his doctoral thesis, *Die Logistik als Versuch einer neuen Begründung der*

* 3rd Degree Scientific Researcher, PhD., “Constantin Rădulescu-Motru” Institute of Philosophy and Psychology of the Romanian Academy; E-mail: mihai.popa@institutuldefilosofie.ro

Mathematik was defended in Munich in 1919), Nae Ionescu also created a system of metaphysics. This has remained for more than fifty years less known, as he himself was not concerned with its publishing. In 1942 *Metafizica I. Teoria cunoștinței metafizice. I. Cunoașterea imediată (Metaphysics I. The Theory of Metaphysical Knowledge)* was issued, edited by his former students. Besides this, it should be mentioned the course of metaphysics held between 1936 and 1937¹, which was published only in 1999. Yet, according to the same former students who contributed to editing the professor's work, besides that published in 1942, before the course in 1936–1937, the other two should have been published: *Teoria cunoștinței metafizice (1929–1930) (The Theory of Metaphysical Knowledge)*, dedicated to the mediated knowledge, and that in 1930–1931, about the history of metaphysics. However, they also considered that: “The metaphysics in 1936/37 represents one of the most beautiful courses of Nae Ionescu, which was the only one of actual metaphysics, and the others were mere drafts of this one”². Before 1945, Constantin Floru, Constantin Noica and Mircea Vulcănescu also edited the courses of logic and the history of logic. Out of the professor's courses, should be mentioned *Curs de metafizică. Problema salvării în „Faust”-ul lui Goethe (Course of Metaphysics. The Problem of Salvation in Goethe's Faust). 1925–1926; Teoria cunoștinței (The Theory of Knowledge), 1925–1926* published during the author's life at “Tiparnița” Institute of Graphic Arts, the second edition; *Metafizica. Teoria cunoștinței metafizice. 2. Cunoașterea mediată. (Metaphysics. The Theory of Metaphysical Knowledge. 2. The Mediated Knowledge) 1929–1930*, edited by Teodor Ionescu and supervised by D. C. Amzăr, and *Curs de metafizică. II. Istoria metafizicei (Course of Metaphysics. II. The History of Metaphysics). 1930–1931*, supervised by D. C. Amzăr.

Nae Ionescu's metaphysics is conceived in close connection with the religious issue, approached as a cultural (anthropological) phenomenon, as well as with the epistemological one, studied in the logic or history of metaphysics courses. The connection between knowledge and metaphysics concerned him especially as significant moments in the history of metaphysics, but it appeared after the methodological ones, which he briefly stated in *Funcțiunea epistemologică a iubirii (The Epistemological Function of Love)*, the inaugural lesson at the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy in 1919. Nae Ionescu considers – which tends to become a guiding idea of his metaphysical conception – that through scientific knowledge only a summary of knowledge from various fields is made that would not give rise to much more important questions of humanity, and those questions are to be asked by those for whom philosophy is a vocation, and not a technique or a method of

¹ It was published under the title *Tratat de metafizică (Treatise of Metaphysics)*, at Roza Vânturilor Publishing House, Bucharest, 1999, taken into account the course in shorthand and transcribed by Dumitru Neacșu (edited by Marin Diaconu and Dan Zamfirescu). Most of the references in the present study are to this text.

² See *Ultimul curs încheiat de Nae Ionescu (The Last Course Concluded by Nae Ionescu)*, text which represents the Foreword of Dan Zamfirescu to the quoted edition of *Tratat de metafizică*, pp. 7–8.

knowledge that can be learned. "If philosophy is, in fact, only the adaptation of existence in general to the metaphysical needs of the human personality, then it is good to emphasize the fact which is usually indisputable, but again usually neglected, that, namely, metaphysical consciousness reaches the full unfolding of its creative forces only within religious concerns and that, furthermore, any previous solution to these concerns becomes truly fruitful only in relation to them"³. The metaphysical experience and the possible knowledge – scientific and philosophical – become main themes of his concerns that he instilled in his former students or discussion partners, such as Mircea Vulcănescu. In a text entitled *Conceptul de filosofie (The Concept of Philosophy)*⁴. Mircea Vulcănescu makes some notes on the definitions given to philosophy and science, retaining one of Herbert Spencer's remarks. According to it, once the discordant elements are eliminated from what constitutes the sphere that philosophy fills, it remains that its field "is a knowledge of the highest degree of generality"⁵. Vulcănescu only resurrects an old problem of the theory of knowledge, which contrasts the objectivity of knowledge in science with philosophical subjectivity. He brings up again the distinction between two modes of knowledge, the philosophical one (which can also be defined as an effort of total unification of knowledge) and the scientific one, through which the unification is done on partial domains of reality. Addressed in the most general way, the problem of philosophical knowledge – which aims at reality or existence as a whole, but also at what is beyond the reality that can be known through thinking, the Absolute –, its ultimate meaning cannot be reduced to an objective and indifferent, syllogistic construction, but to one that seeks to mirror the real (in the Greek sense of *theoria*) starting from the deepest interiority of the subject. Therefore, any philosophical system can only be an original answer that each of the thinkers tries in a unique way relative to the most general problems of knowledge and not only. Why do we bring up Vulcănescu's distinction between philosophy and scientific knowledge? Because this problem appears in Nae Ionescu's metaphysics, when he approaches the determinations of being⁶. For Nae Ionescu, the starting point in the metaphysical construction is the act of living. We would have expected that, in the tradition of Platonic philosophy,

³ Nae Ionescu, *Funcțiunea epistemologică a iubirii (The Epistemological Function of Love)*, in idem, *Neliniștea metafizică (The Metaphysical Anxiety)*, Bucharest, Romanian Cultural Foundation Publishing House, edition and notes by Marin Diaconu, which opens with *Logistica – încercare a unei noi fundamentări a metafizicii, (Logistics – An Attempt at a New Foundation of Metaphysics)*, translated from German by Alexandru Surdu, 1993, p. 76.

⁴ Published in Mircea Vulcănescu, *Pentru o nouă spiritualitate filosofică. Dimensiunea românească a existenței (For A New Philosophical Spirituality. The Romanian Dimension of the Existence)*, Foreword by Constantin Noica, editors Marin Diaconu and Zaharia Balinca, Bucharest, Eminescu Publishing House, 1992, pp. 47–50.

⁵ Herbert Spencer, *Primele principii (The First Principles)*, apud. N. Bagdasar, Virgil Bogdan, C. Narly, *Antologie filosofică. Filosofi străini (Anthology of Philosophy. Foreign Philosophers)*, the second edition, Bucharest, Casa Școalelor, 1943, pp. 582–583 (n.1).

⁶ Nae Ionescu, *Tratat de metafizică*, quoted edition, pp. 103–112.

the point from which metaphysics begins would be a gnoseological or methodological one, a dialectical necessity of the inner discourse, or, as in the classical Aristotelian view, metaphysics would be the prerogative of the first philosophy. Yet, as others – such as Descartes, who was dissatisfied with the Stagirite’s physics (not with his metaphysics) – have said, “the tyranny of the Aristotelianism was the finding that it did not properly account for the phenomena of nature”; the path he initiated could be abandoned, if not for some other reason, at least because “he does not properly account for the fact of the spirit – if the spirit and not nature were the great theme of the first century after the Renaissance”⁷.

In the Renaissance, philosophers, thinkers in general, focused on nature. But this orientation was different from that of the ancient Greeks. They did not seek to discover the principles behind the phenomena, but the mechanisms and laws of change and steadfastness, of the emergence and transformation of things. We can understand this by following the philosophy of nature which, in general, went in the Aristotelian direction, until Galileo and Newton. With them, and even earlier, in Giordano Bruno’s philosophy, the question of immanent laws was raised, and not of transcendent principles of an ideal order. It was then more important to discover the laws that govern both inorganic nature, biological beings, and their own moral or social phenomena in general. The art of healing, for example, which has evolved from divination and astrology to the study of the anatomy and physiology of organisms, evolves according to the general belief that medicine is somewhere on the border between metempsychosis and alchemy. In *Despre cauză, principiu și unu* (*About the Cause, Principle and One*), Bruno, through Theophilus’ voice, says about the physicians that: “After all, the best and truest of them is the one who besides the physician is also alchemist and astrologer”⁸. The knowledge of nature was considered, by Bruno himself, from a completely different perspective, immanentist or pantheistic. He renounced at the maintenance of irreducible dualities, specific to Platonic philosophy, which opposes the matter of spirit or ideal forms. For Bruno, matter is an informed substrate that the form of forms – the soul – dynamizes and transforms into the most complex organisms and even into the highest and the most intelligent form, which is the man. This movement cannot stop in man, being a continuous and infinite becoming, in space and time. For Bruno, true knowledge is that initiated under the heroic impulse which is the same as the poetic inspiration or the mystical state, having as target the divine reality. In his system, both the sciences and the liberal arts, such as medicine, could not be conceived outside philosophy. Only in philosophy could the

⁷ Constantin Noica, *Schiță pentru istoria lui Cum e cu puțință ceva nou* (*Outline for the History of How Something New is Possible*), Bucharest, Humanitas Publishing House, 1995, p. 95.

⁸ Giordano Bruno, *Despre cauză, principiu și unu* (*About the Cause, Principle and One*), translation and notes by Smaranda Bratu Elian, translation of the poems from Italian by C.D. Zeletin, in Idem, *Opere italiene* (*Italian Works*) II, editor Smaranda Bratu Elian according to the critical bilingual edition of Giovanni Aquilecchia, Les Belles Lettres, Paris. Romanian edition, Bucharest, Humanitas Publishing House, 2002, p. 103.

truth of nature and that of the divine being be reconciled. This is reinforced by the same Theophilus when he says that “the best philosophers are those who attain, in the most appropriate and elevated way, the perfection of human thought, those who agree with the truth of nature and who, as far as possible, collaborate with it [...] either by making laws and correcting or improving morals, or by practicing medicine, or by knowing and living a happier and divine life”⁹. Yet we are far from a metaphysical openness in the personal understanding of mystical experience of a fact of experience that assumes both existence and history, and this should be done from the perspective of the self. Or, not to be mistaken, this total assumption is specific only to Bruno, who understood it in such a way that, in order not to give it up, he rather sacrificed his life, considering that only this way will he be consistent until the end. This problem – of the self that relates to existence until resisting it – but especially a new one – of the self that lives history within the collective, as well as the relationship with God – is met, from the perspective of a Christian-Orthodox view, in Nae Ionescu's metaphysics. For the metaphysical opening of the self, we must take into account experience not only as an objective fact or as a field of reality, but also experience as a whole. Experience (which includes both the experience of thinking as reflexivity, as a conscious act that becomes a logical object, and the “living” of the act of knowing, as well as the presence of a subjective, interpersonal reality) relates only indirectly to *something* which can be known rationally in the sense of objective reality.

THE PROBLEM OF THE BEING. THE MAN AND THE SELF. THE NECESSITY OF HARMONIZING WITH EXISTENCE

In Nae Ionescu's work, from a metaphysical point of view, we encounter a threefold problem: of the self, of the being and of freedom. The object of his metaphysics is not constituted starting (only) from the way we know, from the dialectic of the self with the world. It also does not appear as a result of the preoccupation with the self, it does not focus on self-knowledge, as a dialectic of the subject with the inner self. The emphasis of Nae Ionescu's metaphysics is on *the human being and on the self's relationship with the others, but especially on man's relationship with God*. What gives concreteness to the self, as a spiritual value, is the quality of *human*: “I have a self, I exist as a self, so much so that I am human. The quality of human being gives me the quality of having a self”¹⁰. It can be stated that only when this situation is acknowledged, not so much as a generic situation, but as a real one, present and lived, can the metaphysical problem be initiated. In this sense, metaphysics refers to presence, to a living reality, and not to a logical situation (although it passes through a logical way). The self, in relation to

⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰ Nae Ionescu, *Tratatul de metafizică*, quoted edition, p. 62.

the being, can be considered as a subject, and in this way the being is something that behaves as a subject. Only the subject is the one who bears, it is the subject of the being.

The being-subject is the being of the self in relation to the object, but the being is also an object.

The object we know can also be the being-subject; this being behaves as a subject; we can consider it in its essence, in the way it is, and we can, metaphysically, establish categories of beings, so that we can say that *“there is a world that exists only through me and a world that exists independently of me*. But between these worlds there is also I”¹¹. Nae Ionescu considers that the last element of this logical and ontical situation is at the same time the self, but the same self is the starting point. In fact, from this consideration, from the way I relate to others, begins the question – thousands of years old – the essential question of metaphysics, which the Romanian philosopher formulates as follows: “Do I have the right to start, in capitalizing the experience, from this personal self? From me? Or: do I have the right to give the other selves at most an existence by analogy? In other words, do I condition the existence of other people on myself, or am I simply a man among others?”¹². The identification of the self as a center of irradiation of the being is not the result of a formal process or as a categorial reduction, it is not (only) an act of knowledge, but it takes place as a result of an act of living.

That this is so, Nae Ionescu tells us from the beginning: the problem of being, the problem of experience or the metaphysical preoccupation is a problem of harmonizing man with existence.

Metaphysics is not so much an act of thinking, as an act of thinking which, encircling the being, reducing it to the unity of the self, leads to the identification of a personal center that lives the experience of thinking. This thinking experience represents the being as the last possible unity of everything that exists here, but metaphysics is not a simple matter of thinking. Metaphysics *might*, says Nae Ionescu, be a matter of thinking, but metaphysics is a passionate act or a lyrical offering¹³. In this sense, metaphysics is the ultimate experience of the one who missed eternity. *“But who has tried this passage into eternity and has missed it, passes back, falls back into the human condition; and from that moment begins to die. But again: by the time one begins to die, one has already embraced all possible experiences in one’s experience*. At that moment, thus, one has enough elements at hand to build *that comprehensive overview, that total overview of existence that is metaphysics*”¹⁴. For that person, the possible experience is an absolute. History is also an absolute. Experience is not a result of chronological succession, but is the history of the community, and for man history is the absolute,

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 54.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 57.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 19.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 18.

which is beyond all possible experience. The self belongs to the person. I am a person who realizes that I can be a center of communication and experience with all people who are aware that they are living this historical reality. This person, who is me, lives in an open unity, in humanity, is not a simple center of reduction of existence. "My person, I, the one who lives, is an instrument of identification for existence. I am not, as it is said, neither a 'point of reduction' of existence, nor the 'origin' of this existence"¹⁵. From the beginning, by establishing the personal self and by denying a categorial definition of being, the solipsistic point of view is removed. The problem of the unity of being now returns to that of the unity of consciousness, but of a unity which is not fulfilled within existence itself. The unity is not of a lonely self – although the self is the instrument that will resonate, as a knowing subject, to reality and to the lived experience – but of a natural and historical reality that is man, it regards the human being in its totality.

In the context we described, the metaphysical problem in Nae Ionescu's work has three pillars: *the self*, which refers to a more comprehensive existence, *the man* – the man and the self constitute both the (functional) possibility and the ontological situation from which one can acknowledge the being; the being, however, for which the self is an instrument of identification, is present for man first as an experience, then as an object; the being, as a conscious subject, the subject as a support of the being, the subject-self is no longer (only) an instrument of identification of the being, but, as an experience, is the catalyst of *the person* who is the environment among knowledge–love–freedom; the being is related to man, and the man is aware of the freedom (to know, but also the uselessness of knowledge for self-salvation); freedom – when the self understands the being, is aware that it is an instrument of identification of the being – is not a quality of man alone; freedom is defined in relation to others, collectively, in history. We find, at any moment of Naeionescian metaphysics, this triple relation of the subject-self: to the self (as a logical instrument, but also as a living self); to the being that man identifies in thinking, as a unit; yet, the thinking is a process, it sees the unity (of being) as *something* that is joined by something else, and this *something else* can be nothing, non-being.

THE BEING AND THE NON-BEING (*SOMETHING – SOMETHING ELSE*)

The nothing, as we know, the non-being, as *something else* that opposes the being, is an old problem of philosophy. Put in terms of eleatic elite philosophy, the being is the same as thinking. Yet, thinking, taking into account the Parmenidian interdiction, can account for the unity of being only in one way, by affirming the being and refusing to investigate the non-being. This way of thinking makes it refuse the non-being, both in things and in consciousness, in the subject: As no

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 94.

compulsion can ever make things that are not; but turn your mind away from this search are the words of Parmenides, which the Stranger invokes in his dialogue with Theaitetos in Plato's *Sophist*¹⁶. However, as things stand in the Platonic dialogue – how can we qualify the false so as not to contradict, other than by admitting that the false exists – at any moment of thinking we must have as a presupposition the non-existence, otherwise, the false wouldn't come¹⁷. This thought, at least, helps us when, from a logical but also ontological point of view, we must encircle the being as “something”, because, as the Stranger says again, in Parmenidian logic only one thing is evident: that things that exist cannot be applied “what is not”. This means that any reality is full of something, because when we say the word “something” we do it in connection with what it is. Consequently, we cannot, at least logically, doubt that reality is, and we do so in utterance, putting *in something* the basis of the being – As to say it simply, empty of anything and detached from all realities, is something impossible, isn't it?¹⁸ However, the problem of non-existence continues to haunt us. Something relates to the existence of something, but does not exclude the possibility of existence and something else. Thus, ontologically, we have something – nothing that corresponds, logically, to something – something else (the principle of contradiction). Ontologically, says Nae Ionescu, the reduction of existence to something is arbitrary, but it is valid. But this reduction, again, beyond its validity or beyond its arbitrariness, transfers us in the situation of assuming that reality *is*, but not through a logical act, but through a fact of living: “It is valid that I reduce all existence. How? By an act of living, not by a logical act. Through the logical act it is impossible to do this operation, for the simple reason that my being cannot live all things at once. By its essence, it experiences certain things and is disinterested in others. My being concentrates on living it in certain centers and lives them so intensely that nothing happens to it anymore”¹⁹. The problem of existence brings along the problem of its organization.

GOD'S LAW AND MAN'S LAW

Man is made to direct and to concentrate his living only towards certain centers: some enter his area of interest – the reality, the experience of this lived reality –, others remain foreign to him. The interest can be of a cognitive nature – and then the concern is the scientific one –, it can be historical, and the concern is

¹⁶ Plato, *Opere complete (Complete Works)*, IV, eds. Petru Creția, Constantin Noica and Cătălin Partenie (the translation of the fragment (B7) from Parmenides belongs to D. M. Pippidi in *Filosofia greacă până la Platon (The Greek Philosophy up to Plato)*, vol. I, part 2, Bucharest, Scientific and Encyclopedic Publishing House, 1979, p. 235), Bucharest, Humanitas Publishing House, 2004, p. 42 (n. 4), 237 a.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 43.

¹⁹ Nae Ionescu, *Tratat de metafizică*, quoted edition, p. 101.

the political action, but also the moral behavior –, or it can raise the question of the difference between man and the rest of existence. Man lives in compliance with a law, according to which one organizes one's existence, the possibilities inherent in one's being. The way man does it can be in the order of creation, subject to the law of God, or man can establish the own law, when, through knowledge, one seeks another purpose in existence. By choosing to know, one can escape the order of nature, of cosmos. By knowing, man believes that one can substitute oneself for God, that one can be autonomous. God does not tempt man to be, but asks man to be, that is, to be fully realized in the order of his nature, just as he requires existence to be what it is, "to be completely fulfilled, without any rest"²⁰. The Christian God is not the Platonic God, although, in the aspect of the law He establishes to existences, He is similar, because the law is one, of the Spirit, of the Logos that founds. As for the becoming of things or beings – the possibility of fulfilling oneself completely and without any remnant – the Christian God leaves the man the freedom to choose, to access the being, or to descend to death, while the Platonic Demiurge periodically creates the Universe after an eternal model identical with itself, a model that can be contained in thought, in a rational discourse. The Platonic Demiurge does not give status of being or value of truth to those who become. The becoming has no being. What is eternally identical with itself can be grasped by thought through a rational discourse, and what becomes and perishes, never truly being, is the object of irrational opinion and sensibility²¹. Knowledge, in Platonism, makes sense as a rational discourse oriented towards the Eternal Forms. It is true that in Platonism there is a second principle, love, which always accompanies and completes knowledge. Nae Ionescu, on the other hand, states that the purpose of love, as it is present in great thinkers (Bruno, Leonardo da Vinci, Goethe, Spinoza, Pascal), is to fulfill human knowledge, which the philosophical tradition deeply confirms. In a text that constituted the inaugural lecture, delivered in the autumn of 1919 at the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy in Bucharest, later published in "Izvoare de filosofie. Culegere de studii și texte" (Sources of Philosophy. A Collection of Studies and Texts), I, 1942²², Nae Ionescu advocates a unitary approach to the relationship between love and knowledge, insisting on it from the perspective of the Christian doctrine. As for the Platonic doctrine, as it appears in *The Symposium*, as well as in Marsilio Ficino's commentary on *Sopra lo amore*, he considers that love, in philosophy, should be seen from a double perspective: the metaphysical one, of the desire to balance with existence, but also as a love of wisdom, a meaning which later thought loses almost completely: "The relation between love and knowledge would therefore be: love accompanies knowledge in its process; it is something more, a kind of *quid movens*, through

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 162.

²¹ Plato, *Timaios (Timaeus)*, in *Opere complete (Complete Works)*, IV, quoted edition, p. 287 (27 d–28 a).

²² Bucharest, "Bucovina" I.E. Torouțiu Publishing House, pp. 1–7. Our references are in idem, *Funcțiunea epistemologică a iubirii (The Epistemological Function of Love)*, in Nae Ionescu, *Neliniștea metafizică (The Metaphysical Anxiety)*, quoted edition, pp. 75–93.

which knowledge takes place. Therefore, it is not only pre-existing, but it even causes, in a way, knowledge. Hence the ancient, metaphysical, and not epistemological character of the relationship between love and knowledge in Plato, with all the mysticism in which the doctrine of ideas drowns²³. Love is also dedication to something else, a connection that knowledge alone cannot restore.

LOVE AS *PRINCIPIUM AGENS*

What can love represent at the time of the emergence of Christianity or, more precisely, what has brought the new Christian doctrine in relation to the other ancient doctrines? Can we speak of an issue or an attempt to theorize the meaning of love, if not in knowledge, in the field of ethical values? In Christianity, love is an anthropological concern, a dimension or characteristic of man meant to restore man's initial connection with existence. It is obvious that in the ancient Greek philosophy eros represented a cosmic principle, a universal binder, which does not change the essence or the structure of knowledge, but which makes knowledge possible. The cosmos is known in what is rational. In Plato, the eros has a subjective psychological meaning, but also an ontic significance. Through eros one transgresses from subjective and relative knowledge to absolute knowledge: "objectively, ontically, as *principium agens*, it is the tendency to pass from non-existence to existence, from matter to idea"²⁴. In *The Sophist*, in the eleatic approach to the problem of non-being, there was the prohibition for the rational subject to follow the path or the indications that could come from the consideration in some way of the non-being. On the other hand, the impossibility of disregarding the nothing to which the being relates or which the knowing subject should consider at least as *something else*, according to which the being can found, both in thinking – thinking and being are the one from Parmenides to Hegel – as well as in existence. That man must take into account both, that he is the measure of things as they are, but also of those which are not, we know from Protagoras, the sophist philosopher whose apothegm Plato invokes in *Theaitetos*, 152 a. What is certain, from man's point of view, of the one who accounts for the being or the non-being of things, is that the logos, the utterance, is the only way we can do it: the utterance represents for Plato a part of the real things, as he states in *The Sophist*, through the voice of the Stranger, in an elated manner, when the question arises of how the genres can be combined in speech. Then the utterance can be the one that accounts for both the purpose of the being in things and the presence or influence of the non-being: In the sense that speech is, for us, a part of the real things. If we lacked it, we would also lack philosophy. But we still have to agree on what speech is, and if we were without it and it didn't exist, we wouldn't be able to say anything. And we would be deprived of it if we recognized that there is no connection, of nothing

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 84.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 83.

with nothing²⁵. But if nothing has a positive meaning, it makes sense as a *virtual reality*, as reality beyond things, beyond the sensible world. It is *something else* to which *something* refers, that is, this being here, the man. For Nae Ionescu, something else is the Absolute, it is the transcendent. While for the world here, history is an absolute, something transcendent to man – it is made above men –, for the person who wants to be saved, for man, God is the Absolute.

Man is the subject of everything that exists in the process of knowledge. When he bit the apple of Heaven, man opted for another order, which he wanted to set besides the one established by God – it is irrelevant whether the gesture is a privilege or an infatuation, or if he was tempted to want another status. He expressed his will to put a new hierarchy in existence. Even so, man, wanting to know everything, cannot do it through science, he at most tends to fulfill this need through philosophy or art; what is certain is that, through this gesture, he wants to reduce reality to the size of his being, to his own personality. Rationally he can do so only in one way, through philosophizing, because only philosophy represents “the adaptation of the existence in general to the metaphysical needs of the human personality”²⁶. Together with the need to reduce existence to the needs of the personal self, the need for the Absolute is triggered, through the act of knowing, and at the same time the need for salvation appears – only through an act of living. Neither philosophy nor art can satisfy this need. Through knowledge, as we have seen, man tries to reduce existence, to capitalize on it, but there is in this “preoccupation” another tendency, that of giving, of extending the self to something else. Giving counterbalances the act of unilateral knowledge – knowledge is the desire to grasp reality –, through which man tries to oppose God and even replace him. Yet, through devotion, through love, the self tries to melt into something else: love is par excellence a metaphysical activity, because through it one tries to transcend the being. Love tends “to the dedication of your person, to the melting of your being into something else, to the search for balance through a single point of support that transcends you”²⁷. No matter how hard it tries, the self cannot give itself completely to another self or to another person, it can give up itself only through suffering.

THE IMBALANCE BETWEEN THE SELF AND THE WORLD. THE LONELINESS

Not finding in someone else – through the erotic relationship – a receptacle of his being, unable to restore this initial and total unity, man tries to transcend his being through the love of God. Man's attempt to harmonize with the existence through knowledge is a first step, but it rather separates him from existence and makes him, in a way, the emulator of God and, in the end, it breaks his connection

²⁵ Plato, *Sofistul (The Sophist)*, quoted edition, p. 81 (260 a–b).

²⁶ Idem, *Funcțiunea epistemologică a iubirii*, quoted edition, p. 76.

²⁷ Idem, *Tratat de metafizică*, quoted edition, p. 171.

with God. Man wants to put order in existence, but this order can exclude him, at some point, because it is an artificial order, which does not last, an order that changes the connection and the original unity of Creation. Then the imbalance between the self and the world appears. A more important consequence is that a split is created between the known reality and the unknown that surrounds us. Loneliness and suffering are so oppressive that salvation is impossible. The rebalancing of man in existence cannot be achieved through knowledge, in a rational way, but through dedication and love. Metaphysical concern is, in the sense that Nae Ionescu gives it, an anthropological problem. "Nae Ionescu's entire discourse, through which his metaphysical reconstruction comes into being, only makes sense as an attempt to solve a human problem, namely the fundamental one: the meaning of life, salvation and/or reconciliation. Also, the whole itinerary of the reconstruction relies on man's features, on his existential qualities"²⁸. Salvation is the living on the edge of existence and the desire of being to transcend into something else. In the Romanian philosopher's view, there is only one way to achieve it: the communion with God, initiated by the communion with other people, the total devotion to a reality that transcends him, in which he wants to melt completely. The self exists according to the existence of something beyond it, a more general reality – the man. Yet, the reality towards which man tends – alone through knowledge – is the Absolute, the being as something else.

THE POSSIBILITY TO CHOOSE. TO BE IN COMMUNITY

Metaphysics or the problem of transcendence is a concern of man who has totalized the experience and realizes that through knowledge one cannot redeem oneself. One cannot give oneself to this existence. However, man wants to know it through the very act of knowing, he establishes a new, logical, rational order, which ultimately is a "capture" or a taking in possession. Through knowledge, man is polarized in relation to existence. The relation of man with the world, as a logical modality, leads to this polarization: subject – object. "The report is unequivocal. So to speak, existence is mine, first to satisfy my needs, because that is why is existence here. Besides, through the very process of knowledge, all existence is mine as an object to my knowledge. Everything exists – both in the order of knowledge and in the order of existence – according to me"²⁹. Yet, existence, as existence, is as God did it – everything God has done is well done – although God also gives existence *the possibility* to be. God did not make existence perfect – it offers the opportunity to be, to reach the being, as well as the possibility of not to be. Man is not perfect either, he attempts to. The man created by God has all the

²⁸ Viorel Cernica, *Căutarea de sine și chemările tradiției. Studii și eseuri (The Search for Self and the Calls of Tradition. Studies and Essays)*, Mihai Dascal Editor – Casă de Presă și Editură, 2002, p. 123.

²⁹ Nae Ionescu, *Tratat de metafizică*, quoted edition, p. 169.

possibilities, moreover, he has the tendency, the need to become a man³⁰, as well as the freedom to choose within these possibilities. Man, in history, has no possibility of being – history is made above man. Yet, man has the opportunity to be in the community – he becomes, he tends towards unity. The unity towards which man tends, the more surprising reality that embraces him, to which he can give himself, is the community of which he is a part – a community of destiny, says Nae Ionescu.

Man lives the unity – he is not in unity with existence, he cannot live in unity with it, at most he can order it, by knowing it. “The moment one fulfills oneself, the moment one comes *to live oneself as unity*, at the same time one knows the world as unity and at the same time one lives this world as unity. At that moment, the transcendence also becomes one”³¹. This moment of man's becoming is one of limit, but also a moment when man exceeds the limit – man is man as a spiritual unity. This becoming towards unity has one way – through community on the road to God.

***DUH*(SOUL) – SPIRIT – THE LIGHT THAT TRANSFIGURES**

For Nae Ionescu – whose metaphysics is fulfilled within the Christian-Orthodox paradigm or unity – both the way we know and the meaning of human existence take place within the spiritual community. What unites or connects man's unity in the community is life – the spirit makes life in unity possible. Yet, he also emphasizes the difference in meaning between the Christian-Orthodox and the Catholic views relative to the notions of soul (*pneuma*, in the Greek translation of the Gospels) and spirit, by virtue of which unity is accomplished in both religions. Rather, in Nae Ionescu's work, the meaning of what in Orthodoxy is called *duh* (soul) is close to spirit, but not used in the sense of binder or universal connection, but of “spirit of fire”. The spirit, he says, is always cold. “It sums up the means of communication of the diversity in which man lives”³². We believe, on the other hand, that the spiritual meaning is closer to that of Dionysius the Areopagite – whom Lucian Blaga, another great contemporary of Nae Ionescu, mentions in his work *Religie și spirit (Religion and Spirit)*³³ – namely that of super-light of God, which flows in effluvia over the created world. The mystics of Mount Athos compare this light with that which surrounded Jesus on Mount Tabor at the moment of the Transfiguration. Blaga makes a suggestive description of the divine light under the meaning given to it by Dionysius: “The divine light is not of a physical nature, but of a supernatural nature, it springs from God, incessantly, like

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 211.

³¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 211–212.

³² *Ibidem*, p. 212.

³³ Lucian Blaga, *Religie și spirit (Religion and Spirit)*, Sibiu, “Dacia Traiană” S. A. Publishing House, 1942.

a grace from heights poured torrentially over all the stages of the creature world. The divine light is, among other things, magical in nature, being destined to ‘transfigure’ creatures. [...] The divine light, which flows to the world, is added to the created world, or perhaps the world was created from the beginning in this environment, crossed by the force of the divine light³⁴. We mentioned the symbolism of the divine light of the Aeropagite, as interpreted by L. Blaga, because the meaning of divine light refers to the state of grace, which Nae Ionescu defines as the state or spiritual environment in which the connection with transcendence can be established. In his work, however, the symbolism of divine light is taken over by the “spirit of fire”, a spiritual energy that does not bond as an omniscient spirit, but as a spirit that communicates, that unites and, at the same time, is felt as a divine presence in the community. “Man lives himself in a way, and lives in another way our unity of which he is a part. As this unity lives, of which he is a part, comes the connection we have just mentioned: the life–soul connection and the connection that exists between these elements”³⁵. *Duh* (soul) is a word of Slavic origin and refers to the Greek *pneuma* (πνεῦμα, ατος) – breath (vital breath). Reference is made to the Greek translation of the Gospels, where the Hebrew *ruah* was translated with *pneuma*, designating the third person of the Holy Trinity, *Aghion pneumaton* – in Old Slavic *svetij duh*³⁶. This distinction is important in order to understand Nae Ionescu’s metaphysics. The soul (*duhul*) – the vital breath – is different from the spirit. The soul is living in communion, it represents, on the other hand, the divine grace or the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Holy Trinity. The soul is the spirit of fire while the spirit is cold, abstract and universalizing. The soul is a state – it is the state of full founding, living to the limit and even exceeding the limit³⁷ beyond which there is transcendence. Given this paradigm, it is important to realize what the moment of the complete fulfillment is in the order of existence, and the order of man’s becoming. Overcoming it can indicate that we are within the state of grace – because immortality, eternity cannot be reached and communicated at the same time within this existence. There may be several moments that indicate the meaning or the path to the fullness of existence,

³⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 127–128.

³⁵ Nae Ionescu, *Tratat de metafizică*, quoted edition, p. 212.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, see note 2, p. 212.

³⁷ Limit < *limes* –, itis, in Latin, in the sense of border between two fields, but also of reinforcement, border (G. Guțu, *Dicționar latin-român (Latin-Romanian Dictionary)*), see p. 197 (chapter XXX, *A fi și a nu fi sau ființa ca ființă* (To be and not to be or the being as being), note 1 in the *Tratat de metafizică* (Treatise on Metaphysics)), Nae Ionescu uses the second sense, the border between two regions, but to emphasize the idea of movement, ascension to the limit of transcendence, attaining immortality or fullness of being, of being as being. Immortality is not a region, it is a state specific to each of us, which is lived by each man in his own way, because “[...] I have specified that the ascent to transcendence is a movement towards a limit. This very notion is included in the capacity to reach it. The immortality we are talking about does not really mean touching it. It happens somewhere below. The problem of immortality can only make sense if this immortality is solved by each of us, not by someone else” (*Ibidem*, p. 198).

and these are liminal experiences, but not the experience of the above-mentioned *limit*, in the sense of reaching, overcoming transcendence. Such an experience is that of love, of self-giving for something else. The one who assumes it integrates into a unity that transcends him. We have seen that through knowledge man cannot achieve this unity and no knowledge makes sense without the element that ensures the cohesion or the meaning of knowledge (aspects approached by the Romanian thinker in *Funcțiunea epistemologică a iubirii – The Epistemological Function of Love*). Another moment of this experience – perhaps the only one in the view of the Romanian philosopher – is that of the unity we achieve in communion with people, not in the sense of a structural or sociological catselfry, but in that of a national community. We must dwell on this notion – communion or community, living the meaning, awareness of the flow of life and its orientation towards being. We have pointed out that around transcendence – which is not a region, but a state – man is transfigured, he reaches a state of grace. Well, communion is not another name for the collective conscience and it is not conscience in general – terms not agreed by Nae Ionescu. While love or communion can transfigure man, the state of grace, which gives him another nature, is an enlargement of reality, an opening to something else, which may or may not last (they may or may not appear by chance). There are differences between these states that transfigure the man (love, mystical experience or communion), just as there is a difference between the state of grace and the state of ecstasy. And there are solutions for continuity – against the background of the discontinuous experience of our relationship with transcendence. “There are always solutions for continuity. The human condition, which we can never definitively overcome, this human condition imposes this character of discontinuity in our connection with transcendence. One cannot live continuously – so to speak – in a state of ecstasy. One can live continuously in a state of grace, under certain conditions, but one cannot live continuously in a state of ecstasy”³⁸. How does the state of grace – itself a liminal experience, which finds its place here in everyday life – differ from that of ecstasy? The former is an enlargement of the self – namely, a transposition into another level of the state of ecstasy (as is the dream, for example, in which the self lives, but on a different level, at the limit, although in spatial and temporal conditions, events that cannot be experienced in reality. The state of ecstasy is pure intuition and contraction of the whole possible experience.

INSTEAD OF CONCLUSIONS: THE STATE OF GRACE. THE VIVID THINKING

The state of grace, through which reality is enlarged or transfigured, occurs after the state of ecstasy has disappeared – and can be achieved through the love

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 191.

among people. The state of ecstasy can be and is specific to the encounter with an area of the sacred (in the terms of Mircea Eliade, a brilliant disciple of Nae Ionescu), in the case of a hierophany. In Nae Ionescu's terms, the reality here can be enlightened, transfigured by the reality beyond, and this experience in life is possible because, in the state of grace, we bring something from beyond. "The state of grace is a kind of light that pours on your life, which brings with it from beyond something that transfigures your life, transfigures your reality"³⁹.

We may wonder whether these states, which are unrelated to the actual level of rational knowledge, are possible in the subconscious or are reached at a time of liminal experiences that transcend the common consciousness and even the rational knowledge. Being specific human feelings, which have no continuity, but are intermittent connections with transcendence, which do not transpose man into transcendence, are, somehow, a pre-coming or transfiguration of the living consciousness, moments of supreme superconscious intuition, of fullness of being. They touch on religious issues or ontotheology, but they refer to a whole phenomenology of the sacred, to the permanent connection between man and divinity.

Nae Ionescu introduces through his metaphysics courses ideas about salvation, ecstatic transfiguration, the state of holiness, but he does this from the level of the rational discourse. He states that in the spiritual becoming of mankind there are moments when people are preoccupied almost exclusively with the problems of rational-positive knowledge but even then the metaphysical preoccupations do not disappear. On the other hand, the relationship between man and divinity is permanent, there is a dialectic of the sacred and the profane (which M. Eliade, also at the urge of Nae Ionescu, will highlight in his studies). There are also categories of phenomena and feelings irreducible to ordinary feelings, such as those specific to religiosity, but also a permanent dialectic of them with the phenomena or categories we know by scientific, rational-discursive means⁴⁰. For Nae Ionescu, metaphysical experience is a continuous preoccupation of man, which comes on the much deeper background of the religious act, of his relationship with the divinity, but this will also become an anthropological need to explain that connection. In the religious act, man reconnects with the divinity that is beyond the world. "The only one thing that can be deduced from the religious act is that there are two terms of the act. These two terms are essentially distinct in nature"⁴¹. While through the state of grace we do not have an explanation of the way in which we can dialogue with God – and we do not know this, because those who perform it do not reveal it to us explicitly – we can realize the personal way of relating to the

³⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁰ D. Allen, *Myth and Religion in Mircea Eliade*, New York, London, Carland Publishing Inc., 1998, p. 8 and the following.

⁴¹ Nae Ionescu, *Filosofia religiei (The Philosophy of Religion)*, Bucharest, Eminescu Publishing House, 1998, p. 51.

divinity. Moreover – according to Nae Ionescu's belief about the particular way of each nation to relate to God, because God is not the same for everyone, but for “each of these communities there is only its God”⁴² – we can discover, in the language and the way of thinking and relating to the existence of each people, a concrete “dimension”, specific only to it, of approaching metaphysics, implicitly, a particular relationship with God.

Nae Ionescu had a very special way of making his ideas known. He didn't necessarily want to write – his classes were written by others, his students – nor did he want to sort his ideas through the covers of a book, perhaps for fear of being frozen there. The thinker, the philosophy teacher, was a Socratic guy. He preferred to plant his ideas and let them grow in others. It was his own belief, according to his view, that thinking must be vivid; if your thinking doesn't sprout ideas in the minds of others, if it does not proliferate, as he used to say, that thinking dies. So those who listened to him, for the most part, each in his own way, took with them and carried on a seed of the teacher's thinking, which they planted and cared for until it bore fruit. Among his successors in the metaphysical issues, we mention Mircea Vulcănescu, to whom we referred in the beginning, but also Mircea Eliade, Constantin Noica or Emil Cioran. Mircea Vulcănescu, influenced also by the lessons of Nae Ionescu, which he attended, was of the opinion that there is a specific way for each nation to relate to existence and to seek answers to the fundamental questions of the spirit. He also stated that the answer to these problems must be sought in language and in the collective imaginary, because the depth of the thought, as well as the actual experience of great events, created a series of fundamental attitudes towards existence in the soul of each of us. Concerned with the identification of spiritual topoi in the folk creations – which he analyzed as a researcher in the team of sociologists led by Dimitrie Gusti –, Vulcănescu focused especially on their philosophical interpretation. He believed that there is a Romanian ontological model and highlighted a series of powerful ideas, symbols, images, but also ways of relating to the existence of those in traditional village communities, which led to the study *Dimensiunea românească a existenței* (*The Romanian Dimension of Existence*). Vulcănescu was convinced that in this way it is possible to continue, through further research, a typology based on which a specific spiritual dimension of the Romanians can be identified. All this research was undertaken largely inspired by the ideas or thoughts of Professor Nae Ionescu, which, very briefly, and only partially, I have tried to present in these pages.

⁴² Idem, *Tratat de metafizică*, quoted edition, p. 214.