

MATERIAL AND IMMATERIAL IDENTITIES

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ABOUT THE TRUE BEGINNING OF THOUGHT

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Abstract: In Greek philosophy, Parmenides was sure of his destination: he knew where he had to go, but he didn't know where he had to start. A brief review of how philosophy began is enough to show extreme heterogeneity. The multitude of starting points made philosophy highly suspicious of itself. Even when a physicist of the stature of Archimedes signaled the impossibility of finding a safe starting point, the situation of philosophy did not improve. All the more so since, through the suture with poetry (Alain Badiou), philosophy took note of a mythological manner in which such a starting point offered its services.

Keywords: point, safety, method, inspiration, philosophy.

It is known that what made Archimedes famous was something small and insignificant in the world order. He used to repeat that what he lacked was of the order of a point: *Give me a fixed point*, he used to say, *and I will overturn the universe!*

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The poets had what Archimedes lacked: they had that fixed starting point from which to overturn the universe. By requesting the inspiration by which the poetic force was able to conceive the poem, the epic, or the song, the poets were in possession of the fixed point of Archimedes' desire.

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The best moments of Hellenic poetry, the epics, are due to the benevolence of the gods at the precise moments when mortals address them with their wishes.

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There is no circumscription of the way in which the first epic of European culture, *the Iliad*, was written, except as related by itself. “Sing, goddess, the anger that ignited the Peleian Achilles,/ The cruel passion that brought thousands of bitterness to the Achaeans:/ Many courageous spirits sent to the other world, / The body making them food for dogs and all kinds of birds / And the will of Zeus was fulfilled...”¹.

So, in the beginning it is the gods, or rather, the mortals who intend that story to tell them about their own greatness, about the love of the gods and their own virtues. It is about mortals who know themselves well enough to admit the precariousness of not being able to proceed to the construction of the poem without divine help. They could not own their own reality, they felt that it did not belong to them at all unless the gods were willing to help them. The wording is such that the apparent sensation is that everything in this rubric belongs to the gods.

The second epic, *the Odyssey*, is no different. The gods are still present, only while, for the first epic, they were courted for the narrative evocation of the multitude of heroes that *the Iliad* is full of, the second epic, following the same structure, has only one character in mind: Odysseus. “Sing to me, oh muse, about the man with a clever mind, who incessantly/ Went out to the sea, when, holy city of Troy he conquered/ And among many mortals, he also saw cities and customs! / He had a lot to endure...”².

It would be interesting to trace both the general manner in which the goddesses discharged their duty, and the particular manner in which the obedience to the wish was granted. There was no cause for dissatisfaction on the part of the aed for the way the goddess had granted his wish. On the contrary, the poet's satisfaction was in a posture that urged further success. Achilles' anger was sung so well that, once in the gear of his own phenomenology, nothing could make it appease.

Finally, even when the bravery of the heroes is no longer at stake, as we were used to in the epics, the poets cannot do without the service of the muses. The very birth of the gods needs muses to listen to the poet's prayer. “Let's begin our song with the Heliconide muses/ For theirs alone is Helicon, the high and divine mountain! /.../ The benevolence of the Muses does not delay: The children of Zeus the great //...have inspired me a prophetic verse/ That I may sing as befits all that will be and all that has been;/ They command me to glorify the happy deathless race,/And always begin with them and end my song”³.

Only in the Orphic hymns, the presence of the muses is ubiquitous, themselves being the object of request: “Heralded and glorified Muses,/ By mortals always close under dozens of faces, much coveted,/ Planting in each youth the

¹ Homer, *Iliada*, Editura de Stat pentru Literatură și Artă, 1959, p. 37.

² Idem, *Odiseea*, Humanitas Publishing, Bucharest, 2012, p. 6.

³ Hesiod, *Teogonia*, în Hesiod, Orfeu, *Poeme*, Minerva Publishing, 1987, pp. 3–4.

unparalleled virtue,/ Satisfy our hungry soul, inspire us with pure thoughts,/ chaste and admonishing, guide the clever mind./.../ Come, celestial embodiments..."⁴.

Once the key to success is known, the whole epistemology of things and the world is no longer a problem. All Hellenic poetry that followed the epics already knows how to proceed. The gods should be put at the top of the list, of the entire working toolkit. When, as poetry is concerned, the specialized gods are not called upon, the others come into play. In the final part of history, no one is shy about invoking muses and gods alike. It seems that the nine muses specialized in the poetic art, make room for the whole pantheon by refining it, forcing it from the coarse affairs to which the whole of Greek mythology had accustomed us, thinning it in the direction of arts and philosophy.

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Could philosophy proceed in a similar manner to poetry? Could she begin with an exercise in courting her own gods, close to the thought, from the traditional perception, of Athena or Apollo? What were the terms in which he could do it so as not to be ridiculously confused with poetry? And what specific content could he have requested when, as is known, poetry was so evanescent that it could be lost in the spell of words without this being noticed?

For philosophy, a manner similar to poetry did not seem to be appropriate neither in formulation, nor in content, nor in what was proper to philosophy: logic. Philosophy needed a support which the gods could not provide as they had done in the case of poetry. Philosophy needed a logic of introduction to thought that showed itself compatible in a straight line with the developed content itself. Furthermore, the logic that was to preside over the beginning had to be endowed with the a priori ability to know the idea before it showed itself. Logic had to be, for philosophy, visionary, to have within itself the force of the prophets separated from the usual generality of heaven, being commensurate with the multiplicity of the earth, from which philosophy, in the first hour of its birth, had to start.

The first objection to philosophy is precisely this: the attention to the earth, to the heterogeneity of its composition and the adequacy of the steps, the anteriority of the earth to the idea. This is what the peasant woman criticizes the first philosopher, Thales of Miletus, when he, chasing the sky, falls into a pit, ignoring the fact that the earth is not everywhere flat, that it can be bumpy, heterogeneous, diverse.

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Philosophy needs a method prior to the actual method. If by method we mean simply, the way to follow the idea, then, in order to get here, a certain priority was

⁴ Orfeu, *Immuri*, în Hesiod, Orfeu, *op. cit.* p. 222.

needed that made the method necessary. It is the fixed point that Archimedes was asking for without the certainty that someone would be able to provide it.

More precisely, in starting the project, philosophy needs an a priori intuition of it in such conditions of accuracy that its exact physiognomy is offered in relation to compatibility with an equally intuitive logic, i.e. a priori.

For philosophy not everything plays out in its full course. The authentic content of philosophy under the relation of completeness includes antecedents that will never be part of proper philosophy. Such a view does not allow philosophy to exhaust itself in the entirety of its statements, affirmations and negations, nor even in the strong device of logic that supports it.

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Compared to poets, philosophers have always been poor beings. They had neither the lexicon, nor the intuitions, nor the contents, nor the vast view of their world at hand. Their world was built by contrast. All that the poets had, the philosophers had on a reduced scale. They lacked nothing, but everything they had could be counted. Everything was from a little.

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Of Tales it is admitted that he would have come to know the origin of all things, the beginning of time, and many other things connected with time and beginning, days and nights, seasons and years, equinoxes and solstices, and many other things⁵. But nothing about how to start such research. It is not excluded, however, on the contrary, taking into account the complicated discoveries attributed to Thales, that such a preoccupation related to the beginning would have preoccupied Thales. It was the fixed point of his inventions and discoveries.

Many of those attributed to him came on the poetic path, and the poets, worshipers of the muses, selected the appreciated ones according to their affinities. In addition, it is not excluded that many of his writings are in verse, that is, borrowing the poetic technique. He was not insensitive to the expression of the time, and when he receives the tripod, a kind of Oscar of the time, according to the indication of the gods, the answer formulated by them was also in verse: “You, sapling from Miletus, go and ask Phoibus / Who is to be master of the tripod? The god answers you: / The one among you who shows himself first in wisdom”⁶.

If Thales was able to move the universe at all, as his large number of scientific contributions attest, he certainly knew of such a fixed point. Thales was more fortunate than Archimedes: he did not even complain that he did not have at

⁵ *Filosofia greacă până la Platon*, vol. I., Bucharest, Scientific and Encyclopedic Publishing, 1979, pp. 149–164.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 151.

hand all the props to make the universe something mobile. His discoveries are remarkable. In the archives of Greek antiquity it is said: “he laid the foundations of geometry among the Greeks, he was a very serious researcher of natural phenomena and a very skilled observer of the stars, he discovered things of the greatest importance, which he reproduced in a few lines: the succession of seasons, the blowing of the winds, the paths of the stars, /../ the inclined orbits of the stars, the annual cycles of the sun. Also, the waxing or waning phases of the moon, what obstacles make it lose its brightness...”⁷.

He was considered a sage, one of the seven sages credited with opening Greek culture. As a sage, Thales could start from anywhere, wisdom being nothing more than the punctual application of the logos.

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In such a reflexive context philosophy evolved until Parmenides who, probably defeated by the difficulties encountered, simply declared his indifference regarding the certainty of the starting point. It is not to be believed that he had arrived at such a conclusion in a labor-free manner, without doubt and investigation of the optimal starting conditions for thought. Because, versed logicians, the Greek philosophers could not avoid such a zero-degree encounter.

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The first serious reflection on the difficulty of the beginning belongs to Parmenides in the form of a statement in which a failure is barely camouflaged: indifference – it is still one thing for me where I will start; for there I will return again⁸.

It is only with Parmenides that the question of the redoubtable beginning can really be raised since no empirical perspective is approved by his thought. Empirically everything can be convincing since the truth, in the data of the senses, is everywhere present and equally valid. Nothing of what is felt is different, always equal to the rest so that the questioning about a fixed point cannot have support here.

But Parmenides seeks the fixed point in the order of reason, in that sequence of it in which it can be established in a necessary manner. He starts from a kind of judgment that does not take into account sensation and despises it, with the conviction that the one that must be followed is reason...⁹.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 161.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 232.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 221.

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If we take Parmenides' option as a solid foundation, then the problem of the fixed point belongs to the rational order of philosophy. Only for reason is the beginning problematic, to be sought, with more or less chance of being found. Otherwise, for the empirical order of truth, anything can be a fixed point since everything that is empirically experienced is validated as such.

But when it is accepted that at the beginning of the world is the word and the word is with God, and God is the word, the world and its birth become complicated. Because it is about the rational world and reason, about the reason that precedes the world in the a priori laboratory of its birth. Any birth on this ground means an a priori location of reason, i.e. a consolidation of it on a ground that did not exist and which reason prepares to administer before its existence.

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But was the indifference proclaimed by Parmenides elevated to the rank of method or, apart from the expression of exasperation, does it establish nothing? In any case, the indifference declared here as the optimal beginning is the first assumed and exposed failure of philosophy. Through indifference, philosophy not only assumes openly, programmatically, the active character of facing an adversary with an invisible face, it also declares that, on the new terrain of the struggle, one's own strategy is not always elevated to the rank of method. Indifference is not a method, but it is a manner of awareness of the position, a clear and positive assumption, a visual circumscription of all its props. The indifference thus promoted is an act of consciousness by which philosophy advances by accepting its active destiny whose lexicon presupposes indifference as the result, the search as an active and interested gesture, and the result, in the variant of acceptable failure, as indifference. With indifference, philosophy knows that it is not in the best position. Philosophy knows just as well, however, following internal reflections, that something else, in the order of reason demanded by Parmenides, could not be obtained. It is an awareness of limits, all the same, with a minimal endowment.

But what can be done with indifference as a starting point located outside the strict perimeter of thought? As a lack of option, indifference to optimal voluntarism is all that philosophy could achieve in its auroral moment.

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If, indeed, in philosophy, no idea has perished since its appearance until today, as Constantin Noica believed, then philosophy is in the extreme situation, not to be found in any neighborhood, of having no history and no past. Both, that is, history and the past, are strictly composed of things that have perished. *In philosophy, no idea is lost!*

The tone of the statement is interrogative-polemical: what idea has perished in philosophy, from the auroral moment to its twilight, i.e. until today?

Whence, then, so many scruples regarding its birth, the beginning which no art and no science, no religion, have maintained with such fervor, with such carelessness and paroxysmal refusal? No debut has seemed too good to philosophy to assume it, to recommend it, to place itself under its banner so that the feeling of insecurity, of unscientificity cannot be imputed. The reproach did not come from outside, nor did he always carry it with him, nor did he feel the force that would generate the crisis, inhibiting it to the point where it reabsorbed all its power, paralyzing it at the gates of its own heaven, of its own being, of its own concept.

If such a preoccupation to challenge philosophy since its dawn had an agent, it was Descartes. With him begins the great drama of the unfounded debut of philosophy. It is he who takes infinite scruples to start from a point which has nothing certain on its side but convention and tradition. But if all this is not good, if they do not convince and throw quicksand under the dust of the road made to clog from the first steps?

Descartes had something of a globe-trotter about him. He liked to walk, to exercise, not necessarily out of the common desire to know something new, different, nor out of the desire to test his locomotion. Descartes' desire for hiking was the desire to test sedentary settlements. A sedentary person himself, he wanted stability.

His first acts of knowledge are about the unstable knowledge of the age, its uncertain foundations. Descartes begins with a complaint about this situation. If a list of tearful philosophers is ever undertaken, Descartes will probably open the list. No other philosopher before him began with such a vast indictment of the whole world. Nothing in its content of knowledge seemed good to him, nothing could satisfy him as long as he did not possess the sure prerogative of the beginning. The entire content of the world of knowledge was shaky because its first beginnings were not correct. In short, the beginning of philosophy had been a mistake.

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What is strange in Descartes' thinking is his disregard for the world. Although he makes use of the knowledge of the world, of his own empirical knowledge, when he thinks, it is as if the whole world has become empty, in its contents only a long desert is found where there is no longer any human, art, science or religion.

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The whole description above is, however, nothing but the end point of a strange evolution. This evolution only aimed to signal the fact that an occurrence such as the difficulty of the beginning does not have a sufficiently wide historical

circumscription to make its novelty intelligible. For antiquity, as we will show further on, there was no such concern. But it existed for modernity, and the strangest thing, therefore the most interesting thing, is how such a problem could appear at the end of a hiatus, where tradition has accustomed us to continuities, determinisms and linearity.

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If poetry could afford to have the gods on its side, philosophy could not. The beginnings of philosophy are linked to a separation from the persons who made poetry possible, i.e. the gods. What they were able to do and support on the one hand, that is, on account of poetry, was simply no longer possible in the case of philosophy. Philosophy could not play into the hands of the gods, attributing to them their own contents regarding the world since the reason for the separation was precisely their mismanagement of the world. The poets never rose to the point of formulating a reproach of the faulty administration of the world by the gods, at most they could condemn facts, not reasons. What was in the lot of poetry was not dry reason nor abstract causality, but effects. Greek poetry did not rise to the investigation of absolute causality except in terms of manifestations, i.e. the visible, not the invisible concerned it.

In the name of its own causality, philosophy distanced itself from the gods who served such a cause only deplorably. In order for philosophy to be born, it had to separate itself from the gods. What grace could it claim from those who had just been condemned, made to execute their punishment by being dethroned from the seat of the absolute causality of the world?

What muses to be preserved by philosophy when the process of exile of the sacred had just begun, was in progress, their complete evacuation being already glimpsed? For philosophy, the muses had suffered a condemnation with the gods, and their small numbers, precise functions did not provide sufficient arguments in favor of the plea for remaining alive and offering services for services. Even for its own interest, philosophy could not resort to the illicit strategy of favoring the accused. Along with the pantheon, the muses were also evacuated.

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If, for the sake of a game that was not its own, philosophy could have involved itself in the playful scenario of preserving a relic, it could have kept, as a symbol or relic, Dionysus, the poetic god of the old world, its heterogeneity and heteronomy, the detestable pomegranite of beauty, god of nature and its secrets, of escapades and surprising appearances, free of obligations, to be met on the edge of shabby and unglamorous courtyards etc, in caves and lakes, mountains and waters, forests and meadows where nature never stopped hiding. He, in the diversity of his

appearances, could patronize philosophy in the dawn of his being. Dionysus could be the god of that object to which all philosophers up to Plato, philosopher of the restoration, had not stopped writing one and the same book: the poem of nature. Discreetly, hidden behind the utterances of the philosophers, Dionysos was that reminiscence of which the philosophers never took heed to banish, contenting themselves with this shadow of the imperceptible sacred.

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