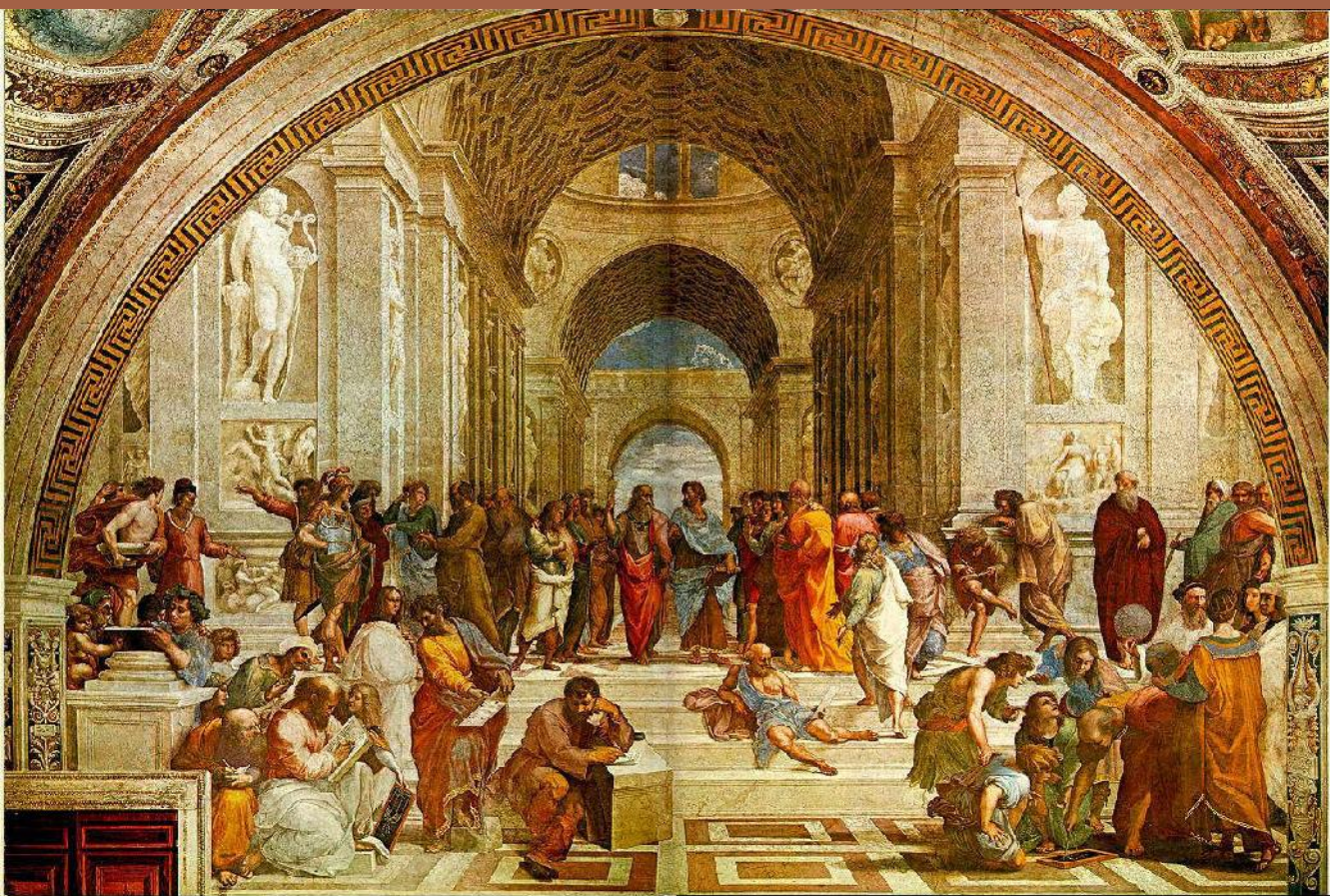


# Annals of “Ștefan cel Mare” University of Suceava

Philosophy, Social and Human Disciplines

Volume II

2011



PAST AND PRESENT HUMAN  
STANDPOINTS



**ISSN 2069 – 4008 (online: ISSN 2069 – 4016)**

# **Annals of “Ștefan cel Mare” University of Suceava**

**PHILOSOPHY, SOCIAL AND HUMAN DISCIPLINES SERIES**

**Volume II**

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**“Ștefan cel Mare” University of Suceava Press  
2011**

**Annals of “Ștefan cel Mare” University of Suceava  
Philosophy, Social and Human Disciplines Series**

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ISSN 2069 – 4008 (online: ISSN 2069 – 4016)

**Analele Universității „Ștefan cel Mare” din Suceava  
Seria Filosofie și Discipline Socio-umane**

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ISSN 2069 – 4008 (online: ISSN 2069 – 4016)

# ANNALS of *Philosophy, Social and Human Disciplines*

(Annals of “Ștefan cel Mare” University of Suceava, PHILOSOPHY, SOCIAL  
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**PHILOSOPHY, SOCIAL AND HUMAN DISCIPLINES SERIES**

**Past and Present Human Standpoints**

**2011**

**Volume II**



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# RESEARCH PAPERS



# Philosophical Aspects of Homosexuality in Ancient Greek

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## Abstract

*The current opinion on how Greeks lived and considered love is the following: love is seen as a sensual desire, a desire of possession. What we understand today by love (feeling plus passion) did not interest the Greeks. The Greek love is the love as impulse, as desire, as need of reunification, so that any erotic act is the sign of an imperfection. The lover sees in the loved one just an existence of a higher degree. Only to love something inferior is a pathologic sign, and when love is like this, the inferior cannot get the best part of the love. Therefore, more valuable is to be loved than to love. Since the Greek feels the love as a necessity, he does not make anymore the distinction between love as such and the other needs of human nature. Maybe love is the most intense need, it can as well be the deepest or the noblest, but in the end, it remains what it is – a need, and it differs from the others not by nature but by degree and harmony. I used the last term for the following reason: because needs are of a sensitive nature (bodily), love seeks to satisfy itself in harmonious bodies, and the Greek is not ashamed of the natural part (bodily) of love. As much chastity the natural love generates as the need of drinking, eating (it is true that, of and among creatures man is the only one who drinks without being thirsty and eats without being hungry. The same is with the need or use of eros.)*

**Keywords:** *ethics, homosexuality, pederasty, philosophy, eros, education.*

## *The Problem of Greek Love*

The essence of Greek love is given by the aspiration towards possession and the possession is reunification (re-possession). Then everything is allowed since it is natural, and what is natural goes beyond the frame of family. Thus, Greek love lives completely outside marriage and family. The wife has other duties: she procreates, she is mother and housewife; she cannot be a mistress, neither a courtesan, this is not her role.<sup>1</sup> For an Athenian woman, for instance, a reason of

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<sup>1</sup> Adriano Tilgher, *Viața și nemurirea în viziunea greacă* (Life and Immortality in Greek Vision), Univers Enciclopedic Publishing House, Bucharest, 1995, p. 78.

pride was the fact that nobody knew anything about her in the citadel, and Menander (fragment 546) says that “an honest woman must remain at home; the street is for miserable women”. The premise is: “the Greeks have loved, with strength and elevation, but they did not love Love; and the Christian world and the modern one never loved anything more than Love itself.”<sup>2</sup>

The Greek is conservative: in the public sphere the man is moving; in the domestic one, the woman (as compensation: in the public sphere there is nothing that belongs to the man directly, in the domestic one the woman owns everything in what the administration is regarded, both the keys to the pantry and to the cellar are for the woman the sign of authority, even if the man may exert some sort of extra control. Teofrast, in *Characters*, 18, shows how the man, distrustful, before bedtime, asks the wife if she had closed the chest, if she had put the seal, if she had locked the gate). Women did not travel and the Greeks did not prepare themselves to receive women as guests. However, even for the Greeks, a house without a woman was an empty house. In the bedroom there was the matrimonial bed. It belonged to the man as husband and it was intended to the woman as wife; the sexual liberty of man was total; the sexual liberty of woman was limited exclusively to her man and only when he thought it was right. All women had to get married and their moment of perfection is virginity – *parthenos*. The father enjoys the daughter not because she belongs to him, but because he can give her in to someone else: “the more wanted she is, the more desired for marriage and, thus, he will loose her even more secure and faster. For women, the moment of maximum ambiguity is at the same time that of maximum accomplishment, to be more precise the moment when she becomes wife,”<sup>3</sup> wife by excellence (Pandora, Penelope), abandoned wife (Hera).<sup>4</sup> Pandora is the first woman (she brings on the world death, but also life), Hera is the last woman (sterile marriage is the sign of

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 80-81.

<sup>3</sup> James Redfield, “Man and Domestic Life,” in Jean-Pierre Vernant (coord.), *Omni grec* (Greek Man), Polirom Publishing House, Iași, 2001, p. 164. For example, the woman “was not required anything else but to spin, to weave and to insure the perpetuation of family. For physical pleasure, the Athenian preferred the company of prostitutes at home (*the pallaces*); if he wanted to combine the charm of discussion with bodily pleasure, he would have to go to privileged prostitutes, famous for their intelligence, as Aspasia was, Pericle’s sweetheart. The wife, on the other hand, would not dare committing not even the smallest infidelity [...]. The Greeks despised so much the woman, that they could not even imagine that she could become the object of a passion: any man who would humiliate himself by passionately loving a woman would become «unmanly», drawing disdain on him [...]. The lack of any dialogue between sexes facilitated the development of prostitution, of male homosexuality and of female homosexuality”, Mathilde Niel, *Drama eliberării femeii* (The Drama of the Liberation of Woman), Politică Publishing House, Bucharest, 1974, p. 34.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 165-171.

eternal reign, but of course, only in Olympus). In the space under the moon, however, things do not take place exactly in the same manner. For them not to happen in contrary, there is the need of an intermediary; the intermediary is not a man, but a woman – Aphrodite. She is *paraitios* (“participant”) at the marriage she makes with the earth. She is, somehow, accomplice at this marriage, she encourages it and transforms a whole story into only a half one: the man enjoys the public space and thus appears a dichotomy. From it he can only come out mediated, but the mediation is not in him. Whether the Greek likes it or not, the mediation is in the woman. When he does not like it, the mediation is to be found in some sort of substitute which must respect a rule: temporal difference and sexual homology. It is in fact about a “rite of transition”.<sup>5</sup> The exigency of the substitute is an ontological commandment, because to love yourself by yourself means, in reality, to cease existing.

### *Paideia vs. Paidasteria*

I shall refer next to what it can be called, shortly, the cultural (and ethical) situation of homosexuality.<sup>6</sup>

It is an illusion to think that ancient Greek, and first of all Athens, was a paradise of the pederasts. It is not less true that homosexuality is certified in many cultures, so that the existence of sexual relations between men (or women) is to be considered as an anthropological fact. Hence the institutional forms that homosexuality takes, namely that the membership in a social group (or having a determined social status) may imply homosexuality. Only three examples, from a significant series:

- in ancient China female homosexuality was encouraged (it is reached the point where the family is forbidden to have more than one child);
- in the case of samurais, the *Bushido* code saw a rule in homosexuality;

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<sup>5</sup> Arnold Van Gennep, *Riturile de trecere* (Rites of Passage), Polirom Publishing House, Iași, 1996, pp. 147-165.

<sup>6</sup> Henri-Irénée Marrou, *Istoria educației în antichitate* (The History of Education in Antiquity), vol. I, Meridiane Publishing House, Bucharest, 1997, p. 59. Julius Evola, in *Metafizica sexului* (The Metaphysics of Sex), Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 1994, wrote: “Homosexuality is a phenomenon which, considering its spreading, cannot be ignored by a sex doctrine. Goethe could write that «it is as old as mankind, for which it can be said that it is part of nature, being however against nature», p. 111. And another thing: “The word «uranism» used by some for homosexuality comes from the Platonistic distinction between an Urania Aphrodite and a Pandeia Aphrodite; the first one would be the goddess of a noble and not bodily love, not oriented towards procreation, like the one whose object is the woman. It seems that pederasty, *Paidon eros*, might have had at its origin this character.” *Ibidem*, p. 112.

- at Thebes, the Sacred Guard defeated by Philip at Chaeronea (338) was formed exclusively of homosexual couples (the so-called “sacred band” founded by Epaminondas).<sup>7</sup>

It is not something that it should not be mentioned the fact that pederasty was so much institutionalized in ancient Greek that Pericles was considered an original since he distinguished himself by the fact that he loved only women, and according to Xenophon, pederasty was part of education: the one who loves is connected with the one he loves the way in which the student is connected with his master, i.e.:

- the loved one is a teenager who has just reached puberty, the age of first beard;

- the one who loves is an adult, usually not older than 40 years.

Xenophon (in *Constitution of Sparta*, 2, 12) confesses that he feels forced to speak about pederasty because “it is important in education”.

Old Greece was not a paradise for the inverted ones. Plato himself says that the reaction regarding pederasty was different in Greek communities (*Symposium*, 182b-d/183e, and in the fragment it is stated that in Ionia and in all barbarous places this is seen as something shameful. Only in such places philosophy is removed as well; it came to something like that because of the wickedness of legislators – 132c-d). The essential problem is not the study of the technique of inversion or the proportion of homosexuality at Greeks. This can be handled by psychoanalysis or moral theology. The problem is beyond *libido*, it belongs to love as such, to the conception of love of the ancient Greek and which oscillates between *phylia* and *eros*.

The premise from which I start is the following: homosexuality differs essentially from pederasty and the Greek language reproves the inversion. The latter one is designated as “dishonor”, “outraged”, “unworthy action”, “impurity”, “infamous conduct”, “ignoble custom” (it is to say that the disdain is a manifest not so much for the one who conducts the act, but for who bears it).<sup>8</sup> Law itself is

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<sup>7</sup> Jacques Corraze, *L'Homosexualité*, PUF, Paris, 1982, pp. 18-23. The author confuses here two things. The first: the one who organized “the sacred band” was Pelopidas, not Epaminondas. Pelopidas was a friend and inseparable collaborator of Epaminondas. The second: the appropriate phrase instead of “homosexual couple” is that of “pair of lovers”.

<sup>8</sup> Henri-Irénée Marrou, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 376. It must be taken into consideration the passive role played by an adult man. The terms by means of which the “passivity” is expressed are *malakia* or *malthakia* and mean “emasculatation”, “limpness”, Andrei Cornea, *Platon. Filozofie și cenzură* (Plato. Philosophy and Censorship), Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 1995, p. 81. Passive homosexuality falls into satire. In conclusion: “For the Athenian from the V century, the fact of having pederastic relations has nothing unnatural; on the contrary, the abnormality is on the side of those who, women, and especially men, agree to let themselves penetrated in the anus. The

harsh on homosexuality. Xenophon tells us that homosexuality was, apparently, accepted only in Elida (*Constitution of Sparta*, 2, 12), and where it manifested itself somehow free, it was, however, sanctioned the violation of the ephebe (Strabon, *Geography*, X, 483; Xenophon, *op. cit.*, 2, 13 and the *Symposium* of Xenophon, VIII, 35). At the limit, however, pederasty is the classical form of homosexuality in Hellenic tradition, and moreover for Herodotus and Lucian of Samosata it was even one of the Hellenism criteria, a criterion by virtue of which the civilized man was distinguished from the barbarian. What is sure, says Marrou, is that “Greek homosexuality is of military type” and “the friendship between men seems a constant of warlike societies, in which a male environment tends to shut in itself.”<sup>9</sup> The Greek citadel is the model of the “club for men” and in the club a *sui-generis* chivalry is practiced. Based on this chivalry I distinguish pederasty from homosexuality. However, pederasty (and not pedophilia, because the age of the *eromenos* was between 15 and 18 years old, and the *eromenos* was exclusively of male gender), as form of homosexuality, was intentionally sublimed and responded to chivalry, it, not homosexuality. Force, courage, fidelity are not domestic virtues or homosexual ones, and this is about the pederast moral, not about the pederasty seen as rite of passage.<sup>10</sup> The fighting spirit, the “agonistic” spirit, are not domestic. Their purpose is glory and glory requires to the one who loves to be noticed in the lover’s eyes, and to him to be worthy of the love that it is given to him. The desire is symmetrical and the ancient tradition connects the practice of pederasty with boldness, courage, virility (not homosexuality as well which is first a deviation, especially moral). The feeling slides imperceptibly from the military area into the political one and the lovers, not just a few times, rose defending their loved ones. Jealousy of this type overthrows tyrannical regimes. It is the case of Aristogeiton – the one who loves and Harmodius, the lover. For

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scorn hits, thus, both the teenagers who, by the sake of anal passivity, give up *diamerismós*, the normal behavior in the homophile relations, as well as the adults who, by neglecting their active role, become effeminate. Only the latter ones could become part of the modern category of homosexuality, which no longer means fugitive homosexuality, corresponding to the practices of education, but the stable inversion, centered on passivity and sodomy,” *Ibidem*, p. 147. The idea is the following: if the adulterous woman sins following her nature, “the one who abuses his own body acts against nature [...]. (Then) male homosexuality among adults is defined, in Greece, as being a custom contrary to nature. To engage to sodomy is equal with a double negation of the quality of man: it means to have the behavior of a man who is not free (and not of a woman), but also to violate ethical rules of asymmetric homophile love, that who transforms teenagers in worthy citizens,” *Ibidem*, pp. 149-150. In *Laws* (836b; 841d), Plato condemns homosexuality only because he understands by it sexual relations between grown men; he does not condemn the relationships between adolescents and adults.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 61.

<sup>10</sup> Henri-Irénée Marrou, *op. cit.*, pp. 62-63, 378-380.



Harmodius which falls in love with the tyrant Hipparchos. Suffering from love, Aristogeiton decides that the only way to keep his lover is to overthrow the tyranny. Plato quotes this example and allows to be understood that a strong connection unites pederasty to the feeling of honor.<sup>11</sup>

Socrates, for instance, knew well to distinguish eros from the simple sexual desire; moreover, the eros is opposed to this desire, so that pederasty does not take into consideration abnormal sexual relations. It is rather about a form of sensibility, “a misogynist ideal of total virility” in which “the eros however takes part in *arête*.”<sup>12</sup> How? The *erastes* (the active partner, the one who loves), since he is admired, draws to himself the *eromenos* (the young partner, the loved one), being for him precisely a model of admiration, therefore we have on the one hand the shaping, on the other hand the growing up, and it is to be seen that the paidetic aspect acts especially on the *eromenos*. And this from an age difference that gives birth to a report of inequality from which *eromenos* will take advantage. *Paideia* is realized in *paiderasteia*, and it was weird for a Greek to see this thing as bizarre. What is attraction exercised by *erastes*, becomes desire in *eromenos* although, if necessary, the desire is distributed doubly:

- *erastes* wants to seduce, to awake in *eromenos* a feeling of admiration and, in order to preserve the relationship, he himself is caught in the paidetic aspect;

- *eromenos* wants to be worthy of the attention that the hero (*erastes*) grants him with and is convinced that he will acquire, in time, at his turn, the status of hero. His intention is not just preserving such relationship, but the shift of roles in what he is concerned: the *eromenos* wants to become *erastes*.

The family does not provide such frame and the father is first of all a citizen (politician), only then head of family. The *erastes* is a model, guide, initiator and responsible for the evolution of the *eromenos*; the latter one is to prove himself worthy of the love of *erastes*. This means that the licit form of homosexuality was pederasty (a temporary relation between *erastes* – the mature man, and *eromenos* – the teenager/*paidika*, relationship in which the educational character was predominantly), while the illicit form of pederasty was homosexuality (if the paidetic/educational aspect was extended beyond the period of adolescence, pederasty was turned into homosexuality, i.e. the relationship was no longer between an adult and a youth, but between adults, even if one was younger than the other). For things to be clear, at least in Athens, the legislation regarding homosexuality stipulated:

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<sup>11</sup> Plato, *Symposium*, 182b-e.

<sup>12</sup> Henri-Irénée Marrou, *op. cit.*, pp. 64-65.

- teenagers (*eromenos*) were protected against the abuses that might have been committed on them during school;
- male prostitution was despised (*malakia*);
- the violation of such provisions entailed the loss of some citizenship rights.

In conclusion: “single homosexual love was, in general, considered by Greeks as fulfillment of the other people’s desires [...]. This must be accepted without prejudice regarding their natural or perverse character, if we want to understand the signification of Greek Eros.”<sup>13</sup> What does this mean? It means that the love the Greeks speak about is male love and its true meaning is to be found in what Socrates says that he had learned from Diotima: *orthos paiderasteia*.

### *Pederastic Symmetry – Sappho*

Any imbalance brings forth a counter-balance. Symmetry must be kept on the line of measure. Men’s club sees itself in competition with a club of women, the frenzy of male eros is found in the frenzy of female eros and this symmetry is transmitted from eros to education, and not even in a forced manner. Damned women built their own club on the island Lesbos. A few centuries later, in his *Geography*, Strabon tells us that he found out things about an island inhabited only by women and which he located in the mouth of Loire. When women needed to be together, they were crossing on the continent and did not delay more than that. Sappho wants exactly the same thing as the corresponding male institution: an ideal of beauty whose aspiration to be wisdom. “Greek spirit needed this woman in order to make the final step in the new intimate universe of purely subjective emotion,”<sup>14</sup> and, at Plato’s (and not only) stimulus, Sappho is worshipped as a tenth Muse. Sappho is not particularly interested in the woman as mother, sweetheart and wife. The traditional posture of the woman does not interest Sappho excessively. The period that the poet develops is the one contained between the period of childhood spent under the mother’s authority and that of marriage. As a whole, for the rule of symmetry to be respected, this period

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<sup>13</sup> Yvon Brès, *Psihologia lui Platon* (Plato’s Psychology), Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 2000, p. 251.

<sup>14</sup> Werner Jaeger, *Paideia*, vol. I, Teora Publishing House, Bucharest, 2000, p. 113. See also Henri-Irénée Marrou, *op. cit.*, pp. 70-72. Certain verses composed by Sappho urge us not to restrict only to men the fiduciary and mutual connection established by the asymmetric relation of love between adults and adolescents. Thus, as in the case of men, the relationship of *phylia* between an adult woman and a teenager is established inside a group of *hetaîrai*; as for men, this relationship animated by Eros is doubled by the pedagogical function by virtue of which the biographer of the poetess could identify the status of *mathétriai*, of students, of some of the young receivers of her poems.

superposes itself to that of *eromenos*. The woman enters in the Sapphic circle as teenager and receives the consecration of beauty to which she serves by dancing, singing and playing under the protection of the unmarried woman whose life is dedicated to the Muses. The *Symposion* (and which is a friendly meeting, although interested, of men and during which it is drinking, singing etc.), with its refined environment doubled by the intellectual tradition, is the place where the constraint does not express; it is understandable that “confessions of love often come out boldly to light in the intimate circle of friends.”<sup>15</sup> In this context appears, as a counterweight, Sappho. In her circle, of an adolescent femininity, the bridal and love songs bring the young woman in a unique position. Unique because she is a woman, not because the educational function of poetry would be contested by anyone. One can notice even an abandonment of the erotic in poetry in order to put instead of it the private life (case in which the poet becomes some sort of philosopher of existence), and in the Aeolian lyric poetry of Sappho private life is seen as the individual intimate life more than the phrase “private life” could say it. One is less interested in the sensual aspect of the Sapphic erotic; what interests is that, “for a woman, the experience of love is the center of existence and only she can receive it with the fullness of her complete nature.”<sup>16</sup> The man is a foreigner to this world. He may be a candidate, but he is not welcomed with love. That is why the intimate space of man, in the Sapphic circle, ends in the threshold. When Sappho imagines the man next to his sweetheart happy as a god, she does not take into consideration the couple man-woman; the couple is formed of Sappho and the memory of someone who abandoned her, a disciple, a student.

The education from “the house of Muses’ disciples” is artistic and physic. She cannot escape (nor has she proposed this as aim!) from the passion between the master and the disciple, and lesbianism is not, as pederasty will sometimes be in Plato a metaphysical aspiration; it is another physical passion, an excruciating one when marriage or betrayal separate the disciple from the master. Sapphic passion is not exactly one of spirit and often Sappho describes the physical symptoms of love, the physical effects of desire doubled by the sighs of the jealous woman (fragments 2, 74, 96, 97-98, 114, 116, 123. Fragment 2, for example, was composed with the occasion of a wedding. A student dear to Sappho decides to leave the group in order to get married. A wedding song – epithalamium – is to be

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 112.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 114. Sappho, by means of a mess of her own imagination and senses, convinces herself that each sex must focus on itself. She was not beautiful (as Lai's was). She was small, brunette, with bright eyes, not tall, blonde, languishing, as we usually imagine her. Horatius claims that she was hermaphrodite, Dionysius that she was a lesbian.

found in fragment 116, and fragment 196 is written, also, at the moment of the separation between Sappho and a disciple. I quote from this fragment: “Thoughts of death are here. / She left me weeping her sore [...] / And to me she said: / Pain torments me a lot, / Sappho, I swear, it is not my will to leave, / and the words call the answer: / Go with joy! To oblivion / Do not abandon me! How dear you were to me / You know. But I wouldn’t say it again [...] / Remember them all / Sweet moments spent together. / How many garlands of violets / Of roses and of garden sage / Have you not made sitting next to me and / How many wreathing of delicate / Flowers haven’t you created in garlands, / The fragile neck to calling arching? / Full of flavor, the drink, / Dripped from the core of the flower, / Clear, I shall let glide on your long tress of hair”. This fragment is a wedding song which is entirely different from a poem written with the occasion of a wedding when the disciple definitely leaves Sappho. We have something like that in fragment 2: “It seems exactly as with gods / The one who is right in front of you / And from close sips your sweet whispers / bending the head / And your charming smile admires. / Badly then my heart in my chest hurts [...] / As soon as I see you my voice melts / And it extinguishes / And in my mouth the tongue remains broken. / Ferocious fire goes under my skin / I cannot see with my eyes no longer and hard / My hearing howls / I am full of sweat and a tremble / Embraces me; more yellow I have my face / Than the dry blade, / As if I were dead [...]” And more: “Eros shakes my soul as the wind / That kneels on the mountain the oaks” – fragment 125). Sappho did not establish a new way of loving: “as doctors trained the believers of this god (Asclepius) in the art of healing, Sappho tried, helped by the goddess, to teach the young girls from Mytilene an art of living – the art of being a woman.”<sup>17</sup> And in this art, Sappho has nothing to hide. Homer is the *Poet*; Sappho is the *Poetess* says Galen, and Plutarch called “mixture of fire” what this woman sang. If she was denied the natural right of being loved in difference, Sappho decides to be loved in similarity, not in identity. That is why I said that she did not establish a new way of loving for Greeks. Sappho’s language is the language of passion and it covers a short and very well determined period of time: the distance between the native home and marriage, distance that becomes an ideal universe of transition. Shortly: “the great moments of Sapphic lyric are those when the poetess tries to conquer the still inexperienced heart of a young girl, when she separates from a friend who must leave the group to return home or to follow her man who asked her in

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<sup>17</sup> André Bonnard, *Civilizația greacă* (Greek Civilization), Științifică Publishing House, Bucharest, 1967, p. 102. Therefore, who does not answer to a confessed love, commits an unfair act regarding the erotic attachment validated by a contract that the adolescent signed when she entered the Sapphic circle.

marriage, or when she longingly thinks of a friend pulled away from her, who was walking on dusk somewhere, far, in the garden sunk in silence, calling in vain the name of her lost Sappho.”<sup>18</sup>

### *Conclusions*

In general, for the old Greek, love and sexuality are incompatible just as, in courtly love, it is reached the situation of maintaining that love and marriage are incompatible. In the case of courtly love (or of chivalry against marriage), the central term is that of “loyalty” and it is opposed, alike, to marriage and to “the fulfillment of love” (not to “fulfilled love”, which is valid also in the Platonic erotic and in the chivalrous one). Loyalty is identical with the passion the disciple shows to the master unconditionally. The problem is if they have chosen each other freely, since they have indeed sinned, without question, but they cannot repent because they are not guilty. Passion overcomes desire, philosophy overcomes rhetoric and Platonistic homoerotic is the same as a perfect “marriage” but unconsummated, because precisely in this is the perfection of such marriage. But not to consume the marriage is an insult for the citadel and an obstacle for the couple! But for love obstacles are exactly its way of being, because the Greeks did not love in vain. They loved passionately and deeper than this, they loved ascetically. The Platonistic erotic is an ascetic erotic, a caste one. The same the chivalry and romantic one. Maybe its hidden mechanism sees the elementary desire growing if the pleasure is delayed. In Sparta, Lycurgus recommended to the young ones prolonged abstinence, hence the following fact: chastity is the natural obstacle against instinct. Only in this case the purpose was a vital one: love shall always remain new, the children shall be strong. The erotic of Platonistic type suspends the relationship instinct-purpose (changing desire in act); the desire is transferred to an aspiration that is no longer defined, has no vital purpose, it is even opposed to such purpose. The eros is unquenchable longing, divine madness, enthusiasm (“the mad ones after Christ”, in another plan). The eros, if it is desire, is like this only in the form of absolute desire, form in which one cannot desire that or the other one because thus you would be subject to relative, to the accident. However, in the absolute, you are under the condition of fatality, so that the supreme desire is the negation of desire, not its privation. Negation is absence; privation is an incomplete form of presence. In the relation that is established between absence and presence it is reached the fact that the lacking desire is not also absent. Denis de Rougemont says that this dialectic of Eros is “*the endless*

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<sup>18</sup> Werner Jaeger, *op. cit.*, pp. 113-114.

*exceeding*, the rising of man to his God. And this path is *without return!*”<sup>19</sup> Absolute desire fuels the relative desires in order to sacrifice them. And the erotic desire is desire only in and under the condition of the fellow man, the one close by, so that no one could love in absolute and remain in the same time how he was.

Later on, the troubadours and the Cathars will praise the virtues of chastity (for instance, when the Cathars received the baptism specific for their sect – the baptism of spirit, because they reject the baptism of water, they promised, among many others, to restrain from any contact with their woman *if they were married*; if not, no!). Cathars even called marriage “lawful dissoluteness” (*jurata fornicatio*).<sup>20</sup> The cult of love is not in marriage, is outside it and in chastity. Loyalty of this type is unmotivated; when you justify it, you mask it, you kill it. Marie de Champagne, daughter of the learned Eleanor of Aquitaine (together they have been some kind of Sappho for the men in XII century and among the first ones who felt they could train men) “mentioned unequivocally the difference between the conjugal union and the union of lovers: «Lovers understand each other perfectly and without the thought of reward. Husbands must, *out of duty*, to be subject to one another and not to refuse each other anything».”<sup>21</sup> Love-passion is asceticism, education, spiritual exercise (with the indication that in courtly love the terms of the relationship are opposed, not alike, are man and woman), and in this exercise is to be found what Gaston Paris called in 1883 *fine amor*. This is an “erotic of ruling the desire”, “even when the lover is lying naked next to his lady”, which makes the difference between “close love” and “far away love”; they are both based on “self-control and ruling the desire.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Denis de Rougemont, *Iubirea și Occidentul* (Love and West), Univers Publishing House, Bucharest, 1987, p. 56.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 80, 87-88. In the XII century chastity was imposed by the laws of court; in the XIX century is imposed by the bourgeois tradition. It is degradation, in fact, embodied in the shift from fatal Eros to vital Eros. On the other hand, the poets of XII century “adopt as theme pederasty, (and) it is often hard to establish whether we deal with the imitation of some literary models (*imitatio*), or with personal feelings”, E.R. Curtius, *Literatura Europeană și Evul Mediu Latin* (European Literature and Latin Middle Age), Univers Publishing House, Bucharest, 1970, p. 138.

<sup>21</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Istoria credințelor și ideilor religioase* (A History of Religious Ideas), vol. III, Științifică Publishing House, Bucharest, 1991, note 48, p. 102.

<sup>22</sup> Danielle Régnier-Bohler, art. “Courtly love,” in Jacques Le Goff and Jean-Claude Schmitt (coord.), *Dicționar tematic al Evului Mediu Occidental* (Thematic Dictionary of Western Middle Age), Polirom Publishing House, Iași, 2000, pp. 29-30.

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# **The Knowledge Society and the Reform of Creative Writing**

## **How the Reforms Promoted by the Romanian Ministry of Education, Research and Innovation Affect the Writing in Higher Education**

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### **Abstract**

*This article deals with how major top-down reforms in the Romanian higher education system have affected and will continue to affect student writing and have forever challenged and changed teachers' and students' traditional roles. The reform of student writing in Romania is initially due to the implementation in the Romanian education system of the Bologna Declaration of 2002 and continues ever stronger due to the extraordinary new Education Law passed by the Romanian Ministry of Education, Research and Innovation in 2011. One of the initial outcomes of the adherence of the Romanian education system to Bologna Declaration was that, while previously to this change Romanian universities demanded very little undergraduate writing especially the original, research-oriented one and, thus, grades relied heavily on the results of the traditional sit-down final examinations, most courses now in the Romanian higher education system include student essay writing and other types of writing and systematic teacher feedback. Creative writing has started to appear here and there, too in the university curriculum especially at private universities. As a result of Romania's adherence to Bologna Declaration of 2002, Portfolio Assessment, which demands extended writing, has been also introduced in Romania, both at state universities and private ones. As a result of the new 2011 Education Law, even more emphasis will be placed on writing, research, competences and abilities, included practical ones, and creativity at all levels of education, higher education included therefore. The article presents some results from an evaluation of the educational reforms in Romania, mostly of the initial reforms following Romania's adherence to Bologna Declaration of 2002, but the study considers some of the reforms that follow from the newly passed Romanian Education Law. Mainly the following questions are addressed in this research study (1) Why did the initial reforms change writing practices and how even more we expect writing practices to change as a result of the implementations of the newly passed Education Law?; (2) What other factors have contributed and will further contribute to the change; (3) In what ways have the changes in writing practice, including creative writing practices, affected students and teachers and how further on these writing practices will*



*change as a result of the implementation of new Education Law; and (4) What are unintended results and critical factors in the future development of writing in the aftermath of the new reforms of the Romanian education system?*

**Keywords:** *Education, Romanian Socialist Education/Pre- 1989 Education, Romanian Post- 1989 Education, Reforms, Bologna Declaration, Education Law, Writing, Creative Writing.*

*Introduction: Brief Facts about the Romanian Education System Pre- and Post- 1989*

*Romanian Education after the Second World War and before 1989:* After the Second World War, Romania became a socialist state. Education in socialist Romania, like in any other socialist regime, was a key component of the socialist society and was centrally controlled. Every student from nursery to kindergarten, from primary and secondary school to high school and all the way to graduate school was taught in a socialist environment closely monitored and controlled by the state. The education system was strong, rigorous, tough, selective and based on many exams and tests during the trimesters, at the end of each trimester, at the end of the school or academic year. Written exams at main academic disciplines, each exam being based on everything studied till that point, examination time per subject lasting three hours, were also required in order for a pupil or student to pass/graduate from one level to the other, with very difficult final and entrance exams when finishing the 8<sup>th</sup> grade in order to pass in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, then again when graduating the first two years of high school, when finishing 10<sup>th</sup> grade and entering the last two years of high school, and then again there were the compulsory baccalaureate degree exams, oral and written ones, at all main subjects taught and the entrance exams to the faculty and university of each person's choice, different exams for each specialization. Competition was extremely high, a lot of emphasis was on theoretical knowledge, attendance was compulsory up through secondary school,<sup>1</sup> yet even at university level attendance was mostly required. The centralized education system provided one notable success – literacy rates were estimated at 98 percent during communist rule,<sup>2</sup> students took studying very seriously, and the academic staff, teachers, professors were appreciated.

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<sup>1</sup> S. Rabitte, "Education: Overview," retrieved from <http://www.russia.cz>. 2001, on November 8, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> United States Department of State, "Background Notes: Romania," July 2000, retrieved from <http://www.state.gov>, on November 8, 2011.

There was both a scale of values where each person knew his or her place and a clear social system, with obvious social classes – as contradictory as it may seem in the light of socialism and communism as systems eradicating social differences among people, system based on equality among all members of a society. Thus, during the socialist education system, students from all levels were studying very hard since there were only few places at university level and only the very best ones could succeed, and also in order for one to pass from one level to another in school or high school, if they desired to be in the best classes, students had to have the very best grades at all subjects of examination. If on one side competition proved efficient, students used to study hard and be serious about school, parents cared about school, too, on the other hand, teaching methods focused mostly on memorization of material for state exams. Very little emphasis was placed on critical thinking. Creativity was and is still not too encouraged in the Romanian education system. Students were not taught that it is desirable to think out of the box, when the contrary they were punished if they had too much initiative. Same goes for the Romanian education system nowadays, even after the *Bologna* reforms. Perhaps, however, that the 2011 *Education Law* will bring some good changes in this respect. The desire to toughen again a system that now lacks rigour (and that showed in the low-passing rate at baccalaureate degree this year). If teachers were to be paid what they deserve, if there were to be more enforced discipline and less corruption in the school system, further generations will be more like those of the socialist time with yet another advantage too: the one they could also think for themselves, have initiative, think creatively and be different in a good way.

In the socialist system, the Ministry of Education set the curriculum and the curriculum and the textbooks were heavily influenced by the communist doctrine – Religious and private schooling was nonexistent in communist Romania. The Ministry also planned the number of students who would be accepted at institutions. Students were generally free to apply to the school that they chose, but acceptance was regulated by the state. The number of pupils to be accepted at schools of each level was planned during the summer by The Ministry of Education for the school year beginning in September.<sup>3</sup> The Ministry of Education and the state declared that all schools had the same quality of education, but it was clear that technical schools were the emphasis of the state. Agricultural and rural schools had fewer resources and were not sought after like technical schools, which included the sciences and engineering. Regarding Arts, foreign languages

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<sup>3</sup> S. Rabitte, *op. cit.*

included there, the competition was even harder, and each year only one of the three state universities would have open seats for the students passing the entrance exams. Thus, one year students who would want to study English had to go to Bucharest to attend courses at the University of Bucharest, the next year there will be seats available for exams in Iasi at *Al I. Cuza* University while the third year students desiring to major in English will have to go to Cluj to that State University. Usually 10 to 15 places in the whole country were assigned yearly for those who would like to major in English, meaning that for each place there would have been over 300 well prepared students competing. Education reforms in the 1970s provided a heavy emphasis on technical schools at a ratio of two-thirds technical schools to one-third or even less humanity schools. This was, in part, due to Ceausescu's belief that study of the humanities was a waste of state resources and that intellectuals were not productive members of society like those trained in the industry. The emphasis on technical education is exemplified by the different tracks of curricula available to students entering high school. Technical schools, at the high school level, were divided into different types and students were selected for these on the basis of entrance exam scores. The best students were placed into physics and math curricula, middle grade students were placed into electronics and mechanics, while the rest will specialize in textile industry, wood industry, etc. Each high school student was also compelled to complete a one-month internship or apprenticeship per trimester and also each student had to spend time doing agricultural work during fall, when all Romanian population will be involved in harvesting.

Despite the technical emphasis of education, Rabitte<sup>4</sup> notes that the socialist curriculum was well balanced – even by Western standards. Students balanced their technical training with courses in Romanian literature and language, two additional foreign languages, even if students had only one or two hours a week of foreign languages, history, sports, geography, biology, and drawing. Physical education was obligatory and even during breaks, students were gathered in the yard of their kindergarten, school or high school to perform a few stretches and different types of physical exercises. Gaining both general knowledge and technical one – student having to go each semester for practical training in the factories depending on their curricular emphasis, was important. However, emphasis was placed on Math, Physics, and Chemistry, students taking two hours of math a day, one of physics and one of chemistry a day if they specialized in math-physics. It is not surprising that international estimates of literacy rates were

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<sup>4</sup> S. Rabitte, *op. cit.*

reported so high. Schools taught the English, French, German, Spanish, and Italian languages. However, Russian was not heavily taught in schools because of Ceaușescu's severance of ties with the Soviet Union during the late 1960s. Each year, student will be rated – same happens nowadays but with more tolerance and flexibility, and they will be given first, second, third place and a few mentions. Grades in both the socialist and actual education system are 1 to 10, with 1 being the lowest and 10 the highest. One had to receive 5 at each discipline, at each subject each semester in order to pass. Same goes for each exam necessary for passing from one level to another, with 6 being the average of all exams taken. At university level, there were only a few students who graduated *Summa cum Laudae*, with 10, and they were Honor students, Meritory national scholars. Another think worth mentioning here was that gifted children, adolescents and young people did not have enough opportunities to develop their talents. Also, very bright students could not finish school faster than their peers, could not do two years in one for instance, thus they were stuck in the same level with slower students. If on one side teachers used to concentrate on teaching the very best students in the school, the mediocre ones and weak ones being let at the mercy of private tutoring, etc., on the other side, gifted children too could not truly benefit from their skills, talents and abilities. Also, even if in one of the above paragraphs I was writing about the role of physical education in socialist Romania, on the other hand the lack of adequate state support showed even in this area since not too many students knew how to swim or skate due to the lack of swimming pools and skateboards.

*Education in Romania after 1989:* After 1989, the Romanian education system began the process of reforms, but without continuity, each new person in charge bringing his or her personal agenda into reforming education. Education reforms were adopted, yet chaotically, and implementation of reforms was and continuous to be a slow process. Market reforms allowed several new publishing houses to open up and print books for the new national curriculum, however the standards are not as high as needed, and due to corruption not always the best textbooks are selected. Even the current Romanian Minister of Education, Dr. Daniel P. Funeriu was referring to current Romanian textbooks as to “books that put one to sleep”. Also, due to slow changes or even no changes in mentality, communist/socialist ideas remain even nowadays among the teachers and the academic staff. Thus, Romanian managers (school principals and university presidents included here too) tend to favour long briefings and meetings where there is much talk and little work and teachers and professors still favour courses

they read while students take notes. It is interesting to notice that immediately after the 1989 Revolution; one controversial reform allowed students the opportunity to dismiss teachers and professors that were not changing with society, but that was a very temporary movement. In addition, some teachers who were active members of the communist party were forced to retire from teaching,<sup>5</sup> but that again was just immediately after the 1989. There always have been and still are many contradictory things in the Romanian education system. On one hand, the Romanian government placed emphasis on following a certain retirement age; however, both state and private universities are full of teachers that should have retired a very long time ago. Also, we borrowed ideas and procedures from other education systems, yet we do not follow through as needed. To give an example, student evaluations do not have the same value they hold in the American system, for instance and many times it is not even the students who fill in the forms but teachers themselves just before some ARACIS or ARACIP committee will show up. There is too much bureaucracy, not enough honesty, and too much corruption in s a system that needs to be drastically reformed. Tougher rules that are being implemented regarding the promotion of professors came a little too late punishing those that are good while for too many years after 1989 assistants were very fast and with almost no writing or research promoted to full professors. Also there is something similar to mafia – the so-called “nepotism” in the university system, where family clans rule. One of the immediate reforms of education after 1989 was to rid the country of socialist ideology classes. Religious education and other private schools began to emerge from socialism. Included in this was a growth of private universities of different caliber. Many of these schools were, especially initially, quite expensive for locals and the curricula was and is still not always very good. It does not mean that state curricula are any better. Since universities became autonomous, the curricula did not become mostly better than before but unfortunately mostly worse, courses and seminars being placed in the curricula not based on students’ needs according to their chosen specialty, their major, but according to human resources, meaning according to professors’ training and specialties. Even over 20 years after 1989, some of the private universities do not have the resources of well-established state universities, not that state universities are also very competitive when there is much corruption and little real competition and when at many universities some families rule the place. No wonder, that Romanian higher education system places very low and we have no elite schools, no first tier universities, and none of the Romanian universities ranks in the very

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<sup>5</sup> S. Rabitte, *op. cit.*

first 500 ones in the world. Regardless of criteria taken into consideration for making the “top 500 most important universities in the world”, not a single such Romanian institution has managed to make the list, even though our Hungarian, Polish or Czech neighbors have at least one institution in this list. Every year, four such lists are published: “The Academic Ranking of World Universities”, conducted since 2003 by the Shanghai University “Jiao Tong”, “QS World University Rankings”, made by the Times magazine, “HEEACT”, made by the Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation Council of Taiwan and “Webometrics” made by a Spanish state institution.

Of all these, *The Academic Ranking of World Universities* seems to be the most reliable, as the list is made according to the number of graduates who have won the Nobel prize, the Fields Medal prize (the most important prize given to a mathematician) and the number of published studies in the most relevant science magazines. Every year, more than 1,000 universities are analyzed and the first 500 names are made public. As expected, the list is dominated by American education institutions. 17 of the first 19 best universities in the world are American. Top three is made of Harvard, Stanford and University of California, Berkeley, while UK’s Cambridge comes fourth. North America has 184 universities in the top 500, Europe has 208, the Asian/Pacific area has 106, and Africa has 3. Of course, higher education units in Romania do not count, but countries in our area are quite well placed – Hungary and Poland each have two universities in the top 400, the Czechs have one university in the top 300 and Slovenia has one in the top 500. By continents, 212 of the first 500 universities are North American, 9 are Latin American, 222 are European, 15 are Australian, 38 are Asian, 3 are Arabian and one university is from Africa.

Also, with too many students graduating and with too little emphasis on actual real life training, many students who graduated especially after 1995 found that their degrees were not valuable in the market. As reform continued, there were and continue to be improvements in the private universities and many became nationally accredited, even if even the accreditation process was not always very clear or fair. Rabitte<sup>6</sup> suggests that private institutions institutions, Romanian private universities have improved greatly and have sunk much of their profits into internal, capital improvements. State run universities and their curricula also came under reform. Reisz<sup>7</sup> argues that the initial reform of universities in the 1990s was

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<sup>6</sup> S. Rabitte, *op. cit.*

<sup>7</sup> R. D. Reisz, “Curricular Patterns Before and After the Romanian Revolution,” *European Journal of Education*, 29(3), 1994, pp. 281-290.

an expansion of academic freedom. These included a development of new disciplines by academics along with the fall of barriers to international information (e.g., by the Internet). However, even nowadays most Romanian universities do not have the needed resources for real research since they lack subscription to online research databases or to printed specialized journals and most universities do not have enough computers or printers for their students, professors and staff. The 1989-1995 reform toward a more open society included a new emphasis on business, and the arts and humanities in education. However, the new government in 1991 continued to promote the industrialization of Romania and technical education remained important. This meant deemphasizing fields such as health and education to fund industrial priorities. These implementation problems are of particular concern to rural areas that are underfunded and without good facilities and textbooks. Raisz<sup>8</sup> argues that the early reform experiment of “absolute freedom” in curricular affairs was considered to be unsuccessful. Therefore, he suggests that academics in Romania have been held back by the Ministry of National Education and that this signals a return to more central control over education in Romania. The Romanian curriculum also changed from an emphasis on memorization to a more emphasis on critical thinking. International experts aided Romania with this transition mostly in urban areas, however measures implemented were somewhat artificial and they did not consider the actual cultural background becoming forms with no real content. The transition was even slower in the rural areas where teachers still follow the old teaching techniques, where students and their parents do not always have the material resources needed for good education. Despite reform efforts since the 1989 revolution, many problems persist including what has been termed as “chaotic growth”<sup>9</sup>. Student enrollments increased from 164,505 in 1988-1989 to 256,690 in 1992-1993; the number of faculties tripled; and private universities grew to 73 by 1995. Along with this growth came a serious shortage of teachers. The number of teaching positions grew from 14,485 to 31,249 from 1989 to 1993. However, although the positions grew by 116 percent, the number of positions filled only grew by 64 percent (according to different internet sources). Most newer, after 1989 state and private universities have been founded in the 1990s, and, of course, due to the rapid increase in both the number of universities and the number of available specialties and places at each university, there is an inflation of badly prepared professors and

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<sup>8</sup> R. D. Reisz, *op. cit.*

<sup>9</sup> K. Smith, “A Romanian Renaissance,” *The London Times. Higher Education Supplement* 1178, June 2, 1995, p. 10.

students — please see findings.

In 1990, Romania put forth objectives for educational reform. Wilson Barrett<sup>10</sup> discusses the reform mission put forth in 1990 by Romania as a series of reforms that were in line with other national reforms (constitutional, political, economic, and social). The following objectives had priority: One was decentralization of educational administration by delegating responsibilities to inspectors and school principals; by increasing university autonomy and the accountability of education through a system of public responsibility for efficiency; and by creating boards to facilitate the participation of local officials, parents, trade, and industry. The other very important priorities included: modernization of education finance, reorganization of teacher training, restructuring of vocational and secondary technical schools, modification of curricula including books, and the abolition of the state monopoly over textbooks. Along with granting more autonomy, Romania also prioritized higher education reform to include academic evaluation, accreditation, and new financing systems. Finally, new government institutions were set up to implement education reform. These included the Department of Reform, Management, and Human Resources (under the Ministry of Education); the establishment of teacher centers in each county; regional managers of reform at the local level; a network of pilot schools organized by the Institute for Educational Services; the National Council for Educational Reform; and the National Council for Evaluation and Accreditation. Given the discontinuity in the system, it is still laudable that the Romanian educational system is still competitive not as before of course, and that Romanian students stand out in both high school and college. Romanian high school students hold a record number of medals and distinctions in international math, physics and computer science competitions, Romanian computer scientists, engineers, and medical doctors are considered among the best in Europe, and Romanians students who receive grants overseas are the best teaching assistants and research graduate assistants at the institution that offered them financial support. In fact, compared to all Central and east European countries, Romania sends most students to top American universities yearly. Given the performances these students show abroad, one can see the intellectual capacity of the Romanian academic body and the potential of Romanian students to top students in universities around the world. However, due to universities desperate desire to have more money, weaker and weaker students are enrolled each year at both state and private universities and

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<sup>10</sup> W. Barrett, "Romania," *European Education: A Journal of Translations* 27, Winter 1995/1996, pp. 70-71.



there is much pressure on the faculty to make sure the students, regardless their capacity and work, to pass and be graduated if possible even with good grades, meaning there is serious grade inflation in the Romanian education system all the way from first grade to doctorate degrees.

Another comment to make about post 1989 Romanian education is that a staggering 41% of 15-year-old Bulgarian students have difficulties with reading, which ranks Bulgaria first in Europe while Romania is second in the negative ranking with 40% while the average EU percentage is just 20%. The data comes from a new study titled "Teaching Reading in Europe: Contexts, Policies and Practices," which was published by the European Commission.

*A Few Words about the Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sport and a Few More Words about Romanian Higher Education System as It Stands in 2011:* The Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sport is one of the nineteen ministries of the Government of Romania. Over the years the Ministry changed its title. Initially it was called Ministry of Religion and Public Instruction, then Ministry of Public Instruction, and then it changed to Ministry of Teaching, Ministry of Teaching and Science, than changed back to Ministry of Teaching. When Andrei Marga became Minister, it introduced the largest reform measures, starting with the name of the institution: Ministry of National Education (Romanian: Ministerul Educației Naționale). In 2000 the name was changed to Ministry of Education and Research (Romanian: Ministerul Educației și Cercetării). This title was kept until April 2007, when it changed to Ministry of Education, Research and Youth (Romanian: Ministerul Educației, Cercetării și Tineretului). Since December 2008 the title is Ministry of Education, Research and Innovation (Romanian: Ministerul Educației, Cercetării și Inovării). From October 1, 2009 to December 23, 2009, Prime Minister Emil Boc served as ad interim Minister, member of the PD-L, and as of December 23, 2009, Daniel Funeriu of the PD-L holds the post of Minister of Education. The European University Association will be working with the Romanian Ministry of Education and the Romanian universities to support the implementation of a major new higher education reform bill that came into force this year.

*A Few Words about Romanian Higher Education System as It Stands in 2011:* Romania has a large higher education sector with 54 public universities and approximately 40 accredited private universities. The new law, which foresees a reform of the entire HE sector, seeks to diversify the system by grouping all

universities (public and private) into three major categories of institutions: research intensive, teaching and research oriented and mainly teaching institutions. The launch of the evaluation process has been announced on 25<sup>th</sup> of March 2011 at an event involving EUA and Daniel P. Funeriu, Romanian Minister of Education, Research, Youth and Sport as well as the Rectors of the country's main universities. The law requires these reforms and particularly the classification exercise to be supported by an external body. On the request of the Romanian Minister of Education, EUA has agreed to act as this external body. As a first step, EUA has established a high level international expert group to support the reform process. The task of the expert group will be to provide expert advice and follow-up on the methodology for this differentiation exercise, on the development of relevant indicators, and on the evaluation of the documentation received from universities. In this initial phase universities will be asked to evaluate, themselves, to which of the three categories – mentioned in the law – they belong, and to provide or confirm the relevant data, much of which has already been collected by the Romanian Quality Agency (ARACIS), and the Romanian Funding and Research Councils. EUA has agreed to take part in the first phase of this project provided that it is able to support and work with universities in the crucial follow-up phase focused on improving quality and institutional performance. This process will be carried out by the EUA's Institutional Evaluation Program over the next three years.

### *The Knowledge Society and the Reforms(s) Of Writing*

*A Few Words about Writing and Its Place in Higher Education:* Writing is a central activity in higher education across disciplines. Research results are published in journals and books, and students are required to document their acquired knowledge primarily through written text. Although writing is often referred to as a “skill” or a “competence”, most academics would agree that it involves much more than being able to communicate what you already know. Writing is also an important tool for thinking, learning and knowledge creation. Writing as the “discourse of transparency”, whereby language is treated as ideally transparent and autonomous is a common way to look at writing.<sup>11</sup>

Current academic practices need to be located within a broader historical and epistemological framework both in order to reach a deeper understanding about what's involved in student writing and in order to inform meaningful pedagogies.

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<sup>11</sup> T. Lillis and J. Turner, “Student Writing in Higher Education: Contemporary Confusion, Traditional Concerns,” *Teaching in Higher Education*, 6(1), 2001, pp. 57-68.

To learn a discipline involves learning how to think and talk and write in the discipline. This is the basic theoretical assumption and rationale behind investigating the change in academic writing in Romanian higher education over the last few years. Although the centre of interest in this article is writing, it is acknowledged that writing practices are closely interconnected with assessment and structure. Therefore, all of these issues are important topic strands in the article. Thereby the article deals both with writing in general and creative writing as well.

*Student Writing at Romanian Universities before the Bologna Reforms:* Romania is located in Eastern Europe, at the crossroads of Central and Southeastern Europe, on the Lower Danube, within and outside the Carpathian arch bordering Hungary, Ukraine, Serbia, Moldova and the Black Sea. It is a member of NATO and has joined European Union on January 1st, 2007. At 238,391 square kilometers (92,043 sq mi), Romania is the ninth largest country of the European Union by area, and has the seventh largest population of the European Union with 21.5 million people. Its capital and largest city is Bucharest, the sixth largest city in the EU with about two million people. Romania is the largest country in Balkans and has one of the most developed educational systems in the region. Romania has a long-standing record of national and international academic achievement. The country is home to more than 1,380 high schools, more than 90 universities with over 740,000 students enrolled in high school and 600,000 in college each year.

Student writing at Romanian universities before the 2011 Reform can briefly be characterized as making low demands at both undergraduate level and at master's level—with the exception of the master's thesis. "A major reason for this can be found in the traditional Romanian university model, which has been called the «exam giving university» in contrast to the Anglo-American «instruction giving university»."<sup>12</sup> In such a system students' grades only depend on the final examination and external examiners are important in order to secure a fair evaluation. Romanian students have not been expected to write as much and as regularly as in the United Kingdom and the United States. Even though handing in written papers was always advocated as a good way of preparing for the examination, the system was based on students' free choice. Generally speaking,

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<sup>12</sup> O. Overland, *Can Universities Improve?*, UNIKOM, Universitete i Tromsi, Tomso, 1989; O. Overland, "Writing at the «Instruction Giving» and «Exam Giving» University," in O. Dysthe (ed.), *Writing at University*, UNIKOM, Universitete i Tromsi, Tomso, 1994.

undergraduate students did little or no compulsory writing, except for the final examination at the end of one year of study, which in most cases was a sit-down examination of 3 hours. The picture was, however, somewhat more diversified in the humanities and social sciences, where some courses had introduced ‘term papers’ too, especially in the last couple of years. In mathematics and science departments, laboratory reports and site observation reports constituted the bulk of writing. In some subjects like physics, laboratory reports often require very little writing, as the students fill in a standard form. Training in sustained writing was lacking, and this became a problem for many graduate students, combined with a lack of knowledge of the demands of the academic genres expected of them. The Romanian master’s degree before the Bologna Reform was a two-year graduate degree based on a substantial dissertation or thesis with a time frame of 3–4 semesters, which often took longer. One overarching question in this article is how the *Bologna Reforms* affected student writing at undergraduate level and how the *Education Law* of 2011 will even further affect it. Subsidiary questions are how students and teachers react towards the changes and the wider implications for student learning and teachers’ work practices. In the final section, I will discuss how structural changes combined with changes in assessment interacted, and thus created both intended and unintended effects on writing.

*Characteristic Features of the Romanian Higher Education and the Bologna Reforms:* When 16 European education ministers met in Bologna in 1999 to discuss a common European education policy for the future, few had foreseen the consequences. The *Writing in higher education* 239 Bologna Declaration<sup>13</sup> is not a treaty that is ratified by parliaments or signed by the governments that were involved in formulating it. Nevertheless, it has already exerted considerable influence on educational policies in many European countries. Its clear goal is the creation of a European Higher Education Area by 2010, in order to ensure mobility within Europe and to make Europe more competitive on the international arena. The objectives of the Bologna Declaration are specific: A common frame of reference for comparing diplomas from all the European countries; An alignment of programs at undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate level: 3-year bachelor’s and 2-year master’s, followed by 3-year Ph.D.; Implementation of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS); Quality assurance systems; Better student and teacher mobility.

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<sup>13</sup> *Bologna Declaration* in particular, retrieved from [http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/educ/bologna/bologna\\_en.html](http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/educ/bologna/bologna_en.html), on November 8, 2011.

The recent reforms of Romanian higher education were strongly influenced by the internationalization in the higher education sector in general, and the *Bologna Declaration* in particular.<sup>14</sup> The *Education Law* of 2011 will further reform the Romanian education system. As a result of the *Bologna Declaration*, the bachelor/master's study structure (3 + 2 years) was implemented at all levels in Romanian universities. The Bologna Reform represents a radical break with many of the traditions in Romanian higher education. It affects the structure and length of undergraduate and graduate studies, the assessment system, teaching, supervision and student learning. Romanian students now get their bachelor's degree in three instead of four years, many courses are modularized and the use of external examiners in undergraduate courses has been reduced. New types of courses have been created, although many of the new programs build upon the old ones. The pedagogical expectations of the reform were clearly formulated in official documents and can briefly be summarized as follows: (1) More use of student-active teaching methods; (2) Closer follow-up of each student and regular feedback on their papers; (3) Closer connection between teaching and assessment; (4) More emphasis on formative assessment and alternatives to traditional examinations, for instance, Portfolio Assessment; and (5) Increased use of information and communication technology. As a result of the new *Education Law*, educational institutions will also have to make agreements or contracts with students concerning courses, clearly outlining the rights and responsibilities of the institution and the student in relation to each other. These measures are clearly in line with international trends in higher education. A more rigorous school system at all levels, the difference between teaching and research institutions, an emphasis on life-long learning, the heavy use of Portfolio Assessment, more student writing and more regular feedback to students are all new directions in education.

In order to see how both the *Bologna Reforms* and the new *Education Law* change the way student and teachers think about writing, I have conducted a national survey and four institutional case studies. The survey was carried out with the aim of collecting quantitative measures of the consequences of the *Bologna Reform* as experienced by the teachers. The survey consisted of 82 questions, and was sent out to a randomized sample of professors, associate professors and lecturers in all the higher education Romanian institutions, both state and private. The survey was administered from April 2011 till June 2011. There were 70 respondents. Statistical analysis shows that there are only small deviations on the variables age, sex, institution and position. It is therefore safe to use statistical

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*.

inference tests on the data. The data is, however, not quite representative of the entire population of academic employees as such. A more comprehensive survey send to more respondents and a survey conducted with students are the next step of this part of the research. As to the case studies, I had to choose a sample of institutions to visit. Given the time and financial constraints, I chose only universities based in the city of Iași. It was particularly important to include state and private universities, big and small altogether. Thus two state universities and two private ones were selected as case studies. Thus, I have selected the *Alexandru Ioan Cuza* University and the Gheorghe Asachi Polytechnic Institute as the two big state universities and *Apollonia* University of Iași and *Gheorghe Zane* University as the two small private universities. Of course, the study needs to be further conducted, including more geographically diverse institutions and both small and big both state and private universities. At *Apollonia* University of Iași, I have already started the student-based survey, too. Here are some of the findings that relate to student writing. In the interviews the teachers and students were not asked specifically about *writing*, but they were asked to talk about the changes after the *Bologna Reform* as they had experienced it. One question was, for instance, “What were the major pedagogical changes after the *Bologna Reform* in your department?” The findings that I report are thus based on what the informants chose to talk about and comment on, as well as the follow-up questions that brought more specific information.

I do not have data to document the exact increase in student writing after the *Bologna Reform*, but the survey data combined with the interviews give a fairly clear picture of increased compulsory student writing. Some 59% of all the respondents in the survey report great or considerable changes in assessment. There is no significant difference between state universities and private universities in this respect (see findings below). A greater number of smaller written assignments are reported by 32% of these. Portfolio Assessment is reported by 37% as the biggest change. This means that, of the 59% who have changed assessment practices (i.e. small assignment combined with tests or portfolios or projects combined with or instead of final examinations), a total of 81% have instigated changes involving more compulsory student writing. The data from the case studies corroborate that there has been a quite substantial change in all the departments included in the study in the direction of compulsory student papers. Here are some question presented in the initial surveys and the statistical data:

*Have the Bologna Reforms led to changes in assessment?*

Yes, great changes 33; Yes, medium changes 26%; Yes, some changes 13%;

No, just small changes 22%; No changes 6% Total 100%.

As a result of the *Bologna Reforms*, students engaged actively in the content of the subject instead of just listening to teachers and fellow students and as a result of the new *Education Law* this will happen even more. Thus, writing will contribute more and more to “student activity” and thus their writing skills will improve. There seems to be a consensus between teachers and students across institutions that the *Bologna Reforms* have resulted in closer follow-up of students. Of those in the survey who reported changes in their teaching, approximately 70% answered that they give more feedback to the students than before the *Bologna Reform*, and 60% provide more supervision. Although not explicitly stated, it is implicit that feedback means feedback on students’ written texts. Teachers commented on student papers before the *Bologna Reform*, but since writing assignments at undergraduate level were then voluntary in most disciplines, the amount of time the teachers spent on giving feedback had been very limited. In university colleges there has been a tradition of giving more feedback to students, partly because the teaching component is higher for the teachers there than at universities.

### *Portfolio Assessment*

In the survey 29% answered that *Portfolio Assessment* was one of the most notable changes of assessment, while 14% identified project assignments. In the interviews at HSF a frequently voiced opinion was that new assessment practices and better follow-up of students, in the form of feedback to written assignments, were the most noticeable and positive result of the *Bologna Reforms*. A major finding was thus an increase in the total amount of assessment in the institution, a finding that was confirmed by teachers and students alike. The initial positive attitudes towards portfolios seemed to wane when students felt they did not get enough credit for the amount of work they put in. On the other hand, when portfolios replace examinations they tend to have a lower failure rate than examinations. Critics of the reform therefore contend that this contributes to a “light version” of a university degree. Others argue that the higher grades are due to students learning more when they have to write continuously. A closer investigation of portfolio use at the four institutions has revealed a wide variety of definitions of portfolios and has thus corroborated our impression from the interviews. But a common denominator of portfolios of all types is that they require students to write and hand in written texts and that these count towards their grade. Since *Portfolio Assessment* had not even been in the vocabulary of

most higher education teachers in Romania before 2000, it is not surprising to find a great variety of interpretations of what portfolios are. In some cases “portfolio” is used to designate continuous assessment of very traditional assignments, while in other cases teachers used this opportunity to introduce more authentic assignments, with the purpose of tying the course content closer to the world of work. Whatever type of portfolio, undergraduate students were asked to write on a regular basis and hand in their written work for feedback and grading.

*Few Discussion Points and Further Explanations:*

My theoretical point of departure for this discussion is a view of language and learning as closely integrated.<sup>15</sup> From such a perspective writing supports the learning process by making students engage with the content at a deeper level. A crucial aspect will then be the assignment, whether set by the teacher or by the students themselves. As a result of the 2011 *Education Law*,<sup>16</sup> even more emphasis will be placed on assessment and types of assessments. Another important aspect is feedback that will help students discover misconceptions and encounter different perspectives. Again, as a result of the 2011 *Education Law*, even more emphasis will be placed feedback. Writing in the disciplines also means learning the relevant genres and mastering the demands of academic texts, being always aware of the specific audience’s needs. Qualitative improvement of such writing is dependent on a number of factors, not just a quantitative increase in the amount of student writing. My study focuses mainly on four issues. Thus, first, I will discuss why writing practices were changed by the top-down Bologna reforms, in the face of evidence from decades of school reforms that they have little effect on grass-root practices. My argument is based on a view of assessment as one of the strongest forces for change or retaining the status quo, but I will also discuss other factors. Secondly, I will discuss students’ and teachers’ views on whether the changes had positive effects on student learning. This leads to the third issue, namely, the unintended consequences that are potentially counterproductive to the goal of improved quality of student writing. Fourthly, I will briefly indicate, based on the previous discussion, some critical factors for the future development of writing at

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<sup>15</sup> L. Vygotsky, *Thought and Language*, A. Kozulin (ed.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987; J. Britton, *Language and Learning*, Penguin, London, 1988; O. Dysthe, *Writing and Talking to Learn. A Theory-Based, Interpretive Study of Three Classrooms in Norway and the USA. Report No. 1*, University of Tromsø, Tromsø, APPU, 1993.

<sup>16</sup> *Legea Educației Naționale* (Education Law), retrieved from <http://www.ccdis.ro/userfiles/files/Legislatie/Legea-educatiei-nationale.pdf>, on December 6, 2011.



Romanian institutions of higher education. Necessary at that point was the interviews I conducted which inquired *Why did the reform change writing practices?* In the interviews, I got the clear impression that many teachers interpreted “more student-active teaching and learning” as an invitation to give students more written assignments and they argued that this would engage students in the course contents. This is a “safe” interpretation of active participation, compared to initiating new interactive teaching methods, which would have meant more radical change for many teachers. The general conception was also that writing would increase the quality of students’ learning. The strongest driving force in changing or conserving teaching and learning practice, however, has always been assessment. This has been called the “backwash effect” of assessment in international literature.<sup>17</sup> Assessment is then seen as “the dog that wags the tail”, implying that it has a strong, even determining effect on teaching and learning. Another important raised question was *What other factors contributed to the change in writing practices?* Even though assessment changes are important, it is very unlikely that a top-down reform would have resulted in such widespread changes unless “the soil was ready” for it. We need to take into account that critics of the Romanian university system for decades have deplored the lack of undergraduate writing. Another factor influencing the change in the direction of more student writing is an increased awareness of the demand for communication skills in the students we “produce”. In international discussions of quality improvement, “academic competencies” get a lot of attention and writing is regarded as one of the most crucial of these. The impact of new technology should also be considered. It has been claimed that the widespread use of computers has made our culture more text-oriented. More specifically, the introduction of virtual learning environments (VLEs) in higher education institutions has made it much easier to administer increasing amounts of student papers. The data indicate great variations among departments and within departments regarding the extent and type of use of information and communication technologies. Paper-based portfolios, for instance, are still common in subjects with small numbers of students. It is also likely that the new budget model where a substantial part of the finances depend on student throughput is an incentive to introduce more written

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<sup>17</sup> C. Gibbs, *Beyond Testing. Towards A Theory of Educational Assessment*, London, Falmer Press, 1994; L. A. Shepard, “The Role of Classroom Assessment in Teaching and Learning,” in V. Richardson (ed.), *Handbook of Research on Teaching* (4<sup>th</sup> ed), Washington, DC, American Educational Research Association, 2001; S. Murphy, “That Was Then, This Is Now: The Impact of Changing Assessment Policies on Teachers and Teaching of Writing in California,” *Journal of Writing Assessment*, 1(1), 2003, pp. 23-45.

assignments. Since grades are predominantly based on written work, writing gains in importance. It is also commonplace that written assignments help students to work more regularly throughout the semester and distribute their work better. Compulsory writing was, therefore, an important element in maintaining quality, in the face of the reduction of the bachelor's degree from four to three years. I also asked *What were students' and teachers' views of the changes and the effects?* The main tendency in the interviews is that both students and teachers are positive towards the changes in writing and feedback practices, but find the increased workload problematic. There was considerable agreement among the teachers interviewed across disciplines that frequent student writing combined with feedback had improved student learning, but it was not clear whether they thought this was due to regular written assignments spreading the workload of students and making them work more, or to a belief in writing as a tool for learning. Nevertheless, our data indicates a broad acceptance of compulsory writing as a quality improvement measure. This was somewhat surprising, since there had been considerable resistance to compulsory writing requirements earlier, sometimes based on the argument that "academic freedom" should also include students' right to decide how they would learn the subject matter. Compulsory assignments and constant feedback would, according to this view, remove a basic difference between universities and schools and counteract students' autonomy and critical thinking. There also seemed to be general agreement among students that writing papers proved to be a good way of learning the subject matter, and also that increased writing had improved their writing skills. A typical statement was: "Writing papers is very time consuming, but we learn a lot". Students were also unanimously positive that the reform had resulted in more regular feedback, even though some complained that it still was not good enough or specific enough. At the *Apollonia University* of Iași, all the interviewed teachers and/or leaders mentioned more compulsory student writing as one of the consequences of the reform, but the effect was rarely discussed. At the Law Faculty from *Alexandru Ioan Cuza* University, however, students specifically talked about the positive consequences of more writing: "We have become much better at writing. The training in writing has been very effective and we have already got positive feedback on this from the workplaces that employ lawyers." When asked about change in work habits, a student leader at the same faculty answered: "We clearly have to work more and the knowledge level is probably higher than before." Another student agreed that this was so in the modules where writing assignments was compulsory, but he also pointed out that avoidance strategies were still

possible: “But there are ways of avoiding regular work. With just one final exam that counts, it is possible to continue as before.” This last point will be discussed later. A major concern for both students and teachers was time. Students generally felt that their workload had increased compared to before the *Bologna Reforms*. This was not in itself the major source of complaint, but they problematized first and foremost that they did not get enough credits for the time and effort they put into writing. The teachers’ ambivalence was also connected with the time factor, but from a different perspective. Many of them felt that they spent too much of their time giving feedback to students’ written texts, and that this took time away from research. This emerged as one of the teachers’ major concerns. Even though many university teachers had earlier advocated increased use of compulsory writing and better follow-up, skepticism was now based on a fear that the extra resources were insufficient to pay for labour intensive pedagogical changes, and that they would be the losers. I then asked for Unintended *effects*? In order to get behind the surface level of the complexities involved when changes of this kind are made, I will first discuss students’ dissatisfaction with not getting enough credit for their writing. It can be argued that this is a result of the difficulty of making real instead of cosmetic changes in an established assessment system. Students voiced a positive attitude towards Portfolio Assessment, but complained that their final examinations had not been reduced in numbers and often not even in size. At both *Alexandru Ioan Cuza* University and *Gheorghe Zane* University, students were positive about more compulsory writing tasks during the semester, as long these counted towards the final grade. At the *Apollonia University* and *Gh. Asachi* Polytechnic Institute, the students said that the continuous writing made them work more regularly, but the assignments were of little consequence for the final examination. Very often the final examination counted for 80%, and a variety of written assignments in the portfolio added up to just 20% of the final grade. Students therefore reported that they experienced ‘the same old stress’ before the examination because the finals demanded new knowledge that had not been covered through the regular written work. The students’ explanation for this was the inherent conservatism in university assessment practices and the teachers’ lack of knowledge about alternative forms of assessment. It is a very common phenomenon both in curriculum and assessment that it is easier to add something than to cut something. If Portfolio Assessment is just added on to existing assessment, without thinking through how it is going to be combined with or replace end-of-term examinations, the change is just cosmetic. If this continues beyond the first reform phase, students will act accordingly and gradually invest

minimally in their writing assignments. Alternatively, it can be solved through negotiations and a reasonable balance found. This has already happened in many of the courses. There are, however, in our interview material signs of more dysfunctional aspects related to the structural changes of the reform that affect students' attitudes towards their writing, and ultimately also endanger the development of quality in writing. In disciplines/courses where the end-of-term examinations were replaced by graded written assignments, or where passing writing assignments was a necessary prerequisite for taking the examination, students prioritized working on their assignments instead of going to lectures, seminars and groups. This is a clear instance of the backwash effect of an assessment system on students' strategic behaviour, but the connection is more complex than it may seem. It is tied up to the modularization, which means that students need to take two or three modules each semester, and if all the modules introduce regular writing assignments, whether in the form of portfolios, continuous assessment or requirements for examinations, the result may be overloading the students and avoidance strategies are to be expected. At some of the institutions there was also concern among the teachers that the great number of compulsory writing tasks given to students had the unintended effect of students reading less and attending fewer teaching sessions unless they were compulsory. This was corroborated in communication students. Students interviewed said that a lot of students tend to drop both lectures and group sessions and that they tend to read selectively, which means that unfortunately they do not get the big overview. It is not surprising, however, that it takes some time to adjust study behaviours to new demands. I then focused on *What are critical factors in the development of writing after the Bologna reforms, in the light of the newly passed 2011 Education law?* Given my theoretical perspective on writing, it is no surprise that I think the quality of Romanian undergraduate education has improved as a result of the changes in writing and feedback practices. Improving writing in higher education, however, is not just a question of quantity or of whether or not it is compulsory. The combination of structural changes (modularization) and changes in the assessment system have influenced student learning processes in complex ways, some of which may be counterproductive to learning, and these need to be dealt with at a national level. I want briefly to highlight three factors that need to be solved at faculty and departmental level. First, a balance must be found between the needs of the students for regular writing and feedback on their work, and the demands on teachers' time. This may mean a general increase in teaching resources and increased use of teaching assistants, but it may also mean new ways

of structuring teachers' work in order to safeguard specific periods of time for research. A balance has to be found between coursework, portfolios and examinations. Students need to feel that the work they put into the writing assignments is given credit and counts towards their grade. There already exist a variety of models of how to combine portfolios and examinations. Many more of these are used in the university colleges, but they would also be improvements at the universities. Then, there is a need for holistic planning of writing development in the various disciplines from the first semester to the PhDs. Key issues are the formulation of explicit learning objectives, a plan for training students and teachers, a plan for progression throughout the entire trajectory and the placement of responsibilities for the writing program.

### *Conclusions and Further Directions*

In this article, I have started to show how the Higher Education *Bologna Reform* in Romania has changed the conditions for undergraduate student writing by advocating more student active teaching and learning, and, more importantly, by giving up the centralized regulation of assessment systems and opening up much more varied assessment formats. This has resulted in extensive use of coursework, Portfolio Assessment and some project assessment. In spite of widespread agreement that Romanian students ought to write more, and considerable development work and advocacy for more undergraduate student writing over many years, it was of little consequence until the assessment system was changed. There are, however, still structural issues that need to be resolved in order to reap the full learning benefits of the increased attention to writing. The fact that Romanian undergraduate students now are required to write more regularly is not enough to make students proficient in writing. There is a need for more holistic planning of writing programs in order to ensure a sensible progression throughout student's educational trajectory. These findings are relevant to higher education in other countries as well, even those where undergraduate essay writing has been an integral part of the system, for instance in the United Kingdom or United States of America. Regular writing is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for improvement in writing, and the necessity of teaching academic writing is increasingly being recognized in most European countries and in North America. The European, particularly the continental, Scandinavian, and eastern European university tradition has been to view writing as a skill students were expected to possess when they entered higher education, or acquire through practice without being taught. The American tradition, however,

dating as far back as the nineteenth century, has been to offer separate courses in writing. More emphasis needs to be placed on writing and creative writing which may lead European universities, Romania universities included to move in the direction of the Anglo-American model of teaching writing, but probably with a particular focus on teaching disciplinary writing instead of general writing courses. This would be in concert with recent writing research that has shown the inadequacy of an academic skills approach to teaching writing and the close connection of writing to disciplinary knowledge cultures.<sup>18</sup> The *Bologna process*, with its early emphasis on structural changes, did not directly involve the content of study programs. The study reported here, however, has shown that, although the change from a 4 + 2 to a 3 + 2 model in Romania had no specific pedagogic or content provisions, it led to more compulsory student writing and increased teacher feedback, partly as a means to maintain quality in the face of reduced time. A similar focus on student writing as an important quality measure may be expected in other European countries as well, but whether the drive to standardize course descriptions and requirements across countries will result in a call for definitions of what, for instance, “writing-intensive courses” means, in terms of students’ written production, remains to be seen.

As further directions, more universities, both state and private need to be surveyed, with equal emphasis being placed on interviewed professors and students. Also, the new surveys need to focus on creativity, cognitive knowledge and creativity, creative writing, artistic assignments across curriculum.

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# The Use and Problematics of Descriptive Imaginary<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

*The present work intends to justify the use of descriptive imaginary as conceptual tool in investigating the structure of scientific discourse. Our aim will be that of revealing the existence of a fictional component of such a discourse and of explaining the evolution of scientific concepts from the point of view of their ontological authority. Nonetheless, we will try to justify the use of the term “imaginary” instead of “imagination” as regards the dynamics of scientific representations in modern natural sciences.*

**Keywords:** *descriptive imaginary, scientific representation, scientific theory.*

The present work will try to investigate the dynamics of scientific discourse in natural sciences using the concept of descriptive imaginary. The goal is that of clarifying the way in which scientific theories evolve, taking into account the process of conceptual development within the same theory or from one theory to another one. What is also intriguing for us and will influence our investigation is the way in which the ingredients of scientific descriptions of reality evolve throughout the historical process of conceptual maturation of a scientific theory.

The investigative tool we are going to use is the concept of descriptive imaginary. It will help us to emphasize the fictional component of scientific discourse, which in our opinion represents a key point in the dynamics of scientific descriptive representations that influences the evolution of scientific theories.

We have to explain what the descriptive imaginary is and what distinguishes it from other types of imaginary, but before doing that, it is necessary to justify the use of the term “imaginary” in a work dedicated to philosophy of science.

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<sup>1</sup> **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:** *This paper was made within The Knowledge Based Society Project supported by the Sectoral Operational Programme Human Resources Development (SOP HRD), financed from the European Social Fund and by the Romanian Government under the contract number POSDRU ID 56815.*

Imagination was regarded with reluctance by many philosophers, also as regards its use in the discussions about science. Especially modern science represented for a long time a field in which the use of the term “imagination” was a very prudent one. Giving the fact that scientists use their imagination in conceiving new experimental scenarios and proposing new solutions to different scientific problems, such a situation could seem pretty strange.

In fact, at a closer look, one could easily observe that the difficult relation between imagination and knowledge influences indirectly the relation between imagination and science in western cultural space. Starting with Plato and up to the modern period, imagination was rather associated with fantasy and illusion than with the knowledge of the real.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, any imaginative excess was regarded as dangerous for the effort of building knowledge about real world. This attitude became stronger in the moment of modern natural sciences emancipation. The mathematical component of modern scientific discourse in natural sciences developed by Galileo and Newton determined philosophers to sharpen the distinction between analytical thinking and imaginative thinking. The platonic orientation towards a kind of knowledge based on analytical thinking, capable to reveal the truth beyond sensorial illusions was inherited by later philosophical tradition. Scientific truth in modern science became more and more dependent on analytical thinking combined with measurement and experimental activity, whereas imaginative thinking was hardly considered as having a positive role in expanding scientific knowledge.

The general conviction of these authors was that our senses can trick us easily and taking them into account as primary source of knowledge exposes us to errors in identifying the real causes of phenomena, as happened with Aristotelian Physics. On the contrary, the mathematical method combined with experiment could lead us to the discovery of counter-intuitive truths about nature, like those revealed by Galileo or Newton. Moreover, an excessively imaginative manner of describing reality could favor the development of fanciful scenarios about real world and could even indicate the presence of a psychological disease. After all, the limitation of the use of imagination in natural science could help us to make the distinction between modern chemistry and alchemy, between modern astronomy and astrology, for example.

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<sup>2</sup> Hélène Védrine, *Les grandes conceptions de l'imaginaire, de Platon à Sartre et Lacan* (The Big Conceptions of the Imaginary), Librairie Générale Française, Paris, 1990, p. 27.

Of course, there are also other historical causes that favored the reserves towards the use of imagination in science. Among them, as Ioan Petru Culianu revealed, the religious ones should not be neglected.<sup>3</sup> Protestant Reform influenced the attitude towards images in general. Therefore, scientific descriptions of the natural phenomena became more and more abstract and the non-visual mathematical tools like algebraic calculus were used extensively instead of visual mathematical tools like geometry. This trend can be usually observed throughout the historical development of modern science.

However, as we will see immediately, there are also limitations of this process that must be taken into account. For instance, Newton maintained the geometrical character of demonstrations in his *Mechanics*. Every theorem and every principle in his book was corroborated with a geometrical schema that illustrates the magnitude and the direction of mechanical forces represented by vectors.<sup>4</sup> This way, Newtonian Mechanics maintains its geometrical character, being a good example of physical theory that combines the visual character with the analytical one. Of course, later development of Analytical Mechanics favored the enrichment of analytical component of the scientific discourse in this case.

Considering all of the above, we could concede, on one hand, that the reticence of those who hesitate in associating the use of imaginative faculty with the development of scientific knowledge is somehow understandable. However, on the other hand, it is quite easy to emphasize the importance of imaginative faculty within the historical process of scientific theories development, at least as regards natural sciences. For example, almost every new set of concepts that accompanies the introduction of a new theory is developed starting from a set of experimental data that are intriguing in the context of the old theory. This is normal, because the final goal for any theory in natural sciences is that of providing a viable description of natural phenomena, or an accurate description of the properties of nature. Such a description could help in making verifiable predictions testable and measurable, but also in developing new technologies able to exploit the properties of nature emphasized by the new theory.

Thus, imaginative faculty is an important tool for any scientist who aims to develop new descriptive strategies regarding the properties of nature. The real question is what are the limits and the specificity of using imagination in science

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<sup>3</sup> Ioan-Petru Culianu, *Eros și magie în Renaștere – 1484* (Eros and Magic in the Renaissance – 1484), Nemira Publishing House, Bucharest, 1994, p. 19.

<sup>4</sup> Tian Yu Cao, *Conceptual Developments of 20th Century Field Theories*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1997, p. 51.

in order to help the scientific progress and not to mislead it by excessive use of fictional elements that could reduce the rigor of scientific descriptions. Moreover, isn't that a contradiction to claim that scientific discourse, which intends to describe the real world has a fictional component that depends on the use of imaginative faculty?

Starting from these questions, we are going to introduce the concept of descriptive imaginary. First, we have to mention that the term "imaginary" - which we consider here as a substantive, not an adjective – has been introduced by the French school of philosophy and history, starting from Gaston Bachelard and continuing with Gilbert Durand,<sup>5</sup> Jacques Le Goff<sup>6</sup> or, more recently, with Jean Jacques Wunenburger.<sup>7</sup> It was preferred instead of imagination for two reasons.

On one hand, it represented a good alternative to imagination, a term with negative resonance within the history of philosophy.

On the other hand, imaginary is a term that reflects an essential feature of human communities: that of putting in common social representations at the interpersonal level, which triggers a process of selecting, mixing and replacing some representations with others, resulting in the end a group of commonly shared representations which are in fact "common places" for large categories of people belonging to the same culture, to the same religion, or to the same geographical area. "Heaven" could be, in this respect, a good example of representation that belongs to the religious imaginary of some cultural areas, as Lucian Boia states,<sup>8</sup> a representation that maybe in time migrated towards social imaginary.

As to scientific communities, they are not different from other types of communities as regards the putting in common of representations, so in this respect we could talk about a scientific imaginary.

But "imaginary" as an adjective refers to the entities that do not have a correspondent in the real world, simply being products of imagination. Therefore one could have justified reserves in accepting to discuss about scientific imaginary, since this implies somehow the idea that scientific discourse could have

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<sup>5</sup> Gilbert Durand, *Structurile antropologice ale imaginarului* (The Anthropological Structures of the Imaginary), Univers Enciclopedic Publishing House, Bucharest, 2000, p. 21.

<sup>6</sup> Jacques Le Goff, *L'Imaginaire médiéval* (The Medieval Imagination), Gallimard, Paris, 1985, I-II.

<sup>7</sup> Jean-Jacques Wunenburger, *L'imaginaire* (The Imaginary), Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 2003, p. 12.

<sup>8</sup> Lucian Boia, *Pentru o istorie a imaginarului* (For a History of the Imaginary), Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 2000, p. 14.

an important fictional component. There is no problem in accepting the fictional character of literature, of mythology or of other fields, whereas such a claim regarding natural sciences could contradict with their claim of discovering the properties of the real world.

In our opinion there are clear examples of fictional entities in scientific discourse, namely all those old scientific concepts that proved in time unnecessary for the scientific explanation of various phenomena. All such concepts, as “ether” for example, proved useless in time or, as we put it, revealed their nature of fictions.

Of course, in this point one could ask himself if such concepts *had* a hidden nature of fictions that was revealed in time, or if they *became* fictions in the moment they became useless, unnecessary or negligible for scientists. And our answer to this question is that such concepts, like any other scientific concepts, have been *always* fictions in the sense that they were products of human mind.

Not their *fictional nature* varied in time, because that was “genetic” and they were “born” with that. What varied in time was their *usefulness*. At a certain moment in time, scientists claimed to represent the features of the real world using those concepts. Consequently, their epistemological status became a positive one. They were invested with ontological authority as part of “trendy” scientific descriptions at that moment. In time, their place in the conceptual hierarchy changed and together with the rise of other conceptual and explanatory alternatives, especially in the case of a renowned explanatory conceptual system, namely a new scientific theory, their epistemological status eroded. In the end, they regained their initial status: that of simple fictions suitable of being used, eventually, in the scientific description of the world. That is why we prefer to call them descriptive fictions.

Scientists use descriptive fictions continuously and, of course, are inclined to treat them as fictions only in the beginning of the process of their introduction in scientific descriptions or in the end of it. In the beginning, the hypothetical character of the descriptions proposed helps scientists to detach themselves epistemologically from their own creations. At the end, their detachment is guaranteed by disappointment, because their conceptual tools, namely the old concepts, proved to be less useful in comparison with new concepts that finally replaced them. However, in the middle of the process the claim that a popular scientific concept has a fictional nature seems outrageous for many scientists. They are so found of the explanatory power of the concept, that they become impressed by its ontological authority. Therefore, as long as a new concept or a

new theory doesn't replace the old one, they are pretty skeptical in admitting the fictional nature of the scientific concept.

For example, it is much easier for contemporary scientists to discuss about the fictional nature of "ether" or of the "caloric" than to discuss about the fictional nature of "electrons", "neutrons" or "quarks". Of course, in the future things could change drastically.

Coming back to our primary concern, we can say that the evolution of scientific theories is highly influenced by the dynamics of descriptive imaginary, scientific communities sharing sets of descriptive representations in a continuous exchange process. They tend to choose quite rigorously the descriptive representations which are going to be invested with ontological authority in the scientific discourse. This makes descriptive imaginary to be quite different from social, artistic or religious imaginary. Not only the selection criteria are more rigorous in its case, but also the way in which old and new descriptive representations are combined to form a scientific theory determines scientists to use their imaginative faculty somehow within the limits of rationality when proposing new representations.

Therefore, in conclusion we can say that descriptive imaginary represents a useful conceptual tool for investigating the dynamics of scientific representations, with specific patterns of evolution, whose use is justified by the obvious, although uncomfortable existence of the fictional component of scientific discourse.

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# Nichifor Crainic and the interwar “New Spirituality”

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## Abstract

*After long periods in which there was more assimilating from other cultures, rather than creating, Romanian culture has experienced, in the interwar period, also the phase corresponding to the creation of important spiritual values. In that time, if we use a Lucian Blaga's phrase, there was a real “ontological mutation” in the field of culture.*

*Unrests, attitudes, propositions of cultural directions, whether, judged now, were providing solutions or just stimulating the environment of thinking, illustrate today the desire of men of culture of that time to produce values through which the Romanian spirit had to spread, through its contribution, in the universal spirit. But how could this happen? Everything that was done until then had to be left behind, forgotten? Or what had been forgotten was worth to be restored? Which was the undisputed landmark? What kind of spirituality was fundamental for it? The traditional one or the European one?*

*Nichifor Crainic in his essay “Spirituality”, in a first phase, and then, in the same year 1929, the investigation from Tiparnița literară, and seven years later Constantin Rădulescu-Motru in “Românismul, catehismul unei noi spiritualități” emphasize the meaning of the concept of “Spirituality”, and in addition the great number of meanings of the term “new spirituality”.*

**Keywords:** *“new spirituality”, Christian vision, Laic vision, Românism, catechism.*

## 1. “Life in spirit and art in spirit”

As in many other situations, Crainic situates himself among the men of culture concerned about the issue of timeliness. From his register of thinking could not miss the conceptualization of the term “spirituality”, thing encountered in an essay with the same title<sup>1</sup>, but also in other interventions<sup>2</sup> later in 1936, when

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<sup>1</sup> Nichifor Crainic, “Spiritualitate” (Spirituality), *Gândirea*, No. 8-9, august-september 1928, pp. 307-310.

publishing the volume *Românismul, catehismul unei noi spiritualități* (The Romanism, The Catechism of a New Spirituality). In “Spirituality”, the thinker presents, from the beginning, the struggle of the young generation, to which he does not belong as age, but in spirit, if we follow a specification made somewhere by Mircea Vulcănescu. As Crainic noted, at the time, among the intellectual youth there was a visible uproar not seen before: “New problems torment the young scholars, problems unknown before, and they speak more earnestly and more passionate about a new direction, about a «spirituality», as a vague term, about a return to religion, more precisely.”<sup>3</sup> In those years, as Crainic noted, there was an antagonistic spirit among the mature generation, who survived the war, indebted to the political idea of an achievement of a national unity or to the positivist mentality, and the young generation, seeking its own *spiritual itinerary* (Mircea Eliade<sup>4</sup>) and a “master of the new spirituality” that Crainic didn’t have in his time. Under these circumstances, the youth had to be led in a spiritual direction, to take into consideration the “religious thought” arisen from the mystical living. Mysticism is, for Crainic, a cardinal point from which he will not deviate: “From our part, we confess shamefully our orientation martially condemned by the pre-war and anachronistic mentality”<sup>5</sup>; For Crainic the Orthodox spirituality is a postulated future of the Romanian culture,<sup>6</sup> not a “fashion to loan, an imitation of the German poet Rainer Maria Rilke,<sup>7</sup> as Lovinescu considered. Rilke’s conception was completely different from the orthodox one. Crainic himself made this delimitation: “And one can see that Rilke’s religious poetry, having its roots in the German religious poetry and with its God image, specific to the German philosophical Protestantism, has nothing in common with our Holy Orthodoxy”<sup>8</sup>.

To the question “What is spirituality?” Crainic showed as a spiritual view that the human existence in all its complexity must be subordinated to “the spirit that dominates everything.”<sup>9</sup> Ontologically speaking, Crainic outlines “spirituality” being “our piece of existence morally polished, purified and continuously expanded by the flame of the universal spirit. Our existence and, with it, the

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<sup>2</sup> See “Mistificarea «românismului»” (The Mstification of «romanism») and “Spiritualitate și românism” (Spirituality and Romanism), *Gândirea*, 1936.

<sup>3</sup> Nichifor Crainic, “Spiritualitate” (Spirituality), *Gândirea*, No. 8-9, august-september 1928, p. 307.

<sup>4</sup> See the series of 12 stories published by Mircea Eliade in *Cuvântul* (1927).

<sup>5</sup> Nichifor Crainic, *op. cit.*, p. 307.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 310.

stylized image that is art. Spirituality is life in spirit and art in spirit, and as the dedicated and practical form of spirituality is the Church, the new orientation is life and art in the Holy Spirit. If the elite of the younger generation will be touched by this conviction, its way will mean also a return to the contact with the people's soul – that soul which our ancestors were identifying with the religion.”<sup>10</sup>

According to Nichifor Crainic the concept of “spirituality” has a theological meaning, obviously dogmatic, and can not be “an abstract and philosophical concept, which can be understood today in one way and tomorrow in another. It (*spirituality, n.n.*) is a way of living that is the sublime way of living as a man in God.”<sup>11</sup> Therefore, spirituality “has its model in the Son of God incarnate in man”<sup>12</sup> and is *teandric*. By this dualism is illustrated, on the line established by Dionysius the Areopagite, that spirituality “is composed of a divine element, – the grace or power of the Holy Spirit – and the human element in its purest form.”<sup>13</sup>

This “mystical fusion” should result in “a *life* saved from sin, perfect, deified.”<sup>14</sup> *Spirituality*, according to Crainic, means “human life assimilated in the Holy Spirit.”<sup>15</sup> Through such a cooperation, *divine-human*, which is joined by the act of mutual love between God and man, “human nature does not lose its character of human nature, but transforms and illuminates itself to understand the things and to work by after the divine model, remaining in human or creation condition.”<sup>16</sup>

As interpreted by Crainic, spirituality is manifested not only individually, but collectively: “Spirituality is at the disposal of man and at the same time of nation. [...] Nations are units of the human nature.”<sup>17</sup> “The Spirituality of a nation, said Crainic, can be interpreted by its historical actions and from the institutions it created in the sublime aspiration to Divinity, to life in the Holy Spirit.”<sup>18</sup>

## *2. The “New Spirituality” in Tiparnița literară*

Romania after World War I politically reunited by reuniting all the provinces inhabited by Romanian people, but this ideal was not entirely achieved. The

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>11</sup> *Idem*, “Mistificarea «Românismului»” (The Mystification of Romanism), *Gândirea*, Fall XV, No 7, September 1936, p. 357.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 356.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 356-357.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 357.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem.*

existence of a truly united Great Romania was conditioned by a full unity by creating a Romanian consciousness, thing that was in charge of culture achieve it. Thus, “the planned renewal after 1918, through the action of an agent called culture, will mean something very “natural”; the Romanian national State was elaborating the drafts of cultural evolution, practically the Romanization of school, of the elite and of culture as a whole. It is an extremely tense socio-cultural process. Generations and cultural visions clash, ideologies contrast. They strongly speak about a “new spirituality”<sup>19</sup>. In this context, as Ion Dur observes “some theoreticians” of the moment claimed the right to make notional boundaries”<sup>20</sup>. Initially, there were “two landmarks”<sup>21</sup>: Crainic’s article entitled “Spirituality”<sup>22</sup> and the literary magazine survey *Tipariņa literară*.<sup>23</sup> It followed in 1936, a third, which has as promoter Constantin Rădulescu-Motru.<sup>24</sup> Among the following we will refer to the second moment mentioned above.

Above all, we will analyze what Nicolae Iorga, C. Rădulescu-Motru, Octavian Goga, E. Lovinescu, Lucian Blaga, Nichifor Crainic, Radu Dragnea, Șeban Cioculescu, Sandu Tudor, Ionel Jianu, Mircea Vulcănescu, Mircea Eliade, Mihail Sebastian, Mihail Polihroniade and Vasile Băncilă said about the “new spirituality” that started the investigation led by *Tipariņa literară*. In this way it will be easier to integrate Crainic’s conception on this syntagma with multiple meanings.

In a summary presentation we will show what each participant understood by the “new spirituality”.

Nicolae Iorga did not believe in the existence of a “new spirituality” and considered that “the human soul is a unit in the middle of a nature, which always repeats in a new way its things of an eternal age.”<sup>25</sup>

C. Rădulescu-Motru as Iorga did, argued that, for him, “spirituality is in progress, not from today, or yesterday, but from the early beginning of the evolution of the universe.”<sup>26</sup> And regarding the existence of a “new spirituality”,

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<sup>19</sup> Ion Dur, “«Noua spiritualitate»” (The New Spirituality), in *Cariatide*, Psihomedica, Sibiu, 2007, p. 19. The term “new spirituality” is assigned to Petru Comarnescu who made in the literary magazine *Tipariņa literară* (1928, no. 2 and 3) an investigation with the same title.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 19-20.

<sup>22</sup> See *Gândirea*, Fall VIII, No. 8-9, aug. – sept., 1928, pp. 307-310.

<sup>23</sup> See *Tipariņa literară*, Fall I, nr. 2, 30 nov. 1928, pp. 42-47.

<sup>24</sup> See *Românismul, catehismul unei noi spiritualități*.

<sup>25</sup> Nicolae Iorga, “Noua spiritualitate” (The New Spirituality), *Tipariņa literară*, Fall I, no. 2, 30 nov. 1928, p. 42.

<sup>26</sup> C. Rădulescu-Motru, “Noua spiritualitate” (The New Spirituality), *Tipariņa literară*, Fall I, no. 2, 30 nov. 1928, p. 42.

Motru said that this manifests itself under two forms: “A new spirituality? Of course there is. There are even two. One hunted by the opportunism of the individual self, spirituality that fits its ascension. And another, which is brought in people’s life through the deepening of consciousness: spirituality which remains for eternity...”<sup>27</sup>

Goga observed that “a new soul is created”<sup>28</sup> and “we see a descent in ourselves, which announces problems of consciousness”<sup>29</sup> and he was willing to interpret the “new formula the changed time, to which I would like to give my last waste of energy.”<sup>30</sup>

Eugen Lovinescu saw that in terms of a “new spirituality”, “From different parts of the younger generation seemed to come, however, mystical cries and Orthodox urges, where there is very difficult to discern sincerity, possible to be, the spirit of imitation or simple budgetary aspiration: Only time will fix the nature of this “new spirituality”, whose expression, we can say it by now, is “old”<sup>31</sup>. For Lovinescu, the article “Spirituality”, signed by Crainic and also the Manifesto (Crinul Alb) “White Lily” (published in the same number as the essay just mentioned) which is written by Sorin Pavel, Ion Nestor and Petre Marcu-Balș (Petre Pandrea) don’t seem to have the right indications, especially because of the violence of language, of a real “spirituality”.<sup>32</sup>

Lucian Blaga, also participating in the investigation, spoke firmly: “The new spirituality exists. It’s so obvious that I personally feel that I am existing through it. *I exist* to the extent that this new spirituality exists.”<sup>33</sup>

Crainic’s answer, at this investigation was, in fact, the exact reproduction of the last paragraph of the essay “Spirituality”, published one month before the issue of the investigation in *Tiparița literară*. So, for Crainic, spirituality means “Subordination of the entire complex of human existence to the spirit that dominates everything” and “life and art in the Holy Spirit,”<sup>34</sup> having its source the

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

<sup>28</sup> Octavian Goga, “Noua spiritualitate” (The New Spirituality), *Tiparița literară*, Fall I, no. 2, 30 nov. 1928, p. 43.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>31</sup> Eugen Lovinescu, “Noua spiritualitate” (The New Spirituality), *Tiparița literară*, Fall I, no. 2, 30 nov. 1928, p. 43.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>33</sup> Lucian Blaga, “Noua spiritualitate” (The New Spirituality), *Tiparița literară*, Fall I, no. 2, 30 nov. 1928, p. 44.

<sup>34</sup> Nichifor Crainic, “Noua spiritualitate” (The New Spirituality), *Tiparița literară*, Fall I, no. 2, 30 nov. 1928, p. 44.

doctrine of the Orthodox Church. Spirituality was the way in which man could achieve “the alliance of the transience with the eternity”.

Radu Dragnea, further on, on the thinking line said that there was a new spirituality, and the “Content of the new spirituality was the orthodoxy,”<sup>35</sup> superior to the doctrine of the group *Semănătorul* and: “If talents and thoughtful minds will descend to the acts of culture all the artistic and metaphysical consequences arising from the new spirituality, the Romanian culture would only have to score a big bonus. Where are the old people to understand?”<sup>36</sup>

Serban Cioculescu disputes the existence of a new spirituality and denies there was an old one,<sup>37</sup> and through the war, ended a decade ago, then there was a milestone, marking the end of the cycle of the Romanian culture and the opening towards the Western culture: “We are heading to Europe. This is my belief.”<sup>38</sup>

The answer of Sandu Tudor has an apocalyptic meaning, of a great lucidity, for what was to happen to the Romanian people, who went through the gauntlet of the Iron Guard, royal and military dictatorships, war and, finally, the establishment of the Communism. “Let us not lie ourselves. There is a spirituality of the Dark one, very similar to that of Christ. It approaches stronger than ever.”<sup>39</sup> Necessary, in this case, was not a “new spirituality” but a “vigorous and harsh penance”.<sup>40</sup>

Ionel Jianu was pointing out the active power of mysticism above the culture created especially by young people: “About life, young people from today do not understand just satiety, but creative suffering, frantic living of heights which a human soul can ascend”. From I. Jianu’s remark is to be remembered the way in which has to be understood the pure mysticism, that doesn’t lead the human being to the obscurity of existence: “Because mysticism is the longing to existence of the absolute. This does not mean obscurantism or the irrational. On the contrary. In its area, reason is almighty.”<sup>41</sup>

Mircea Vulcanescu, specific to its style, gives a systematic response to the investigation. At first, he explains the fact that “The term «spirituality» is an equivocal term. It can mean completely different things, namely: 1) *inner life*, 2)

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<sup>35</sup> Radu Dragnea, “Noua spiritualitate” (The New Spirituality), *Tiparița literară*, Fall I, no. 2, 30 nov. 1928, p. 44.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>37</sup> Șerban Cioculescu, “Noua spiritualitate” (The New Spirituality), *Tiparița literară*, Fall I, no. 2, 30 nov. 1928, p. 45.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>39</sup> Sandu Tudor, “Noua spiritualitate” (The New Spirituality), *Tiparița literară*, Fall I, no. 2, 30 nov. 1928, p. 45.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>41</sup> Ionel Jianu, “Noua spiritualitate” (The New Spirituality), *Tiparița literară*, Fall I, no. 2, 30 nov. 1928, p. 45.

culture and 3) *spiritual life*.”<sup>42</sup> Mircea Vulcănescu “reaches to the conclusion that, however, says Ion Dur, the true spiritual life is the «holly life», the other two meanings occurring in history along with some ambiguities: for the interior life, the soul was mistaken with the spirit, in culture they have substituted one to another, indistinctly, the world of values with the spiritual world.”<sup>43</sup>

Mircea Eliade noted that “The acts of the young people show a new spiritual direction. Its exposure, authenticity and meaning we discussed it elsewhere,”<sup>44</sup> meaning in the *Spiritual Itinerary*, to which referred also Ion Dur.<sup>45</sup>

Mihail Sebastian said that “the new spirituality” was having an uncertain destiny, and Mihail Polihroniade was pointing out the fact that there was a “new spirituality” with contradictory characteristics.<sup>46</sup> “As for the new tendency to consider the new spirituality as mystical – M. Polihroniade argued that – I think it’s premature. Until now, I see some personalities who say mystical, but I see no mystic.”<sup>47</sup>

The last answer, very consistent, is given by Vasile Băncilă,<sup>48</sup> who stated that there was a hint about the beginning of a new spirituality, but no clear evidence.<sup>49</sup> However, the new spirituality was manifesting especially through young people, and claimed to be an “authentic thinking and a personal experience.”<sup>50</sup> New spirituality, in V. Băncilă’s opinion, has the shortcoming of being or having a “social extension”<sup>51</sup>, but has “generous start”.<sup>52</sup> And at the end, V. Băncilă was pointing out that “The new spirituality seeks to deepen its sense of metaphysical and social dependence. It looks for an attitude through which to integrate organically in the complete reality. To receive the light that comes from active discovery of transcendent values, finding itself, at the same time, engaged in the most intimate meaning of the social-historical reality. Between both these

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<sup>42</sup> Mircea M. Vulcănescu, “Noua spiritualitate” (The New Spirituality), *Tiparnița literară*, Fall I, no. 2, 30 nov. 1928, p. 46.

<sup>43</sup> Ion Dur, “Noua spiritualitate” (The New Spirituality), in *Cariatide*, Psihomedica, Sibiu, 2007, p. 26.

<sup>44</sup> Mircea Eliade, “Noua spiritualitate” (The New Spirituality), *Tiparnița literară*, Fall I, no. 2, 30 nov. 1928, p. 47.

<sup>45</sup> Ion Dur, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

<sup>46</sup> Mihail Polihroniade, “Noua spiritualitate” (The New Spirituality), *Tiparnița literară*, Fall I, no. 2, 30 nov. 1928, p. 47.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>48</sup> See “Despre noua spiritualitate” (The New Spirituality), *Tiparnița literară*, Fall I, no. 3, 1928, pp. 71-73.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 72.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 73.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem*.



areas, the new spirituality wants to pass the first meridian, wants a deep unit. The start, in this regard, is done.”<sup>53</sup>

As seen from the responses given to this investigation, Rădulescu-Motru and N. Iorga have shown reserved concerning the recognition of the existence of a new cultural or philosophical spirituality, and for them, orthodoxy did not mean just a path to follow. Iorga was interested in the recognition of his personal merit and Motru in being allowed to live quietly in “the eternal spirituality”. Among those who were reserved regarding the “new spirituality” there is also E. Lovinescu, and Serban Cioculescu. The first leaves time to decide whether or not there was such a spirituality characterized rather by a “stylistic mysticism”, and the second was for an opening of the Romanian culture to the West. Among those who doubted such spirituality was also a priest, Sandu Tudor, who revealed the fact that, back then, “the signs of the true confession” was not present. In the category of those who were reserved about this was also Mihail Sebastian.

On the other side, Octavian Goga, Lucian Blaga, Nichifor Crainic, Radu Dragnea, Ionel Jianu, Mircea M. Vulcănescu, Mihail Polihroniade and Vasile Băncilă agree with the manifestation of a new cultural spirituality, which according to some of them have deep mystical marks, as a result of cultural visions arising from orthodoxy. As mentors of the “new spirituality” are mentioned Nae Ionescu and Nichifor Crainic.

After the investigation was published, several years later, C. Rădulescu-Motru brought back into discussion the theme of the “new spirituality” along with the issue of the book *Românismul, catehismul unei noi spiritualități* (*Romanism, the catechism of a new spirituality*) – 1936, which will open a polemic Motru–Crainic. Deferent by their content, the types of spirituality proposed were claiming, however, the same Romanian ethnic background.

### *3. (In)compatibility Romanism-Orthodoxy*

Regarding the accomplishment or non-accomplishment of a fusion between the *Christian idea* and the *ethnic idea* or between *psychological factor* and the *ethnic factor*, a dispute occurred in which were involved, especially, Crainic and Motru. Crainic believed that we cannot talk about an authentic Romanian spirituality if, in achieving it, do not contribute simultaneously, through synergy, the *Christian idea* and the *idea of ethnicity*. Motru, however, had another opinion. Even if he wasn’t denying the contribution of Orthodoxy in the Romanian culture, Motru was considering that a Christian Orthodox spiritualization widely had no

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibidem.*

justification and proposed, in order to revive it, the *energetic personalism* formula, from which was taken out the religious component. Thus, “personality” both individual and Romanian collective, could be completed through the fusion of *energy* with the ethnic background.

For Crainic it is obvious that spirituality has a theological meaning, as I’ve said before, and disagrees with the “laicization” of its meaning, like C. Rădulescu-Motru did: “There is no *worldly spirituality* as opposed to religious spirituality. Otherwise, we play with words like illiterates, like dilettantes or even like some philosophers.”<sup>54</sup> Unlike Crainic, who had a perspective on the Orthodox spirituality connected to Orthodoxy, C. Rădulescu-Motru was thinking and acting as a philosopher. What bothered Crainic most about the doctrine of *Românism* promoted by Motru was the statement that *Românism* and *Orthodoxy* must be separated: “So, Romanism worldly spirituality totally different from the Orthodox spirituality. Between them there is an incompatibility of nature. In other words, the Romanian people could not, can not and will not be Orthodox.”<sup>55</sup> And this alliance, said Motru, would be harmful: “Romanism and orthodoxy can not be merged without affecting each other, because one’s nature of spirituality is completely different from the other. [...] Their fusion, like some of them claim, can not be in the future, unless one or the other betrays its calling.”<sup>56</sup> Motru’s concept compared with that of Crainic is modern and adapts after the theory of energetic personalism.

Another criticism Crainic addresses to Rădulescu-Motru is that although it defines spirituality, initially in the Christian sense, after that, he denies it and the author of *Românism* said that: “We take spirituality in a broad meaning to bring it closer to the history of human culture. For us, spirituality is the complex of ideas and feelings, especially the complex of symbolic ideas through which the society of an era explains its belief in a perfect and eternal order which it is bound to make in its lifetime on earth.”<sup>57</sup> Such a change of plan is perceived by the doctrinaire of

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<sup>54</sup> Nichifor Crainic, “Românismul dlui Motru” (Mister Motru’s Romanism), *Gândirea*, Fall XIV, No. 7, September 1935, p. 392.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>56</sup> C. Rădulescu-Motru, *Românismul, catehismul unei noi spiritualități* (The Romanism, The Catechism of a New Spirituality), Scientific Publishing House, Bucharest, 1936/1992, p. 95. The role of the orthodoxy, on one hand, and of Romanism, on the other hand, are presented by C. Rădulescu-Motru as follows: “Orthodoxy can’t go further in the service of a nationalist spirituality without losing its character of religious spirituality; and Romanism can not move forward based on the orthodoxy without paying the price of its abdication from its role of promoter of progress in the economic and political order of Romania.” *Ibidem*.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 16-17.

*Gândirism* as being “arbitrary and confusing”<sup>58</sup> and “leading from mystical to mystification”.<sup>59</sup> In this way, “According to Mr. Motru, we should admit that the Romanian people and its spirituality do not date only from 1936, with no historical precedent and having a new and unprecedented nature in our history. [...] But this is nonsense; a nation can not have two or more natures. It is nation as it has one permanent nature.”<sup>60</sup>

Criticizing Motru, whom he considers “however a man of an unquestionable intellectual uprightness”<sup>61</sup>, Crainic said that he was “secularizing the meaning of the term of spirituality”<sup>62</sup> thus creating a “lack of understanding”<sup>63</sup>/“ciumpăvire de înțeles”.

Although Crainic was misjudging Constantin Rădulescu-Motru saying that he “*doesn't know too much about spirituality*”<sup>64</sup>, even if the author of *Românism*, was reviewing the meanings of the concept of “spirituality” in the introductory chapter, both from the theological and spiritual perspective. So, in the Christian view, Rădulescu-Motru was pointing out that: “The Church of Christ sees spirituality as the power of the Holy Spirit to unite, mystically, through its presence, the human being with the holly light and love [...] The Christian church sees spirituality as an introduction to the work of deity. As the Holy Spirit is one and only, the Christian spirituality is also one and only.”<sup>65</sup> However, Rădulescu-Motru builds his speech, beginning with the next paragraph, from a historical-philosophical perspective, which didn't match with the theological concept of Crainic, who leaving from the Christian meaning of spirituality, reveals the fact that the mystical union made by the Holy Spirit between the “human being and

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<sup>58</sup> Nichifor Crainic, “Mistificarea românismului” (The Mystification of Romanism), *Gândirea*, fall XV, No 7, September 1936, p. 357.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 359.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 357.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 358. Crainic was wondering with indignation if “After this lack of understanding, spirituality becomes «a complex of ideas and feelings» or «a complex of symbolic ideas»- For which purpose? For the society of an era explains its belief in a perfect and eternal order that has to be achieved in life, says Mr. Motru. Very good! But this perfect and eternal order in the religious language has the same definite meaning. For him even this expression is submitted to the act of secularization.” *Ibidem*, p. 358.

<sup>64</sup> N. Crainic, “Românismul dlui Motru” (Mister Motru's Romanism), in *op. cit.*, p. 171.

<sup>65</sup> C. Rădulescu-Motru, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

light and love of God”<sup>66</sup> “is the essence of our religion as an expression of man’s relationship with God or of the fusion of the transience with the eternity.”<sup>67</sup>

In another article – “Spiritualitate și românism” – in 1936, Crainic was ascertaining: “Mr. Professor C. Rădulescu-Motru shows himself, especially for some time now, as a determined opponent to orthodoxy.”<sup>68</sup> In this case, it was, according to Crainic, a campaign of “militant philosophical atheism”.<sup>69</sup> On this occasion, call into question the meaning theorist *Gândirism* concept of spirituality<sup>70</sup> to justify the indivisible relationship between *Orthodoxy* and *Romanism* because – he says –, “Orthodoxy and Romanism are given together, the merger history of our teandric nation. [...] A separation between Orthodoxy and Romanism as Mr. Motru fiercely preaches it would mean nothing more than the fall of Romanism in that atheist *vacuum* of atheist people.”<sup>71</sup>

*The visions of Crainic and Motru, one theological and the other scientific*, though different in means, they were united in purpose. Their aim envisaged creating a philosophical structure – *Românism*, resulting from the union of a spiritual archetype with one of ethnic nature, through which to produce a “jump” into eternity through history.

#### *4. Conclusions*

Discussed and disputed, the interwar “new spirituality” engaged in its problem-solving philosophers, theological thinkers, literary critics and young researchers in the vivid movement of ideas. Recognized or not, this trend of thinking and living created, in our country, the unprecedented cultural development.

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<sup>66</sup> C. Rădulescu-Motru *apud* Nichifor Crainic, “Mistificarea românismului” (The Mystification of Romanism), *Gândirea*, fall XV, No 7, September 1936, p. 356.

<sup>67</sup> Nichifor Crainic, *op. cit.*, p. 356.

<sup>68</sup> Nichifor Crainic, “Spiritualitate și românism” (Spirituality and Romanism), *Gândirea*, Fall XV, No. 8, October 1936, p. 377. Crainic was making this statement having as guidelines the last three books of C. Rădulescu-Motru that he summarized as follows: “in the energetic personalism the religious mystics is depicted as some morbid phenomenon; in Vocation the directive of the magazine *Gândirea* is revealed as a «compromise of the idea of orthodoxism»; in Romanism the attack gets a final and unbearable accent: Orthodoxy should be excluded from the content of Romanism. «Catechism of the new spirituality» addressed especially to youth and scholars, advises to give up to orthodoxy as to something incompatible with the «new nationalism».” *Ibidem*.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>70</sup> Crainic recalls largely the meaning of spirituality repeating mostly what he said in the “Mystification of Romanism”, but to support, this time, the argument according to which “Orthodoxy and Romanism are given together, in teandric fusion by the history of our nation”.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 190.

Reached at that time, even subject of investigation, the “new spirituality” became the clear sign of a change, at least, in culture, although some denied it. Moreover, the “new spirituality” has become the vital element which influenced cultural life. Lucian Blaga, in the above-mentioned investigation, stated “The new spirituality exists. So much that I personally feel existing only through it. *I exist* to the extent the new spirituality exists.”<sup>72</sup>

For Crainic, the whole human existence required a subordination to “the spirit that dominates everything” and “life and art in the Holy Spirit,”<sup>73</sup> having its source in the doctrine of the Orthodox Church. Spirituality was the way in which man could achieve “the alliance of transience with the eternity”.

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<sup>72</sup> Lucian Blaga, “Noua spiritualitate,” *Tiparnița literară*, Fall I, no. 2, 30 nov. 1928, p. 44.

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# Epicureism or a Philosophy of Pleasure

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## Abstract

*In this article I intent to go through the Epicurean thought and the role it plays in the concrete life of man. In this endeavour, I shall use some of Epicurus' maxims, and also The Poem of Nature, written by Lucretius, and thought up in the spirit of Epicureism. The idea from which the entire argument grows is sustained by the pragmatic role that Epicurus cultivates in respect to life. In fact, this is the same way that his very philosophy looks like. Another issue to be discussed here deals with the way in which Greek philosophy is brought into man's factual space by Epicureism. To conclude, we shall see the limits to which Stoicism and Epicureism merge, and which is the belt separating the two conceptions.*

**Keywords:** truth, pleasure, hedonism, Epicurean, Stoicism, happiness.

In Epicurus' conception, the role of philosophy is reduced to happiness, freedom and a life without worries that could be caused or contoured by the play of the contest of circumstances. "Adept of Democritus' Atomist theory, Epicurus considers that there exists nothing in the world other than atoms and empty space, which allows them to move continuously, with an almost infinite speed, and that nothing is born out of nothing, not even through the will of the gods. In this manner he reduces the natural phenomena to their material causes. All thing appear through the combination of atoms and disappear through their separation, therefore, in reality, there is no birth and death in the universe."<sup>1</sup> What is the aim of these specifications? We need them in order to reach the philosopher's aesthetic doctrine and find the root of his philosophy.

It is also out of the collision of atoms that man's freedom results, for it is spontaneity that which governs the soul, and not some divine reasoning. Thus, we

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<sup>1</sup> Adriana Neacșu, *Istoria filosofiei antice* (The History of Ancient Philosophy), Universităţii Publishing House, Craiova, 2009, pp. 153-154.



are offered the portrait of the pleasure-led-man, the purpose of which is precisely happiness. And this happiness, in its turn, is tightly bonded to the running away from pain. As one letting himself led by pleasure, man runs from harm's way and, therefore, reaches the Good. In truth, the good is no longer transcendent; it no longer is a part of the frame that until now was organizing the entire nature, yet a simple running away from pain that presupposes in particular a bending down towards pleasure. Man's so-called autonomy is turned into the state of and seeking the lack of discomfort. Man is free only when he breaks away from those elements that give him the impression that he is corseted. In Epicurus' entire miscellany we find also a kind of typology of pleasures. Consequently, we have pleasures that are *natural* and *necessary* (those things that must be done with moderation), pleasures that are *natural*, yet *necessary* (to replace a natural pleasure with a sophisticated pleasure), and pleasures that are *unnatural* and *unnecessary* (vices).

In his Letter to Meneikeos, the road of philosophy is shown to us, which should be a certain one, which should not allow itself to be falsified by the fears which the crowd captures itself, which should be worthy, look upon life with the strength of one who never lets himself overwhelmed by fear. Man's prophylactic attitude is unworthy of the one engaged in philosophy; for him, a cabalistic, worthy attitude is reserved, one that leads towards the assuming of all costs. Death, the thought most frightening of them all, we are told in this letter, has nothing to do with us, it has to do with the non-being, whiles we are or have being. Out of this game pleasure arises as well, Man, after having become aware of his status, can now truly return to his real needs. After having consumed the costs, without wanting only benefits, man can reach his true essence, and this has to do with his instinct of preservation, that which is telling him to run away from pain and, hence, allow himself to be led by pleasure. The purpose of the happy life is precisely this game that permits him to consent to being seduced by the latency of pleasure. "As a result, we note that pleasure is our foremost asset, the one that is specific to us. We take this as starting point of each preference, and of each aversion, and we turn to it appreciating any good with the aid of our affects, taken as principle. For pleasure is the first of the goods that we are endowed with, we must not select any type of pleasure, yet often renounce many, when of them a minus of pleasure even greater [than that of not having that particular pleasure – n.n.] may flow. Many a times we consider some sufferings preferable to pleasures, when the prolonged bearing of some pains eventually brings an enhanced pleasure. This is why not any type of pleasure is to be chosen, similarly to the way that not

all or any type of pain is an evil.”<sup>2</sup> And yet, despite it all, pleasure is not reduced to a continuous, boundary lacking delight.

Through pleasure we understand a purpose in life, one that presupposes precisely a running away from the sensuousness of vice. Pleasures represent the *natural* way to reach the essence of our becoming. Through pleasures, which help man know himself, we actually understand a firm possibility to oppose yourself to animal, carnal drives, those that imply lust and gluttony by means of all kinds of obscure reasons. Here is a maxim rendering precisely this game: “The gluttony which uses foul means is nefarious. If the means are rightful, it is a disgrace; for it is utmost ugly to let loose the lowering drives of avarice, even when justice is obeyed.” As long as we accept that man is the only one playing with his destiny, we must also take into account the fact that there is no principle to order for him the natural course of things. Diogenes Laertios would say that stories,<sup>3</sup> of any kind, were denied by Epicurus.

With Epicurus, ancient philosophy is set in a new perspective – The transcendent good would now become the mundane good. Epicurus sets aside the cloth with which the intelligible good dresses itself and lowers it into the factual space of man. A great number of commentators see in this type of interpretation a perspective that brings forth Hedonism. Yet, for sure, in a first stage, were we to look upon things as limited as possible, we could say that we are dealing with a kind of Hedonism. Nonetheless, were we to look closer and try to truly grasp the sphere of his thinking, we can see that that which he intended on doing consisted of, in fact, set aside the air of hiddenness that was part of the ideal world and, thus, to put in its place something lively, palpable. Wishing and fearing are functions that are linked to pleasure. Although antagonistic, they hold that spontaneous game that means to show the real sphere of man. Through pleasure we reach the supreme Good, it being the only one that can wreck us or make us rise. “The Epicurean Hedonism does not lead to libertinage and excess, yet to a tranquil life; for men’s misery springs either out of fear, either out of limitless or vain desires, and if these can be refrained, only then can the pleasures of reason be tasted. The wise man

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<sup>2</sup> Epicur, “Trei scrisori, Maximele fundamentale, Gnomologicum Vaticanum” (Three Letter, Essential Maxims, Gnomologicum Vaticanum), *Epicurea*, Științifică Publishing House, Bucharest, 1999, pp. 85-86.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Diogenes Laertios, *Despre Viețile și Doctrinile Filozofilor* (On the Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers), Academiei Române Publishing House, Bucharest, 1963, pp. 490-506.

shall not multiply his desires, for this means to multiply his sources of pain, yet he shall reduce his desires to a minimum.”<sup>4</sup>

Epicurus develops his thinking in the form of maxims and even aphorisms. He was well known for the simplicity with which he would certify and present all dialectical and even philosophical issues. He was clear and precise, so must that his disciples had no means of completing his thinking. In other words, Epicurus would speak himself, as well as speak for those around him. According to his own words, the previous philosophy would only discard the human soul, would drive it away from true knowledge. It is common knowledge that Lucretius is the one to present Epicureism in an elaborate way, at least one close to that of Epicurus. Out of the sea of works attributed to Epicurus, only very little have come down to us. What is true, we are left with the three letters (*Letter to Meneikeos*, *Letter to Pythokles*, *Letter to Herodotus*) and a number of essential maxims. Yet, his philosophy can also be known from Lucretius’ *De rerum natura* (“Also it is not to be thought that anywhere in this wide world / The gods might have their wholly dwelling / For the nature of gods and goddesses is frail / And farther away from our senses: barely our mind might grasp it.”)<sup>5</sup> *On the Nature of Things* pictures the spirit of Epicurus and Lucretius’ cunning artfulness of writing the former’s thoughts in verse. In this sense, the poem reveals precisely the idea of play and naturalness with Epicurus had accustomed us in his letters.

Freedom, from the present perspective, is latently detached from the fire of spontaneity. In truth, the natural way of things gains consistency in the space of spontaneous movement. Any fact is just and natural if it follows the channel of genuine freedom. “There is no such thing, Epicurus would often say, as the necessity to live in necessity; out freedom appears not from the exterior, yet it is sowed in nature itself. In nature, the necessary order of movements is completed by random movements, spontaneous; otherwise we would have to continue ahead on the unbroken chain of causes and effects until a last cause, which is also the final cause, as the Stoics would claim.”<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, natural ordering is given by the firm position between good and evil. Something is good only when evil is defeated. The game that might set us on the space of the melange could be the equivalent of a state of unbalance, a path that would ultimately produce pain. It is

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<sup>4</sup> Frederick Copleston, *Istoria Filosofiei - Grecia și Roma* (The History of Philosophy – Greece and Rome), All Publishing House, Bucharest, 2008, p. 365.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Lucrețiu, *Poemul naturii* (On the Nature of Things), Bucovina Publishing House, Bucharest, 1947.

<sup>6</sup> Marin Constantin, *Ethos elenistic - Cunoaștere și libertate* (Elenistic Ethos – Knowledge and Freedom), Științifică și Enciclopedică Publishing House, Bucharest, 1981, p. 41.

paramount to see Epicurus' ethic as an *island* of dynamics. Happiness, according to the hypothesis that we are working with, is a status that presupposes equilibrium; for any force necessarily comes to dismantle another while everything overflows equally prudently and calculatedly. "Happiness depends on this prudence which, in its turn, depends on man's free will."<sup>7</sup> The accent falls on man's will who no longer lets himself seduced by ascetic ideal, as Nietzsche would say. "Man is in a state of freedom, for he is thinking nature, who deliberately advances towards something, who wills and opts and acts towards the reaching of his goal."<sup>8</sup>

Similar to Epicureism, Stoicism sees in philosophy a means of reaching happiness. Virtue is that which sets man in accordance with divine will and with the entire nature. To live in accordance with nature is, for the Stoics, to let oneself led by logos and thus reach that authentic behaviour of being into divinity. If, for Epicureism, the purpose of life is happiness as well, yet the one that is given by the concrete life of the individual, with all its costs and benefits included, for the Stoics, happiness is related to the virtue with which one opposes pleasures. Thus, what we have here is a type of common root of the two conceptions, with the amendment that Epicureism remains concrete nonetheless, while Stoicism primarily acclaims divinity. "This is why the purpose can be defined as a life in accordance with nature or, in other words, in accordance with our own human nature, as well as that of the universe, a life in which we abstain from any action forbidden by the common law of all things, that is the rightful reason that lays in all things and is identical to that leading Zeus who orders all there is."<sup>9</sup>

To conclude, disregarding whether we speak of Epicureism or Stoicism, the idea that must prevail has to do with the way in which philosophy begins to take interest in the quotidian life of man. Epicureism, even if it resembles Stoicism, to a larger or lesser extent, intends on being more than a simple utilitarian theory through which man must calculate his costs or benefits, it in fact brings philosophy in the factual space of man and obliges him to be in accord with his own needs.

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<sup>7</sup> C. A. Vicol, *Epicur - Omul, gândirea, opere alese* (Epicurus – The Man, His Thought, Selected Works), Fundației Regelui Mihai Publishing House, Bucharest, 1947, p. 88.

<sup>8</sup> Gh. Vlăduțescu, *Etica lui Epicur* (The Ethic of Epicurus), Științifică Publishing House, Bucharest, 1972, p. 53.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Diogenes Laertios, *op. cit.*, p. 354.

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# Types of referendum in revised Constitution

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## Abstract

*There are more types and kinds of referendum so for all forms of referendum, the Constitutional Court is the one confirming the results and certifying the accuracy of the procedure for organization and holding of a referendum. Also there are many criteria and species of referendum*

**Keywords:** *referendum, Constitution, Constitutional Court, species of referendum, optional referendum, popular consultation, Mandatory referendum, Consultative referendum, Referendum initiated by Parliament, Referendum on popular initiative.*

## 1. Sovereignty's manifestation

Art. 2 of the Constitution: "The national sovereignty belongs to the Romanian people and is exercised through its representative bodies, resulting from free, periodical and fair elections and also through a referendum."

In this article are set out the general principles governing the Romanian state.

Mihai Constantinescu estimated that national sovereignty is one of the consequences of the national character of the state. Therefore, it belongs to the nation that exerts, not directly but through its representative bodies, as in representative democracy case.<sup>1</sup> Thus "it combines the principle of the national sovereignty, involving the constituted authorities and empowered to exercise that of popular sovereignty, which might involve the exercise of this sovereignty directly."<sup>2</sup> The Law of revision pointed out that authorities are formed by free, regular and fair choice. The essential condition for a constitutional democracy,

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<sup>1</sup> Mihai Constantinescu, Antonie Iorgovan, Ioan Muraru and Elena Simina Tănăsescu, *Constituția României revizuită. Comentarii și explicații* (Romanian Constitution Revised. Comments and Explanations), All Beck, Bucharest, 2004, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 5.

perhaps it explains the representative nature of the state organs, “in a democratic society, always, the state leaves the ballot.”

Cristian Ionescu considers that Article 2 states the way of exercising the sovereignty: through representation and by referendum. “The National referendum is the form and means of direct consultation and expression of the sovereign will of the Romanian people regarding the revision of the constitution, the president's dismissal and the issues of national interest.”<sup>3</sup>

Ion Deleanu appreciates that this article is an example of sovereignty exercise synthesis through representative organs like the national sovereignty, and the practices of the direct democracy, achieving thus a “semi-representative” or “semi-direct” democracy.<sup>4</sup>

The democratic character of our state is put into practice by the legislator from Romania in Article 2 of the Constitution, which states not “just the holder of the state power nominating exclusively the Romanian people, but also the ways in which it may exercise the state sovereignty, namely either by its representative organs designated by the way of free, fair and regular elections, or through direct referendum.”<sup>5</sup> This fact is owed to the Romanian legislator's will thus putting in harmony the provisions of Article 1 of Romania's Constitution as democratic and legal state. Its preference it was directed to the instruments of direct democracy built in the system of representation, the Romanian Constitution stipulating both the referendum and the popular initiative as a way to facilitate the direct participation of the people to exercise the state power.

The restrictive enumeration of Article 2 can not express that there is a third way of exercising the state power in Romania, as well as any of the two mentioned methods that can be used with equal rights, on equal terms, “either the referendum, or the exercise of the state power by its representative bodies can not be considered as having the subsidiary nature of one to the other.”<sup>6</sup>

The authors make another distinction between the popular initiative and the referendum, including the prospect that the referendum was included only in the way of exercising the power described in the second Article. The state power is

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<sup>3</sup> Cristian Ionescu, *Constituția României, Legea de revizuire comentată și adnotată cu dezbateri parlamentare* (Revision Law, commented and annotated with parliamentary debates), All Beck, Bucharest, 2003, p. 8.

<sup>4</sup> Mihai Constantinescu, Ioan Muraru, Ion Deleanu, Florin Vasilescu, Antonie Iorgovan and Ioan Vida, *Constituția României comentată și adnotată* (Romanian Constitution commented and annotated), Regia Autonomă Monitorul Oficial, Bucharest, 1992, p. 17.

<sup>5</sup> Ioan Muraru and Elena Simina Tănăsescu, *Drept constituțional și instituții politice* (Constitutional Law and Political Institutions), vol. II, C.H. Beck, Bucharest, 2006, p. 133.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*.

power control. So its exercise would involve not only the opportunity to take decisions, but also to implement them, “ultimately, the degree of responsiveness of the human collectivity towards the power of being the unique of verification of the efficiency of the state power.”<sup>7</sup>

The popular initiative is only a manifestation of will, even largely democratic, but that does not reach to a sensitive decision likely to be taken out and effectively to produce changes in the social reality does not constitute a way of achieving the state power, but only one of taking part in the exercise of power.

## *2. National interest issues*

Article 90 from the Constitution:

“Romania's President after the consultation with the Parliament, can ask the people to express, by referendum, its will on matters of national interest.”<sup>8</sup>

Mihai Constantinescu estimated that “the advisory referendum concerns the consulting referendum, whose results are not binding for the legislator.”<sup>9</sup> The author believes that the referendum is not binding, but its results are not binding for the legislative authority. Mihai Constantinescu does not motivate such opinion or the consequences of such approach of the Article in the plan of the law.

Tudor Drăganu reiterates the lacunary character of this provision that “does not state in any other way the obligations that would result for the Parliament, for the President of Romania or for the citizens from a referendum vote expressed under his conditions.”<sup>10</sup> The author concludes that although the Constitution stipulates that the only legislative authority is the Parliament and the President may organize a legislative referendum under this article. The Constitution prohibits the presidential enactment, but nothing precludes the parliamentary procedure of enacting the laws was exhausted, to intervene with a confirmation or rejection of a popular election of a norm.

This point of view was criticized by Ion Deleanu as it follows: “A referendum would cover the sanction of a law passed by the Parliament, through its confirmation or rejection – it is also a legislative referendum. And exactly on

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<sup>7</sup> Ioan Muraru and Elena Simina Tănăsescu, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

<sup>8</sup> *Constitutia României* (Romanian Constitution), Erc Press, Bucharest, 2003, p. 49.

<sup>9</sup> Mihai Constantinescu et. al., *op. cit.*, 2004, p. 148.

<sup>10</sup> Tudor Drăganu, *Drept constituțional și instituții publice. Tratat elementar* (Constitutional Law and Political Institutions. Basic Treatise), vol II, Lumina Lex, Bucharest, 1998, p. 267.



the basis of article 61 which interdicts the presidential legislative referendum it would not be possible not even a *post factum* referendum.”<sup>11</sup>

Tudor Drăganu appreciates that argumentation of Ion Deleanu does not take account of the fact that article 61 forbids that a law should be adopted with the avoidance of the parliamentary procedure. The author believes that after the procedure stated out in that Article was accomplished, nothing else prohibits the intervention of other constitutional factors in order to prevent the entry into force of a law that has already been passed. Moreover, the President may return a law already passed for further study and may notify the Constitutional Court. Another argument is that in case of the revision, amendment law does not enter into force without its approval by referendum. “The conclusion is that, through a referendum initiated by the President of the Republic, the law enacted by the Parliament could be confirmed or disproved, and it is undoubtedly required under article 2 of the Constitution, according to which the national sovereignty belongs to the Romanian people, who exercises it through its representative bodies and by the referendum.”<sup>12</sup> *Per a contrario*, if it was admitted that a referendum can not invalidate a law that has already been passed by the Parliament, then article 2 would be empty of content. The introduction of this regulation in the Constitution is considered by the author as “vain”. The laws that could be thus sanctioned by the electorate body would prevent some abuses that the Parliament would create by granting some rights for the elected of the nation, not being other way of control. The example of Tudor Drăganu is the project of the law through which the MPs wanted to be exempted from paying the tax on allowances and per diurnals. The first filter was announcing the Constitutional Court, which it declared it to be unconstitutional, but reaching the quorum of two thirds of the elected representatives could cause surprises. Only a national legislative referendum could have penalized the privileges.

The dispute may be extended with another constitutional law issue, particularly discussed in the French doctrine and practice that might be put into application also in Romania. In the French Constitution there is the famous Article 11 that allows the President of the Republic to submit the referendum “tout projet de loi”. As a presidential republic, France gives the President greater powers. The question of law is whether the President may refer to the popular approval constitutional laws also, or just the organic ones. The French Constitution has also

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<sup>11</sup> Ion Deleanu, *Justiția Constituțională* (Constitutional Justice), Lumina Lex, Bucharest, 1995, p. 311.

<sup>12</sup> Tudor Drăganu, *op. cit.*, p. 267.

an article reserved for the Constitution's revision, under certain conditions. General de Gaulle interpreted in his favor the dispute, by organizing two referendums on constitutional issues. The arguments can be good and bad, especially leaving from the term "tout" which can be interpreted as including any norm, of any degree.<sup>13</sup>

The same interpretation can be as in the case of the Romanian Constitution, when "the matter of national interest" may include any provision, either at legal level. This article can be interpreted even as a derogation from Article 61 and article 151, so that allowing the popular vote to express in adopting a law is a consequence of people's sovereignty, which is the holder of the original constituent and is not held on the constitutional provisions adopted by himself having the jurisdiction of modifying them according to his will. Such an interpretation would turn our constitution into a soft law, not being needed the Parliament's vote for revision, but only of a simple consultation, only on the proposal of the President.

Our Constitution contains the phrase "a national interest issue." The controversy is between Tudor Drăganu and Ion Deleanu regarding on whether a law can be invalidated under this article, because its enactment is only of the Parliament's competence. Disregarding the theory of exemption, the application of the Article 90 would not be possible only than in the field organic or ordinary laws, because the constitutional law's enactment is subjected to article 151. If the referendum procedure is imperative for the constitutional provisions, *a fortiori rationese* may apply also to the organic or ordinary legislation.

Florin Vasilescu appreciate that this article proposes to use the referendum as an expression of semi-direct democracy, specific to the Constitution.<sup>14</sup> The author describes two types of referendum, which may be mandatory, when it is expressly required by the Constitution, or optionally a case in which is chosen the popular consultation only if the factors that can initiate it, considers it as being necessary.

In this case, Florin Vasilescu calls the referendum described in Article 90 as optional. "Speaking from the point of view of the object or the referendum can see a problem of national interest or a legislative proposal, for which are asked voters to express an opinion."<sup>15</sup> It results that legislator has allowed the appeal to the electorate only for big problems, not about the approval or the rejection of a law, because it does not have legislative initiative.

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<sup>13</sup> Catherine Clessis, Didier Claus, Jacques Robert and Patrick Wasjsman, *Exercices pratiques-Droit constitutionnel* (Practical Exercises - Constitutional Law), Montchristien, Paris, 1989, p. 285.

<sup>14</sup> Mihai Constantinescu et. al., *op. cit.*, 1992, p. 204.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*.

The Referendum, especially the legislative one, is the most democratic way regarding the legislative policy of a country.

In order not to give discretion to the President, Article 90 imposes some limitations and specifications, able to provide a legal framework and a proper conduct.

Thus the subject of the referendum can only be made from the matters of national interest. Another limit requires prior consultation of the Parliament. The author believes that the consultation period should not be minimized, as in the case of a negative opinion and if a referendum was held, however, there is danger of a conflict whose consequences cannot provide. Other limits lie in respecting the provisions of the organization laws of the referendum and of the regular consultation which is in the competence of the Constitutional Court.

The issues of national interest are listed in Article 12 of Law no. 3 of 2000:

“A. Taking some measures regarding the country's economic reform and strategy

B. Taking some special political decisions regarding the:

- a) The general arrangement of the public and private property
- b) The organization of the public local government, of the territory, and of the general regime on local autonomy
- c) the general organization of education
- d) The structure of the national defense system, the military organization, the participation of the armed forces in some international operations
- e) The conclusion, signature or ratification of some international instruments for an indefinite term or for a period exceeding 10 years.
- f) The integration of Romania into the European and Euro-Atlantic structures
- g) The general regime of religions.”<sup>16</sup>

The question that arises is whether these problems are listed exhaustively, because the law of organization and conduct of the referendum is an organic law that must not make revisions or limitations to the constitutional provisions. The conclusion that it is only an enumeration with exemplary character it is required.

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<sup>16</sup> [www.superlex.ro](http://www.superlex.ro) Law n.3/2000 regarding the organization and development of the referendum, published in the *Official Monitor* Part I, no.84, on 24 February with the ulterior modifications, art.12

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# Islamic political philosophy: prophecy, revelation, and the divine law

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## Abstract

*This paper examines the issue of Islamic political philosophy in terms of prophecy, revelation and divine law. It is important to note that philosophy, and Islamic politics are in a good relation with religion. In the present study I have developed this connection through the philosophical theories of the medieval philosopher Al-Farabi. What are the differences and similarities between philosophy and divine law, or between a philosopher and prophet? What are Al-Farabi's most important political theories and what are the concepts of virtuous city and democratic city? What is the philosophy of the Quran? Our study seeks to answer all these questions. The divine law sets the beliefs and actions of the Islamic community, while the theoretical aspects which relate to it are entrusted to the philosophers. Theology is a discipline which protects divine law and establishes the truth of a special revelation, political theology being complementary to political philosophy. Theology tries to develop a rational and coherent understanding of the divine law, to find out what is the prophecy and to differentiate the true prophets from the false ones.*

**Keywords:** *Islamic political philosophy, prophecy, revelation, divine law, Quran, Al-Farabi, theology.*

Since always, Islamic philosophy had to be careful not to step over traditions and Islamic beliefs. Islamic philosophy was born mainly due to translations from the Greek philosophers. Al-Kindi (d. 866), Al-Farabi (d. 950) and Ibn Sina (Avicenna) have achieved the most important translations of Plato and Aristotle. Islamic philosophy presented itself in general as a synthesis of Aristotelianism, Platonism and Neoplatonism.

Al-Farabi was one of the greatest philosophers of Medieval Ages, as well as Avicenna and Averroes. Even if sometimes in their shadow, he is known as the greatest political philosopher of his time. He was the first important philosopher

who instituted a new political-religious order that questioned the Greek philosophical tradition and made more sense of a political-religious order based on prophecy, revelation and divine law. Due to his Nestorian Christian professors and due to the lectures of the works of his Neoplatonic professors as well as to the commentators from the Athenian and Alexandrian schools, Al-Farabi was a follower of the Neoplatonism and Neoplatonism-Christian philosophical traditions. Al-Farabi introduced to the Islamic philosophy the tradition of returning to the two primary sources of philosophical investigations: Plato and Aristotle. Al-Farabi especially presented a Plato mostly from the political not from the mystical or metaphysical point of view. For example, *Timaeus* being considered a political work meant to instruct the citizens in the direction of correct opinions, not a cosmological work as it was believed. The interpretation of Aristotle follows that of Plato's and is again void of metaphysics.

Al-Farabi considered important the agreement between the Islamic religion and the Greek philosophy, those two having to constitute as one, for the philosophy of the Islamic religion to be a harmonious and not a contradictory one. Both philosophy and religion express the same thing, the same truth, philosophy addressing to the elites – for it works with abstract concepts –, and religion - that is the Quran – being more precise and specific as it addresses the public who most of the times is not educated enough. To those, the prophet will talk in a simpler way using a symbolical language, at the same time, the philosophers being free not to follow the teachings of the prophet. The person is the subject of interest both for philosophy as well as for the divine law. Philosophy is a human activity and the divine law does address to the people. However, neither is in the service of the man, but the man is in their service:

“In addition, both call on man to reach for something higher than himself, to become divine, to relate to what is above and beyond himself. Man is confronted with a demand, a duty, to open himself to the whole or the highest principle of the whole.”<sup>1</sup>

Philosophy asks from man that he may know the visible universe and its principles helping himself of his reasoning and intelligence, while the divine law asks from him to bow faithfully to the laws of God. Both divine law and philosophy emphasize the social and political principles of life, as both politics and social life are formed out of the duty to act in a righteous way. Such a righteous activity does not consist of desires and passions but of the demands of goodness as

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<sup>1</sup> Muhsin S. Mahdi, *Al-Farabi and the Foundation of Islamic Political Philosophy*, The University of Chicago Press, Ltd., London, 2001, p. 18.

established by human intelligence or by the divine law. The most important of virtues in the virtual city built by the philosophers and in the city established by divine law, is justice:

“...and justice means obedience to the law, which in both cases is comprehensive law, covering what we now call civil and penal law, public and private law, moral and religious law, or the law relating to both deeds and beliefs.”<sup>2</sup>

Islamic theology has always been associated with politics usually because the main problem of the leadership of the Islamic community has been that which lead the development of Islamic theology, the former being rather more preoccupied with ethics than with politics in the strict sense. There are some beliefs, attitudes of the Islamic community which have always remained the same along the centuries, those being: the gratification for divine revelation, the desire to follow the way of life and the sayings of the prophet and the belief that the straining from the ways of the ancestors is a mistake.

### *Philosopher or prophet?*

Al-Farabi identifies the philosopher with the prophet, both being supreme rulers and both having absolute authority to what concerns legislating beliefs and actions. Because of Al-Farabi, the relation between Islamic theology and philosophy was somewhat controversial, as, mainly to what concerns knowledge, philosophy becomes superior to religion. In order to bring to a common nominator religion and philosophy, Al-Farabi brought to attention the theory of prophecy, but none dared to try it except for Avicenna, for it was a purely new theory. The prophecy as such, is no more than a phenomenon like any other, but the prophet is a man who reached perfection and has imaginative power. With the help of **revelation** he can learn eternal truths, the theory of Al-Farabi being that the revelation and reason do not mutually exclude each other. Mashhad Al-Allaf illustrates some of the distinctions between the philosopher and prophet identified by Al-Farabi:

“1. The prophet receives his knowledge, as a whole, from the active intellect in one shot, without a personal effort in logical reasoning or philosophical reflections. 2. The prophet legislates things through the Sunnah and the Divine law that regulates the benefits of people through regulation of right and duties. 3. The prophet leads the people to apply the divine law in their lives in order to achieve their happiness. 4. His method is practical by mentioning the absolute justice of

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 19.



God, Who reward goodness and punishes evil. 5. The prophet does not demand from the public any knowledge that they are incapable of.”<sup>3</sup>

Al-Farabi believed that philosophers want to imitate God, to be closer to Him, to His perfection, for this is the purpose of philosophy as the science of sciences: to purify our soul, to help us know and understand the universe, ourselves and our own existence. There is no doubt that in his political philosophy Al-Farabi followed the footsteps of Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, most of all to what concerns the concepts of well being, happiness, justice, social life but there are several important differences between the Republic of Plato and the city of Al-Farabi, both containing some philosophies. In Plato's Republic there is an idealistic political system created by a leader who is a philosopher and a council of philosophers. In the city of Al-Farabi the leader is both a philosopher as well as a prophet. There is a leading council but for the most part it is formed out of philosophers. There is a more idealistic philosophical system for human beings.

Al-Farabi believed in the existence of a single school of philosophy, a school of Truth. Thus, the philosophers have to agree, so that their only purpose to be that of seeking the truth. The religious truth and the philosophical one are objectively considered identical, though they differ at a formal level. Actually, both the religious truth and the philosophical truth are irradiations of divine lighting through contemplation or imagination. The basis for all revealed religions is made of revelation and inspiration. The prophet is a man gifted with communion with God and with the ability to express His will. In fact, Al-Farabi shows philosophy from a religious point of view and grants religion a philosophical dimension, pushing them in converging directions as to reach a mutual understanding and co-existence. His theory, through the gift of prophecy theme can be considered one of the most significant attempts to reconcile philosophy and religion. It can also be considered the most important part of his system. Its fundamentals can be found both in psychology as in metaphysics. Its implications are both political and ethical. The farabian theory of prophecy had an obvious impact not only on the East and West but also in the medieval and modern history. Ibn Sina adopted it entirely. His particularizations on the ground of this theory are similar to those of Al-Farabi.

#### *The democratic city and the virtuous city*

In *The Virtuous City* Al-Farabi distinguishes between two types of social life: complete and incomplete. The complete social life is in turn split in three

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<sup>3</sup> Mashhad Al-Allāf, *The Essence of Islamic Philosophy*, St. Louis 2003, p. 104.

other categories: great, medium and small. In a great society there is only one organization to which everyone is part. A medium society is a national society and last, small society includes the community, a city that is part of a nation. Incomplete social life refers to the social life of inhabitants of a smaller area, a village, district or street.

The best of all cities is the virtuous city, here the purpose of social life being that of reaching happiness and well being. The leader of the city must be an ideal person, a unique model. Someone else is not entitled to rule or to guide. The leader is as important as God, being at the same time king, philosopher and prophet. This level of perfection can be reached through the accumulation of twelve attributes, among which can be found: excellent condition such as whatever he wants to do he can do easily; good understanding, good memory for whatever he sees, hears or learns; clever; acumen; expressive style; to be able to speak eloquently and clearly; not be gluttonous over food, drink or sex; be in love with the truth and with honest people; justice and just people, shunning inequity, injustice and unfair people; a strong will etc. However, Al-Farabi admits that to find such person is impossible, thus he comprises them in six qualities:

“1. He should be wise 2. He should be learned and a protector of the laws, rules and codes of conduct laid down for the city. 3. He should be able to deduce things not already known. His process of deduction should follow the examples of previous Imams (leaders) 4. He should excel in deliberating matters and dealing with emergencies. He should be an investigator able to deduce what will be best for the city. 5. He should excel in giving verbal guidance, explaining the rules of the forefathers and the ways in which he has used their example to reach his own deductions. 6. He should be physically fit in readiness for war.”<sup>4</sup>

Both in Plato and in Al-Farabi we find a description of the imperfect or non-ideal city. In *The Republic*, Plato describes how a virtuous city can be disintegrated in non-ideal cities: first into a tymocratic city, this in turn into an oligarchic city, ultimately appearing a democracy, at the end everything turning into tyranny. Democracy is by no means the perfect regime, all the more is the fourth step right before tyranny. In Plato's democratic city freedom is mostly emphasized, especially the freedom of expression and of action. As well, the concept of equality has a distinct importance, because for Plato, equality does not distinguish between citizens: they are all equals, no one can impose something to any one, thus the laws can not be imposed, there is no authority, unlike the virtuous city which admitted that different people have different talents and are

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<sup>4</sup> I.M.N. Al-Jubouri, *History of Islamic Philosophy. With View of Greek philosophy and early history of Islam*, 2004.

capable of different tasks. Even if it presents itself as attractive, democracy is superficial, for the liberty and equalitarianism ultimately can lead to the down size of authority and eventually to lawlessness and anarchy.

Al-Farabi as describes the imperfect city in *The Book of the Political Regime*. Even if it is not a degenerative process as that of Plato's, Al-Farabi was mainly influenced by Plato. Al-Farabi distinguishes three categories of cities, opposed to the model of the virtuous city: ignorant city, immoral city and erring city<sup>5</sup>. The citizens of the first type of city have been deprived of happiness and virtue, while those from the second one believed in happiness, were directed towards it but did not adhere, instead preferring one of the non-virtuous desires (honor, domination, pleasure, etc.) The first did not have the possibility to know good, unlike those that knew it but did not follow. The citizens of the erring city have representations of happiness and virtue, but different from the real ones.

The ignorant cities are split as well in other categories: indispensable city, vile city, base city, tymocratic city, despotic city and democratic city. Unlike Plato, Al-Farabi introduced an entirely new city, the "indispensable city" in which people live by limiting themselves to the basic needs, at a subsistence level. The democratic city corresponds to Plato's typology as well, having in common superficiality, diversity and the life style: "The democratic city is the one in which each one of the citizens is given free reign and left alone to do whatever he likes"<sup>6</sup>. Al-Farabi's democratic city can be corrupted by means of money. You can, however, have a virtuous way of life within a democratic city. Virtuous individuals can develop nicely within it.

### *The Philosophy of Quran*

The Quran has always been present in the life of Arabs, no matter that it regarded political, economical or cultural aspect. Even if it is not a philosophical book per se, the Quran has influenced Islamic philosophy and thinking:

"The Quran was not a philosophical book. It did not intend to address basically to the themes of philosophy. But it set free human mind and thought and lifted all the fetters and chain in front of it."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Muhammad Ali Khalidi, "Al - Farabi on the democratic city," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 11(3), 2003, pp. 379-394.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>7</sup> Hamid Naseem, *Muslim philosophy: science and mysticism*, Sarup&Sons, New Delphi, 2001.

The Quran offers a metaphysical vision of the Universe, inviting people to think and observe, to seek the mysteries of life, to discover signs of God, in other words to look beyond reality. The Quran does not propose ethical and historical theories, rather it presents itself as a book of the Universe. The Quran brought into discussion many of the philosophical issues, such as divinity, the power of God, the creation of the world, the prophecy, the liberty and the will. The Quran made out of the study of universe a religious obligation. The mystics and the philosophers emphasized on the mystical elements of the Quran, marked by allegoric and esoteric clues, which however require the power to see and understand:

“God is the Light of the Heaven and the Earth, the likeness of His light is as a niche wherein is a lamp, the lamp is a glass, the glass as it were a glittering star kindled from a blessed tree, an olive that is neither of the East nor of the West, whose oil well-night would shine, even if no fire touched it; light upon lights; God guides to His light whom He will. And God strikes similarities for man, and God has knowledge of everything.” (Qu’ran 24:35)

Sufism has its roots in the presentation in double aspect of God in the Quran: on one hand the idea of the Almighty Creator, Lord and judge, on the other hand identifies as being closer to man as part of His body. Sufism desires a more direct knowing of God, an evolution beyond the intellectual understanding of mystical experience and makes use of the allegoric method in order to decipher senses and symbols of Quran. Like any other Muslim, Al-Farabi says that God is one, without rival. He persists on the simplicity of God, saying that He is absolutely indivisible, especially his essence is at the same time an intelligent being which understands and is being understood. For Al-Farabi, creation is the effect of God’s existence, and the existence of any creature comes from Him through emanation. Al-Farabi emphasizes that God is all-sufficient, He has no need of His creatures and does not want to obtain anything from them. Concerning the issue of creation, Ibn-Sina maintains Al-Farabi’s idea: the One and the First can directly create only one thing. The first creature who is the intellect, emanates other intellects, the souls of the heavenly bodies and the rest of material creation. In this context, God is the indirect Creator of everything outside the first intellect.

“Hadith”- “sunnah” is the second doctrinaire source of Islam and represents the oral revelation transmitted through tradition. Even since the first century after hegira, circulated the following saying: “Sunna can part from the Quran, but the Quran can not stay without Sunna” even being said that “in controversial matters Sunna has decisive value even if it places itself in contradiction with the Quran, and not the other way around”. In the end it was decided to consider the Quran and

Sunna as two factors of equal importance, meant to establish the rules of religious life. Ijma is the consensus of Muslim erudites from one era for newer matters, for which they could not find references in the Quran and in Hadith.

In the Quran, the Prophet has a revelation which does not allow a dialogue. Unlike that, the Hadith is a constant conversation addressed and in reference to certain people. In Hadith are narrated the actions of the Prophet. Even though Quran is the ultimate revelation, without equal in Islam, the tradition acknowledges as well a second form of scripture named as previously mentioned: Hadith. The relation between the Quran and the Hadith is well defined: Hadith either underlines what is the Quran, explains the way in which something should be done, either introduces preaches based on certain Quranic verses or principles. The second category, especially, was to become a source of prime time material for theologians.

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ESSAYS

PRESENTATIONS

REVIEWS



# Two ritual gestures and their religious significance

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## Abstract

*Religious experiences of the human spirit are implemented, in an inevitable way, due to body-soul connection, at the level of the dynamics of corporeality. Gestures in religious rites are a key issue for the believer who sits in front of the Deity to supplicate and adore. Among the most common religious gestures are kneeling and putting the hands together in a vertical position. Far from being simple positioning and posture without any symbolical meaning, they express intense inner feelings of the human emotionally and mentally directed from the profane dimension towards the endless extensions of the sacredness in a total approach of worship and mystical confession.*

**Keywords:** *Prayer, timeless, divine, ritual act, religious gestures, adoration, confession.*

Often, the kneeling and putting the hands together are signs expressing the beginning of the prayer. But, beyond the symbolism, they reflect very intense spiritual experiences of the soul of the one who prays. It is these experiences that we will try to analyze briefly but deeply.

In general, the kneeling announces an act of subordination, a submission. It is the recognition of a higher authority and you conform to its decisions. To conform means to take an imposed contour set from the outside for a certain part of your existence, or even for the whole of it. But the frameworks that constrain your existence are applied over its dynamics; they come from the area above the exteriority, they come from above. Thus, the height of your personality is ignored, more exactly, you lose from its height. The kneeling reflects namely through corporeality the decrease mentioned here. But kneeling in front of the Deity is of an entirely different order, it cannot express the loss in height of the spirit; the Absolute Being, on the contrary, giving height, more exactly, endless raising to all

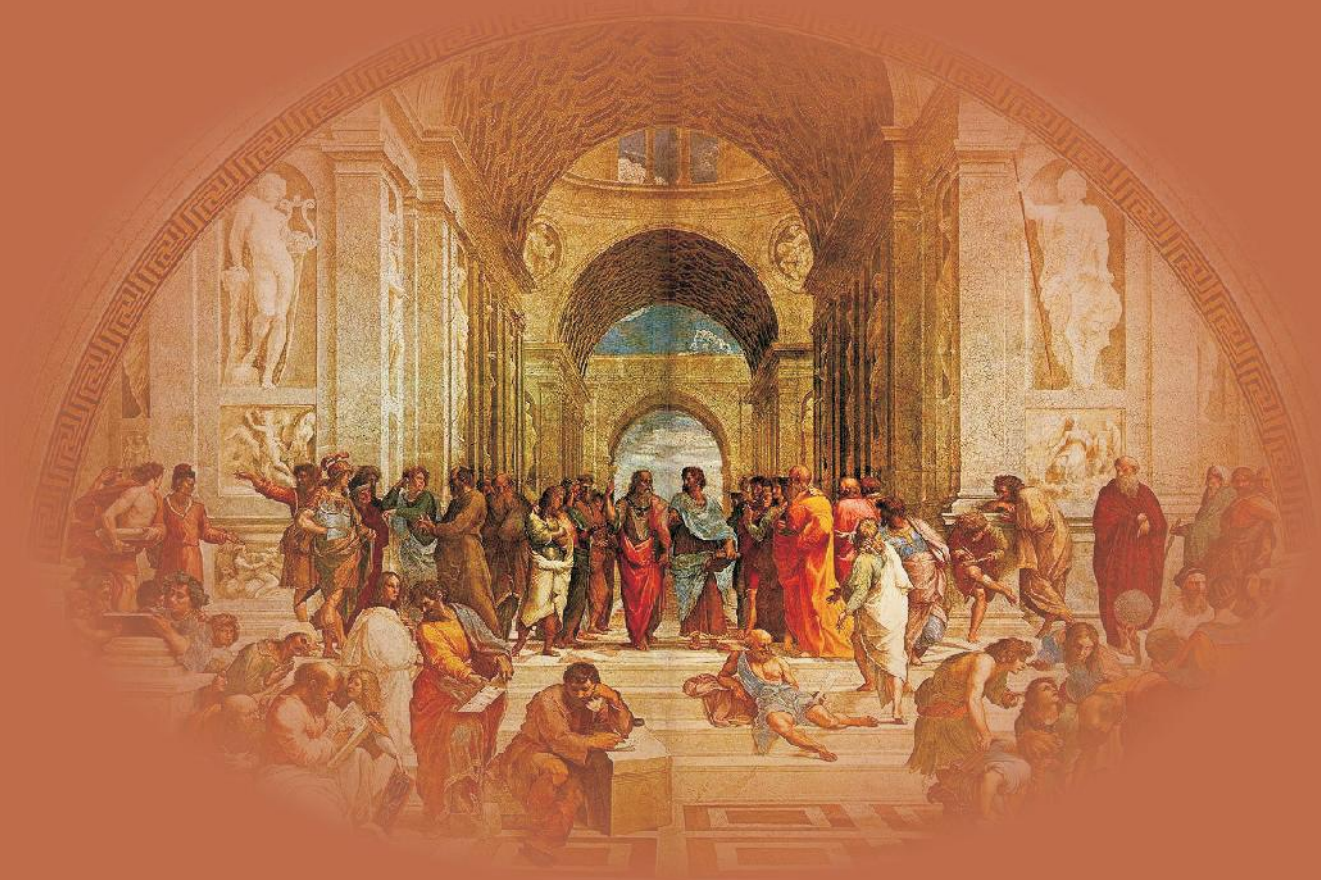


those who invoke its presence. Then, what does the kneeling in front of the Deity symbolize, beyond being just a sign of the beginning of the prayer? Believer's soul experiences a multitude of states belonging to the profane dimension. He is always projected from such a state to another; he is in a movement that permanently changes the shots of the embodied sequence of his existence. This disturbing dynamics of the inability to sit still brings the spirit of the believer to the state of collapsing in front of the Deity. Being tired, exhausted from walking around the world and vainly looking for a full consolation, he cannot keep any more the existence in the pride of freedom of action and experience. He recognizes, therefore, the fatigue of running through the maze of the worldly life, crashing into the weary worship of the Deity and transposing, at the level of corporeality, this fundamental fall by the gesture of kneeling.

Looking further to the one who prays thus knelt, we see that, like the peasant that gathers, in the middle of the autumn, the fruits of the field by placing them together to ponder the outcome of the long effort to acquire before harvest, this believer, after having confessed existential fatigue of the wandering far from sacredness, collects the fruit of his spirit in front of the Deity. He calls, from the dissipation to the voluptuousness of the profane, the deeds and the thoughts that come back, listening to this call, to the one who committed them. Putting the hands together reflects here, beyond being just a sign of the beginning of the prayer, the bringing of the believer to himself, meeting his immortal image. This dual meeting allows the occurrence of the confession, the confession to the Absolute Being. The one who prays, his eyelids over his eyes in order to return him to his interiority, looks at himself and, addressing the Deity, whispers all the right or wrong choices of his spirit.

Only this summarizing of a global perspective on the conduct with which he experienced the moments of his life, summarizing fully reflected by the gesture of putting the hands together, allows the believer to be, in his individual prayer, the celestial chronicler of his own terrestrial adventure.

Thus, kneeling and putting the hands together, far from being signs of the beginning of the prayer, by the evidence that symbolizes them, refer to the deep areas of the believer's religious feelings, areas where the fatigue of the soul is replaced by the apothotic supplication of the Deity and the total confession to the Absolute Being. Making this route between the transience and the bliss of the timelessness, the one who prays hopes to reach, in the transcendental end, the unquenchable peace of his being, settling in the serenity of his own lighting like the saints in the incensed rest of the icons.



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ISSN 2069-4008