The beginning of the history of Romanian philosophy
and the religious phenomenon

Viorel Cernica

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Abstract

In this research I am interested in the issue of the relationship between the religious and philosophical phenomenon. I think there is a unity of these two phenomena in the beginning of the history of Romanian philosophy; and also, I think, in any beginning of a particular philosophy, be it ancient or modern. I try to formulate, in my paper, arguments for the following two ideas: 1) the beginning of the Romanian philosophy is complex: three works belong, together, to this beginning; 2) each of these works, but also their unity, imply, in a great measure, religion.

Keywords: original topos of the Romanian philosophy, religious phenomenon, operational scenario of philosophy, Nicolae Milescu, Miron Costin, Dimitrie Cantemir.

I. The Original Topos of the Romanian Philosophy and Its Hermeneutical Meaning

Firstly, I try to argue and illustrate the unity of three works and its religious aspects that accompany the philosophical ones. This is why I begin with the description of the religious context in which a translation from Greek to Romanian appears, belonging to Nicolae Milescu, one of the most important Romanian writers from the seventeenth century; it is about the text On masterful reason (Pentru sângerul țitorul gând /Despre rațiunea dominantă), entitled also Iosip (or “Maccabees IV”), the final chapter of the Old Testament, in the structure of the Bible of Bucharest, 1688.² (This text appears also in other editions of the Orthodox Bible, for example, in the canon of the Georgian Bible). In this translation the first definition of philosophy in Romanian appears. Of course, this fact has a direct historical meaning and this characteristic will be firstly illustrated in my paper.

Secondly, I pay attention, in order to describe and depict the relation between the religious and philosophical phenomena in the beginning of the Romanian philosophy, to the philosophical poem The Life of the World (Viiața

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¹ University of Bucharest
lumii), that belongs to other important Romanian authors: Miron Costin, from the same period, namely the second part of the seventeenth century.\(^3\)

Finally, with the same goal, I try to interpret the unity of the religious and philosophical meanings in the work of Dimitrie Cantemir, *The Divan or the Wise Man’s Parley with the World or the Judgment of the Soul with the Body (Divanul sau Gâlceava înțeleptului cu lumea sau Giudețul sufletului cu trupul).*\(^4\) The last work is considered as the first philosophical work in the Romanian culture.

Such a topic refers to history, not directly to the present day. But we essentially belong to tradition, and this is why history continuously remains our main mark in order to define ourselves. Moreover, the moment I talk about represents a good example for the relationship between the two phenomena just because they come to form a unity as such. Researching it or another moment from a particular philosophy where philosophy and religion (and theology, of course) come to form a unity together, we get some senses that can help us in understanding at least three main facts from the history of culture – especially Western, whereto belong both the Romanian and Bulgarian cultures – as shown to us today:

1) the great interest of philosophy in approaching theological themes (for example, the theological turn of phenomenology: Emm. Levinas, M. Henry, J.-L. Marion, J.-L. Chrétien, J.-Y. Lacoste among others);

2) the great interest of the theology for the philosophical studies of the religious problems (for example, dialectical theology – *dialektische Theologie*: Karl Barth, Rudolf Bultmann and others, or “European Society for Catholic Theology”: Lieven Boeve as its main representative, or orthodox theology of the person: Cr. Yannaras, I. Zizioulas, especially);

3) the abandonment of the onto-theological model of philosophizing (for example, Heidegger and his followers).

All of these facts prove a continuity of the relationship between the philosophy and religion. I take into account this phenomenon of continuity, but I will try to apply its idea to the Romanian philosophy, especially its beginning. The theoretical space where this phenomenon of continuity appears belongs to the philosophy of religion; and that of the application belongs as well to the history of Romanian philosophy. I don’t ask questions about what is religion or philosophy. The meanings of these terms are contextual. However, there will be contexts where some of these meanings have to set out.

In fact, I pay attention to the aspects of the continuity of the relationship between the philosophy and religion because in a hermeneutical attitude – as mine and our attitude is trying to interpret the presence of the religion in our cultures – we participate with our own cultural horizon, which contains the three mentioned facts amongst others, of course. Therefore, I participate with all aspects of my cultural horizon, in the interpretation act, to the horizon to which

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\(^3\) See Miron Costin (1991), ed. cit. The philosophical poem was created between 1671 and 1673.

belongs the significant tradition concerning the religious phenomenon and its relationship with philosophy. Moreover, without this implication of the main aspects of my cultural horizon in the act of interpretation, any traditional (historical) fact loses its significance. This is why the interpreter is as important as the historical phenomenon that becomes its “object”. In the same measure, we would pay attention to the state of tradition, that is, to its changeable nature. The religious tradition is also in this situation, even though it appears to be more constant that other species of culture. In fact (and I quote from a study which belongs to Jayne Svenungsson), “any serious discussion of religion has to admit that religious traditions, by their very nature, are dynamic and self-exceeding”.

I think it is necessary to remain at the issues of the continuity of the relationship between religion and philosophy in order to both to understanding this relationship in its historical aspects and to explaining the actual situation of our life considered from the religious and philosophical perspectives. This remaining has a methodological sense, because it establishes our place towards the tradition, religious and philosophical in the same measure. Our position is very important, because any element of the tradition speaks to a (historically) determined “subject”. And we can ask the question: how does the first moment of the Romanian philosophy appeal to us and what does it speak to us concerning the relation between religion and philosophy?

This question is not only historical, traditional, but also topical, mainly because it requires our presence with its own cultural horizon that contains existential problems, representations and notions of the past and traditions, goals and ideals, etc. Therefore, what religious significance does the beginning moment of the Romanian philosophy bear? This is my main question in the first part of the study. I don’t want to construct a theory on the issue of tradition. But some senses about our attitude towards the cultural tradition must be settled in order to bring it in our neighborhood.

II. The Religious Phenomenon and the Original Topos of Romanian Philosophy

II.1. Religious Context for the First Definition of Philosophy in Romanian: On Masterful Reason (Despre Rațiunea Dominantă) – Nicolae Milescu

I mentioned that Milescu’s translation has a historical meaning. But in our philosophy the construction of a language was – and still is – a grave and serious problem. We were compelled – even in the contemporary philosophy – to take

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over many words from Greek, Latin, but also from French, German, English, Russian, etc. in order to constitute a Romanian philosophical language. But some philosophers researched the Romanian traditional language and revealed certain words that can express philosophical thoughts, that is, equivalent expressions for the main categories from Greek, Latin texts, firstly. On this topic, Milescu’s translation is very significant. Moreover, this text is in the same measure theological and philosophical; it puts the problem of the relation between reason and passions andformulates a point of view, namely that reason is the master of the passions: a stoic point of view in accord with the Hebraic conception on the relation between reason and passions belongs also to the author, Josephus Flavius (the second century AD). This is why the text was translated into Latin (from Greek) in the beginning of the modern period, in the humanistic context (for example, German Bible, Edition 1524), or it was commented and interpreted by some representatives of humanism, for instance by Erasmus of Rotterdam. In our cultural tradition, this text is considered the first philosophical translation in Romanian.\(^6\)

Of course, I don’t try to reproduce the definition. In any case, the text it contains is significant only with the other two mentioned texts and in this historical and linguistic perspective. It itself cannot cover all conditions of a beginning of a particular history of philosophy. However, talking about Nicolae Milescu it ought to emphasize his religious preoccupations and, very important for our discussion, the fact that he published an interpretation about the Eucharist in Orthodox Church in a collective volume co-ordinated by two well-known Catholic theologians and logicians, at the end of the seventeenth century: Antoine Arnauld and Pierre Nicole. The volume was published in 1669, at Paris, with the title: La Perpétuité de la foi de l’Eglise Catholique touchant l’Eucharistie, défendue contre le livre du sieur Claude, ministre de Charenton. Milescu’s text, in Greek and Latin, Enchiridion sive Stella Orientalis Occidentali splendens, was explaining the fact of the transubstantiation, its understanding in Orthodox Church. It represents the first contribution of a Romanian – maybe of an Eastern European – cultural personality to the European theological discussions, after Reformation and Counter Reformation from the sixteenth century.\(^7\)

Beyond these special contributions made by Milescu to the Romanian culture and his presence in the theological debates, remains, from a philosophical perspective, the first definition of philosophy in Romanian, his endeavor for expressing philosophical thoughts in Romanian, chiefly, a definition of this form of intellectual activity. This point of view is sustained by


many historians of the Romanian culture, especially by Virgil Cândea, who
dedicated a book to the Romanian humanism, where this translation and its
philological, philosophical, theological meanings have an important place.  

II.2. Religious Meanings in the Content of a Philosophical Poem:
“The Life of the World” (Viiaţa lumii) – Miron Costin

Miron Costin is, as Nicolae Milescu, very well known in our cultural
space, thanks to his own historical works and philosophical poem, The Life of
the World (Viiaţa lumii). But Milescu’s translation has only a philosophical
context, whereas Costin’s poem contains some philosophical meanings.
Moreover, the construction of the poem has a philosophical tint. In fact, the
main problem concerns the religious phenomenon: the kind of divine existence
and the sense of the human life from the perspective of the relationship between
God and His creatures, especially man. But the kind in which the problem is
formulated, the characteristics of the discourse, some concepts and, of course,
terms, and finally the scenario, are all of them, philosophical. I will try to follow
the way of revealing the main philosophical aspects mentioned and considered
significant for our topic.

In general, starting with the Greeks, the origin of philosophy is the
wonder. Plato, Aristotle, for example, affirm this point of view. What does
Miron Costin wonder of? In particular, it seems the existence of the world and
its beginning is what wonders him, if one takes the poetical discourse from a
philosophical outlook. Of course, he accepts that the world is created by God
and that man is a being with a double nature, proper human and divine. But if it
is really about a wonder, we can understand: why the author accepts as such –
somehow, without wonder, indubitably – the fact of the beginning of the world,
and even its existence, that is, the “object” of his wonder? God created the
world, and this idea is not problematic for Miron Costin. Nevertheless, the
author tries to speculate at a symbolic level of the language, on this topic; but,
in this way, the topic appears as paradoxical. Perhaps, the wonder of the author
focuses to the reasons of world’s existence and of its beginning, not to the
existence or the beginning as such. (Why did God create the world?) This is
why a suspension of some of God’s characteristics appears. For instance, the
absolute – a main characteristic of God from the Christian perspective – is only
announced, not affirmed as such. The God’s power for creation makes this
announce (appeal). But just this suspension of the absolute Divine introduces
some apories which refer to the image of the world destined to unfruitfulness or
to the lack of fulfillment, even to an existential deficiency. In another way, the

luck (destiny), that characterizes man’s situation in the world in Costin’s view, would be impossible. Finally, just the luck of the man that appears in relation with the time as Kairos wonders Milescu. This luck (destiny) is changeable. But it is not in the man’s power; also, in a way, nor is it in the will of God.

In this scenario, the existence of God himself appears, somehow, suspended. The human’s deed becomes significant. Firstly, the whole world degrades thanks to the passage of the time; secondly, God is not active because the man has *liberum arbitrium* (free will); hence, the man is without help. However, the human deed (only) can save man. The absolute divine is something, but it is past its time. The unreligious tint can be recognized here. This fact shows not a weakness of the religious phenomenon, but, perhaps, its availability for a relationship with the philosophy.

A list of the terms used by Miron Costin reveals his philosophical intentions better: beginning (of the world, man, etc.), death, good and evil, time (*vreme*), spirit (*duh*), nature (of man, *fire*), luck (*noroc*). In the same measure the themes in the poem prove a focusing on the philosophical meanings: the existence of God (over the time), the passage of the time, the changing and the death of the things, of creatures generally, the degrading of the world thanks to the passage of time, the sense of the human deed etc. Of course, all of these approached through the idea of the man as being created by God and endowed with free will.

In the philosophical poem there are, on the one hand, clear religious and theological options (convictions of the author): the indisputable existence of God, the truth about the divine man’s origin and the free will, etc., all of them being active senses in poem, in a measure. And, on the other hand, there are clear philosophical scenarios: the wonder focused on the man’s place in the world and its description, the sense of the human deed in a troubled human life and the relations with the time, which is conceived in two hypostasis: physical time and time as Kairos and so on. This double sense together with all the elements of the scenarios abovementioned represents a proof for a philosophical reconstruction that contains in its structure the religious meanings beside the proper philosophical ones. We can accept, finally, that it is about a true unity between the two aspects (religious and philosophical) in the discursive structure of Costin’s poem.

This idea of some philosophical meanings of the poem must put aside the idea about the religious context of the first definition of philosophy in Romanian in Milescu’s translation. One together with other constitutes a more powerful philosophical reconstruction that can be taken into account when we think about the beginning of a particular philosophy, of Romanian philosophy. I would like also to say the poetic form is historically the first, the original, philosophical form, used by the pre-Socratic philosophers. Nevertheless, this form is not a proof for the dominant literary character in Costin’s poem.
II.3. The Unity of the religious and Philosophical Phenomena into an Authentic Philosophical Reconstruction: “The Divan or the Wise Man’s Parley with the World or the Judgment of the Soul with the Body” („Divanul sau gâlceava înțeleptului cu lumea sau giudețul sufletului cu trupul”) – Dimitrie Cantemir

The third work that is taken into account in order to discuss about the relationship between religion and philosophy in the first moment of the history of Romanian philosophy belongs to Dimitrie Cantemir: The Divan or the Wise Man's Parley with the World or the Judgment of the Soul with the Body. The problems that can eventually refer to it do not have the goal of challenging its philosophical character, because this character is obvious. Moreover, most interpreters and historians of Romanian philosophy recognized this character. It may appear only a problem related to the context in which it is placed: in a philosophical context without other works, in order to solely represent the beginning of our philosophy, or in a cultural context beside other works, in order to constitute, but only together with these, the beginning. Of course, this latter idea represents my option. But, starting from it, we don’t understand that proving its philosophical character becomes superfluous. In fact, only through proofs related to its philosophical character it is possible to placing it together with the other works in the beginning of Romanian philosophy.

A possible philosophical scenario, essentially operational, is present as such in Cantemir’s work. The three operations that are taken into account as being proper philosophical, the wonder, the speculation, and the aporia, compose the structure of this work. Before I talk about The Divan or the Wise Man’s Parley with the World or the Judgment of the Soul with the Body, I need to present some aspects of Dimitrie Cantemir’s personality.

It is widely known that Dimitrie Cantemir was one of the most important historians from the beginning of the eightieth century on the problem of the Ottoman Empire. But for the European culture he was also one of the most important thinkers, geographers, musicians, writers, politicians, philosophers. The late status is, maybe, that contains all others. In any case, for the Romanian culture this idea is true. Ones of his cultural preoccupations is related with his life situation; for example, the status of historian. He stayed many years at Istanbul (Constantinopile), the capital of Ottoman Empire, and he spent the time especially with his preparation in many cultural domains. Moreover, he knew directly the life in the capital of the Ottoman Empire and many political and cultural personalities, and he had access to the historical documents very important for his subsequent scientific preoccupations. Maybe his presence in a centre of culture, as Istanbul, and his relations with ones of the great personalities of that period contributed to the responsible position of Cantemir towards the Romanian culture that is evident in his historical studies from the
Russian period (1711-1723). He is the first Romanian creator who was awarded with the title of “academician”: he was member of Academy of Berlin, in 1714. And in order to inform the contemporaries about his origin, Cantemir wrote one of the most known of his books: *Descrierea Moldovei* / *Description of Moldavia* (1714).

His philosophical interests cover a few disciplines: logics, metaphysics, ethics, philosophy of culture, philosophy of history, even philosophy of religion. Of course, in this presentation I will deal only with his contribution to the constitution of the first moment of the Romanian philosophy. This is why I take into account the work mentioned, *The Divan or the Wise Man's Parley with the World or the Judgment of the Soul with the Body*, not other texts that have philosophical meanings, for instance *Istoria ieroglifică* (*The Hieroglyphic History*) (1705), a literary text mainly, that contains at its beginning a list with many philosophical, logic, historical, scientific terms, ones of them translated directly into Romanian (foreign term – Greek, Latin, Turkish, Arabic, Slavonic, Hebrew, Italian etc. – put in Romanian form), and another ones taken over as such from the Romanian vocabulary. 9

In Cantemir’s language, the Wise Man is the soul, and the World is the body. There is no difficulty to identify the significance of these two terms. The philosophical elements that appear in the scenario of this “judgment” are very important. What wonder firstly the reader represents the world’s courage to confront with the Wise Man (the soul) and to formulate and argue its own requirements; but this is the wonder of the author too. The discourse is philosophical at the beginning, thanks to the topics which are drawn in discussion. But the author wonders also about the man’s impossibility to catch the perfection and to be as God, that is, to be beyond this world. Even the sin, with all its hypostasis, wonders Cantemir.

In correspondence with these wonders there are, in Cantemir’s work, some philosophical techniques and, consequently, some scenarios that are constructed by the author in philosophical ways. On the on hand, the main philosophical techniques are the commentary of the maxim and the counter argumentation; so we have many philosophical elements of context, at the layer of retorts / replies (especially, world’s retorts). On the other hand, there is the probative appeal to the authority of The Scripture; it is about a probatory appeal, not an absolute one. The topics are drawn in discussion, according to the plan of the author, and the two characters who take part at the discussion (the soul and the body) observe and formulate proves and weigh them, argue and establish a meaning for a thing that belongs to the human life, a sense of the relationship between the soul and body, a significance concerning God’s intervention in the world etc.

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Among these techniques, the counter argumentation is very important, in the first part of the work. The body (the world) doesn’t accept any idea of the soul (the Wise Man) as such. Moreover, a body’s attitude or, at least, an intention to reject the soul’s point of view exists continually in the “judgment”. Also, the Wise Man respects the judgment of the World. He sees himself, as a “microcosm”, within the “macrocosm”, of the World itself. Hence, the body is not completely dominated by the soul; it has its own point of view, even if finally it is defeated, somehow, by the soul. This latter is not failed at the beginning, but only after a confrontation between the two partners, at the court of reason. The ideas from the second part of the work would not be possible, in their “dogmatism”, without this confrontation. In the third part, Cantemir imagines the reconciliation between body and soul. The technique used in the sense of reconciliation is the taking over a text belonging to a Unitarian Polish: Andreas Wissowatius. The third book is not important for our topic.

Indubitably, the religious meanings of Cantemir’s work catch themselves onto the philosophical scenarios, with its techniques and topics. But the aporia is the most important proof in order to depict the philosophical aspect and, finally, the unity of relation between religion and philosophy phenomena, in this work. There is an aporia that was very much discussed in that period – as it had was discussed before and as it will be discussed after this period – namely the relation between body and soul. It is about a classical problem that is not resolved directly by Cantemir, even if he defends the Christian position, orthodox, precisely. Of course, finally the soul (Wise Man) is the winner; but through the final victory the world is not destroyed; it is integrated in the order of the Spirit. Paradoxically, the “macrocosm” (the world) is contained in the “microcosm” (the soul). But is not about a quantitative relation; it is a qualitative one.

In order to final reconciliation, Cantemir proposes a theory of the ages (of the seven ages), very significant for the topic concerning the relation between body and soul. The religious conviction of the author appears to be dominant. But even in this place we have to do with an affirmation of the unity that marks sufficiently the peace between the body and soul. Therefore, on the one hand, Cantemir affirms that a dominant soul exists (Wise Man; “microcosm”) over the body, according to the Orthodox Christian doctrine. On the other hand, the author sustains that the body and soul form a unity that cannot be destroyed in any way. These two senses put in order a “valid” aporia, if I can express in this way. But is this problem resolved in modern period? The most theories on this topic end in aporia. Ones of them take into account this problem in order to reformulate it in cosmological terms, as Cantemir.

Beside a definition of the philosophy in Romanian (in Milescu’s translation) and the philosophical senses in a poem about “the life of the world” (in Costin’s work), Cantemir’s Divan assures some conditions for the beginning moment of Romanian philosophy. Of course, to fulfill an argumentation in
favor of this point of view requires much proof. Some of them will be formulated in following research.

III. The Contemporary Philosophy and the Religious Phenomenon

I don’t intent to present exhaustively the topic announced in the title. In what follows, I outline the problem concerning the attitude of the contemporary philosophy, through the phenomenology, towards the religion. In this way, I try to prepare some elements in order to continue my research on this topic: the relationship between religion and philosophy.

In fact, I would now observe how the attitude of contemporary philosophers regarding the relation between religion and philosophy is expressed. Of course, there are many forms of manifestation, but a main sense is represented by the reciprocal interest of philosophy and religion concerning some basic understandings of the human being. Both philosophy and religion focus their discourse especially towards the anthropological problematic, even if each of them has its own basis problems. Always this anthropological problematic attracted any science, philosophy, any form of human knowledge, because they are human at the beginning. But is there an accent on this characteristic in the contemporary culture? What we can observe is the fact that the cultural period to which we belong brings a new tint in the problem of the relationship between religion and philosophy. Certain versions of the philosophy pretend they are not classical, for example the phenomenology, keeping their autonomy towards the theology, retakes in discussion the great themes of the religion phenomenon. But even in this way the main religious dogmas are suspended in their formal validity in order to be again found through the life of an individual man. It is true such an attitude can be observed at the theologians too; for example, to the work of Dumitru Stăniloae, one of the most important orthodox theologians in the 20th century. In The orthodox dogmatic Theology (Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă), the author states that the dogmas are not dead letters, but lived truths. We can say, starting with this fact, that the theology is, as the philosophy, “a daughter of its epoch”.

The attitude of contemporary philosophers about the relation between religion and philosophy express itself in one of the most important aspects of the religion phenomenon. Firstly, its becoming and relation with the human life. As I have said, dogmas are put in discussion, because only in this way they can be lived. And philosophy, through some versions, participates to this work. If we open the discourse to this theme, we come back again at the main philosophical models that propose certain senses on our topic. A refuge in the

10 Cf. Dumitru Stăniloae, Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă (Orthodox Dogmatic Theology).
horizon of the contemporary philosophy is natural, because just this represents our own dwell, the place from which we can watch any human phenomenon.

Phenomenology, in the husserlian version, cannot be used as a device for an interpretation of the religion. Husserl himself considered that the phenomenology is absolutely a science critique that puts under analyses anything in order to reach to the subjectivity through the transcendental reduction. Heidegger, although he talks about religion – for example, in the conference *Phenomenology and Theology*, in 1927 – did not recommend the use of phenomenology in religious problems. But especially in the late three, four decades, the phenomenology is used in the approaching of the religious problems. Maybe the most important concepts of this new way of the relationship between religion and philosophy belong to the French phenomenology. Among them there are two of which I want to deal with in the following research: the saturated phenomenon (J.-L. Marion) and the face-to-face relationship (Emm. Levinas).

The first concept – the saturated phenomenon – makes possible a re-thinking of the divine, so that what is found as absolutely different besides the common phenomenon to be accepted and lived as super-phenomenal or as a saturated phenomenon. The second concept – face-to-face relation – shows us a radical experience: the experience of the pure transcendence. Both of these concepts open the philosophical discourse towards the religious problems, even if their authors had no intention to recommend such a utility. How do these two concepts – and others, of course, from the same phenomenological horizon – open a new way in the relationship between religion and philosophy? Which are the main ideas that can structure a new theory on the religious phenomenon? How these ideas can set up a religious attitude as such? And which can be the element of this approaching that lead to an increase, on the one hand, of the religious life, and the other, of the philosophical experience and knowledge? To these questions I try to respond in my next paper on the theme of our researching project.

Conclusions

I began with a problem concerning the first moment of the history of a particular philosophy in order to enlighten the relationship between religion and philosophy. And I finish with a problem concerning the place of this relation from a phenomenological perspective. Is there a natural link between these two moments? I will respond directly in another paper. But the continuity of this relation is clear. In the sense of this last idea, I interpreted the first moment of the history of the Romanian philosophy. Also, on this basis I showed that we can establish a model of a particular philosophy, and some conditions – even through this model – of a cultural history of a particular philosophy. The
continuity of the relationship between the religion and philosophy can be proved in the contemporary philosophy. For example, in phenomenology, where some new theoretical experiences and, maybe, new grounds for a religious experience that is at the beginning in relation with the philosophy are presented.

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