

Ștefan Afloroaei – *On Metaphysics Nowadays*

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Abstract

Starting from Ștefan Afloroaei's latest book, *Our Metaphysics of All Days*, I try to underline those data that are considered as significant both for the modality in which the metaphysical intercession builds up and for the way in which metaphysics can be found in the day-to-day life experience. These two aspects are inextricably linked to each other: if metaphysics is a natural bend and a natural experience of man, then there must be, on one hand, certain situations that can no longer be subjected to the non-contradiction principle, obliging thinking to the speculative, metaphysical attitude and, on the other, the necessity of meeting certain meanings of being in the current language. Thinking must finally assume the paradox according to which being both shows and hides itself, gives and withdraws, exists and exists not.

Key words: metaphysics, phenomenon, being, contingency, destiny, speculative frame of mind, metaphysical experience, the non-contradictory principle

A book on the commonness of the uncommon

The latest book signed by Ștefan Afloroaei, *Metafizica noastră de toate zilele / Our Metaphysics of All Days*, published by Humanitas Publishing House in 2008, brings into discussion a problematic that seemed long forgotten. The very title of the book announces its main idea, namely that metaphysics, far from being a concern of an ended epoch, a field specialized in obscurities, or the name of the new obscurantism that invaded the world, is as natural and present “frame of mind” of ours as possibly conceivable, a “form of sensitivity”, an “experience,” as the author himself calls it.

However, the title of the book announces another idea as well, one which stands out as we are reading it: the “object” of metaphysics is not, as it is widely acknowledged, something detached from this world, beyond it, with no connection with

what is happening “down – here”. This preconceived idea represents the main reason why metaphysics has been numberless times rejected: not having an empirical basis, lacking a foundation in the directly cognoscible and thus its theories never liable to being validated or gainsaid, metaphysics, it has been said, may be appreciated as a work of art.

Starting from its immanent criteria, the only judgment on its truth is possible only based on coherence, one being unable to pose the problem either of the correspondence with those visible – which by definition it surpasses – or, out of obvious reasons, the correspondence with those that cannot be seen. Therefore, according to this perspective, “metaphysics” cannot be asked more than not being self-contradictory; it is sufficient for it to sustain itself as if a world – equally distanced from the one in which we dwell and from the one which we cannot envisage. Serious charges have been laid against metaphysics – from its meaningless utterances to the absurd claims it raises. Nowadays - when we can talk about a true scholastic of the analytical philosophy, about an official philosophy of pragmatism and empiricism, when metaphysics has even ceased to be driven into any corner whatsoever, being identified rather as a kind of sophisticated alchemy, a pre-history to the ‘true’ analytic philosophy - the publishing of such a book is, unquestionably, a genuine event both in the Romanian culture and the European one. Throughout this work, the author knows how to dismantle the prejudices related to metaphysics and thus to surpass the restricted understanding of experience and the concrete reality. Metaphysics, without being one of our current experiences, is no less a decisive and defining experience for us. Meeting it is as unexpected as inevitable, and metaphysics intimately interlinks with our lives, with the world in which we live, our ways of thinking and even the ones in which we feel. Only those who regard metaphysics from the outside and who forget their intrinsic bonds with it can appreciate it as contemplation on “some aspects which seem to relate to a totally different world”.

It is not the reading of some books with strange titles, nor the initiation in the use of some concepts which may appear as

rather vague to many readers, nor the doctrines or thinking trends that exhaust the metaphysical attitude. "The metaphysical attitude appears not in these situations, but exactly when man himself confronts, let us say so, with the unclear logics of his thinking, with his own beliefs or those of a foreigner, with the blurred boundary between reality and appearance, no less with those events that seem to talk about the lack of sense in the states of things. In these situations - and in an absolutely natural way - there come into being those attitudes and questions that can be called speculative, even if the way in which they are expressed is as common as possible."¹

What constitutes the center of interest in this philosophical work is the way in which a "metaphysical experience" constitutes itself, an experience which makes possible any metaphysical conception as well as our whereness in the world. The metaphysical experience that Ștefan Afloroaei envisages is one that, one way or another, each of us experiences at least once in our lives: the experience of meeting what exceeds thinking, what surpasses our mental and emotional frames, what blurs the categories in accordance to which we usually operate. Only that the source of this experience is not at all strange to the world in which we lead our daily lives in the same way in which it is not strange to ourselves. The same source has, most of the times, the most familiar and usual faces - as the one of our neighbour or our own in the mirror, the image of a beautiful girl or that of pure and simple happiness. It may also have the countenance - drawn with devastating suffering or the one, pensive and serene, of the vesperal sadness. But in all these events of our lives there betides - especially in certain moments - an exceedance of these, a surplus, something else which cannot be reduced to what they embody, nor can it be isolated from its pure and simple occurrence. The simplistic dissociation: essence - appearance, essence - existence, mind - body, image - reality, the thing in itself - phenomenon is unable to clarify

¹ Ștefan Afloroaei, *Metafizica noastră de toate zilele*, Editura Humanitas, București, 2008, p. 11.

anything from this experience which makes erupt the originary unity of those separated or the profound coincidence of those that are contrary.

Stefan Afloroaei discusses a situation which is exemplary for thinking: namely the one in which thinking, asking itself some questions, like the one regarding the sense of being in things existent, realizes that it always bears within it a pre-understanding of those things. In addition to this, thinking has to interrogate itself on its own right to “answer clearly to a question as the one regarding being itself.”² Therefore, in its most proper exercise, thinking has to reflect upon itself. The reflection on being obliges thinking to turn upon itself.³ This fact does not remain without consequences. The author mentions one of them which we can detect in the modern epoch: investing consciousness as “ultimate instance”, “founding, originary and pure subjectivity.” From Descartes to Kant and from Hegel to Husserl, the self is considered “a true principle of everything that means reality or certitude.”⁴ But it could not appear, on the same ground, as the opposite of this attitude. For Pascal, the self is detestable, for Nietzsche – a contingent fact, an interpretation, an idol of the modern man, for Kierkegaard – an entity profoundly divided, in agony for Dostoyevsky, empty for Baudelaire, attracted by its own death in Eminescu, troubled from its birth in Freud. There are, consequently, two limits in the self understanding itself: one Cartesian, and the other, profoundly skeptical.

From this situation in which thinking finds itself – that of bringing itself forward when it formulates ultimate questions – there derives another attitude that it adopts: that of considering the natural attitude as an unsatisfactory one and thus privileging the secondary one, that of self-reflection. The simple and natural question on being will make room for the one regarding the limits of reason (Kant), its originary intentionality (Husserl), the modality in which the others have tackled such themes as being, existence, reality, and the self (Hegel).

² *Ibidem*, p. 19.

³ Ștefan Afloroaei, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 21-22.

From this perspective some questions will be regarded as meaningless, many of them being those questions that the natural attitude could raise: the question regarding what a thing in itself means, what truth, the good, and the beautiful mean, or even the question on being – as if self-reflection could suspend the right of the self to be concerned with anything else except itself. In the duality implied by the act of reflection, the self produces from itself the object of reflection; it becomes a stranger to itself and thus completely sufficient to itself. It will no longer search outside itself the alterity that it itself started to name. At this stage, Stefan Afloroaei believes, thinking can no longer be comprised in its simple conceptual exercise. In the very act of self-reflection, as in the first instance act of reflection on some ultimate themes, thinking confronts itself with some paradoxes that it can no longer avoid. Thus it must overcome itself in its very process of manifestation.

Stefan Afloroaei ponders on the analogy between thinking and the mirror. Like the mirror, thinking reflects “the flow of life” to which it itself belongs.⁵ The Latin term for mirror, *speculum*, will be able to comprise this meaning of thinking as well since it signifies “both the mirror in which a thing is reflected, and the image that doubles that entity.”⁶

From the Kantian point of view, there are two limits of thinking: self - contradiction and the originary intuition. In using concepts, thinking is limited by contradiction and, on the other hand, it is constrained to use the concepts. In other words, it cannot think but logically, which means non - contradictory, without this following of the non-contradiction principle to ensure the thought object another possibility besides the logical one when thinking extends its exercise beyond the boundaries of sensitive intuition.

Dethroning the principle of contradiction by certain (un)usual circumstances

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 39.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

Out of this logic captivity one could not evade except by what Kant calls originary intuition – only that “this last possibility belongs to God.” The originary intellect would create the object it intuits. Despite this, the very way in which Kant talks about the thing in itself lets loom a speculative use of thinking: the radical difference which this announces, the negative assertions referring to this⁷, signify the fact that common logics is suspended when understanding of the thing in itself is dared. The non-contradiction principle entails, as the Romanian philosopher Stefan Afloroaei thinks, an interpretation different from the logical one, being able to meet, even in Aristotle, a metaphysical signification. Without exceptions, this may apply only in a world that ignores the condition of temporality or of the equivocation of meanings.

The events, the variety of perspectives on the same subject, deliberation, taking a decision, make this principle to be exceeded.⁸ What makes the formulation of this principle possible is the representation of the world as “bivalent, actual, finite and clearly determined.”⁹ These boundaries within which it is active are not, according to the same philosopher, the boundaries of thinking in general.

Paragraph 8 from *Metafizica noastra de toate zilele*, called “Situations in which thinking exceeds the non-contradiction rule” is essential for the present discussion. Stefan Afloroaei stops on three situations, frequent in our daily life and conversations, which elude the contradiction principle: the everyday thing, the determination free object, and what is not an object.

1. *The everyday thing*. Under this name there recurs in our life a situation which can no longer be elucidated by means of the principle on which thinking functions, as classical logics claims. The everyday thing may equally exist or not, may happen or not, may be equally true and false, in the same time and in all respects. Its indifference at the logical level translates our indifference at the psychological level. We can equally accept the existence and non-existence of a thing, that

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 52.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 55.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 58.

it happened or not, that it had to supervene or it was the result of a mere whim. We can think about the everyday thing without our thinking to experience logical convulsions. We accept it naturally as if the exigency of non-contradiction did not concern it at all. Either we refer to someone's belief in the unexpected change of weather, or we talk about bookish or raving visions, the square circle or the old bestiaries, thinking gives evident signs that it can encompass anything without following the non-contradiction principle.¹⁰

2. *The determination free object.* The second situation in which thinking exceeds the non-contradiction principle refers to the thing in itself. When thinking tries to encompass it, it finds itself in the situation in which it has to recognize the perfect equivalence of the thing with nothingness itself. The determination free thing makes being and nothingness coincide. In the realm of the absolute, detached from bounds and relationships, to be is identical with not to be. It is a paradoxical situation, especially since it contradicts the idea we all have according to which the maximum of being is determined by the absolute and not by the relative. Yet, within this exercise of thinking, one is obliged to accept that the maximum of being is identical with the absence of being. It is not only the Buddhism that confers to the nothingness the value of a principle or the Heraclitean conception of universal becoming that will stand under the sign of this perspective of the thing in its contradictory absolute, but also the common thinking which develop – especially in proverbs or apophthegms referring to the mutual translation of life and death – “an understanding of things by means of their striking contrast term.”¹¹

3. *What is not a thing.* This stands for the third situation in which thinking can no longer be subjected to the non-contradiction rule: namely, when this does not operate with simple predicative judgements any more or when it thinks what can no longer be subjected to the simple object condition. When there appear other uttering modes than the enuntiative

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 59.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 60.

one, the difficulty of establishing their truth or falsity according to the already mentioned principle maximizes already. Could one say that a prayer or a praise, a question or a narration are true or false? ¹²

Besides all these, one could remark that thinking is never a radical source to itself. This is what Friedrich Nietzsche makes us best understand. According to him, a philosopher's thinking always listens to certain instincts, to assertions taken as indubitable, to idols such as the absolute self, the originary will, the unmediated truth.¹³ All in all, thinking is submitted to those "forces that potentate of diminish life."¹⁴ Typical to thinking would therefore be the act of continuous evaluation and reevaluation. The very question „What is there/what exists?“ so present in Plato's dialogues hides a certain modality of asking, being based on an opposition that grounds an entire metaphysics: being and appearance, being and becoming. A simple change of this question could put everything into discussion again: if - as Hyppias does, ironized by Socrates - one answered to the question "what is the beautiful in general" as if it were "what is the beautiful in particular", "one has great chances to understand the meaning of things from the life world. Since one can thus refer to the real motion of a thing: <which are the forces that govern it? Which is the will that possesses it? Who expresses, manifests and even hides behind it?>"¹⁵

Indeed, thinking often happens not to be able to operate with the categories it is used to. It may also happen that what previously seemed completely clear to it now has become totally obscure; what translated as certitude has been subdued to a total and terrible doubt; what constituted a fulcrum has unveiled as a dazzling abyss. It is that situation which, as no one else alike, Descartes manages to live and express. In this situation everything must be raised for discussion again, while the call to principles becomes a vital exigency. Besides Descartes, Afloroaei mentions Ortega y Gasset for whom the disorientation in the world typical to the individual constitutes

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 62.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 63.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 64.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 66.

the true source of the metaphysical attitude. Consequently, there are situations “in which thinking proves to be reflexive in the most sensitive manner.”¹⁶ In thinking’s self-perception, this truly asserts itself as a comprehension act. It is both a self-proof and a proof of what is foreign to it – as, for example, when it reflects on its own limits or when it tries to differentiate what is truly important in man’s life. “In other words, the indifferent judgment, as much as we could talk about such a thing, does not represent an act of thinking. We could call it everything - calculations, a reflex, a simple logics operation - but thinking.”¹⁷ The moment an individual experiences his inadequacies to the world he inhabits, a disagreement between his expectations and their fulfillment, thinking finds itself bound to reexamine and reground everything. In addition to this, the moment in which thinking is exceeded by those things which it can no longer treat unless accepting antinomy, as there are those that address the totally different (*ganz Andere*), distinguishable in the aesthetic experience or in the religious one, unable to be decided from a logical perspective.¹⁸

The conclusion that Stefan Afloroaei reaches is that the analytical thinking is incapable to accede to the true paradox that all these situations imply. These no longer deliver themselves to the simple categorial data and to the Aristotelian logics of non-contradiction. Far from being a failure of thinking, this aspect is nothing but adopting a new modality of thinking, the true speculative one. As the author says, “The logics of non-contradiction is not simply rejected away, but led beyond itself, within a different realm of communication and comprehension.”¹⁹ It has to be noticed that, unlike those who consider formal logics a hindrance to a “supra – rational” truth, Stefan Afloroaei seizes a nuance of decisive importance: surpassing the logics of thinking comes from its over - cramming; only when the non-contradiction logics has reached its maximum exercising level

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 73.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 79.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 88.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 89.

can it sense that something does not fall within its boundaries, that there is something else that eludes it. It is not by chance that in the last pages of the mentioned fragment the author brings forth the apophatic experience. Never does apophatism refer to God's inadequacy to the human mind but, if one could say so, to God's over-adequacy to it; mind is over-satisfied and this excess of what it thinks makes it pass over or, at least look beyond its own limits. It is equally remarkable the fact that the metaphysical experience that Stefan Afloroaei poses does not translate in terms of lack or absence but, on the contrary, in terms of exceeding and surplus.

If Ortega y Gasset could find disorientation, emptiness, or absence as origins of a philosophical attitude, if Emil Cioran could refer to a vital deficiency from which the spirit is born, if Gabriel Marcel could refer to anxiety as defining for the human being, while Albert Camus would describe a metaphysical revolt in which the individual declares himself "frustrated due to creation", Stefan Afloroaei starts discussing an experience whose negative terms are in the least its vocabulary. The sense of overcoming implied by the metaphysical act that the philosopher talks about does no longer amount to overcoming the precarious condition of the individual or of his thinking, of life or of his soul, but it refers to the surpassing implied by the things that simply "overcome" us. These aspects overcome us without annihilating our thinking; on the contrary, they ensure it a new dignity developed by means of its speculative exercise.

What new could the assertion – "not everything stands within our power" – tell our contemporary man?²⁰ No matter how simple it may seem, this idea has an overwhelming importance, especially today, when too little is believed to have remained outside man's power. When he undertakes this experience, man finds himself brought face to face with what is, in a way or another, "beyond" him, be it death, God or what he cannot decide on. However, one cannot easily talk about a radical separation between what there is and what there is not, between what can and what cannot be done, between mortality and immortality. Should it be like that, metaphysics and the speculative disposition of thinking would turn useless.

²⁰ Șt. Afloroaei, op. cit., p. 93.

In fact, nothing of all these happen. On the contrary, among those that appear as different there is a deep unity that brings them together, which implies not that their unity is more genuine than their difference or that unity would be essential and the difference just an appearance, but that both are equally real, dependent upon each other, mutually justifying themselves.

In a memorable fragment, Stefan Afloroaei writes about the double condition that the self can share: "It is, in fact, about a double condition that the self can live. To his desire of maximum expansion there corresponds, like an echo from the other side, the feeling of nothingness. Only that neither the will of unlimited expansion nor the feeling of nothingness lead to the self dissolution. Although both may appear as devastating, they will not completely annihilate the sensitive self. Contrarily, they search to describe the meeting point of the two viewpoints, the two perspectives, namely the one from here and that from beyond. Or, as they were previously called, the earthly view and the one from the skies. The former gives man the chance to see his own powers in their plenitude, all their expansion manifested, as if he were the sole master of this world. The latter, never completely absent, offers man the sober chance to see himself within the boundless, with all his finitude, a tiny presence caught in the flowing second. He looks at himself from that special place which limit itself names him. And the meaning of the limit is now that of a ground – and not a simple limitation, negation."²¹

In John of the Damascus, the author finds a perfect illustration of what he asserted. The very Christian writer, who negates the existence of necessity and constraint, asserting the "necessity" of the free will – which, being the most distinguished faculty in man, cannot be useless -, will recognize "at the frontiers of the free will (...) those that are not within his power."²² Between his maximum and equally minimum significance there obtains the phenomenon of the self, but not of the Cartesian one who considers itself as the

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 100.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 102.

only absolute instance: it is the self who, when it puts itself forward as “a solitary instance, the only atom or metaphysical residue”²³, discovers in itself another sense of solitude as well.

The speculative disposition as mirror to metaphysical things

In order to clarify the significance of speculation and of the speculative disposition, Stefan Afloroaei carries out, at a certain moment, an extremely intriguing excursion into the history of the term meanings. Thus one finds out that, before denoting an elevated, superior activity, even a supreme one, in the row of those conferring happiness, at least in Aristotle, speculation used to mean “guarding during the night, especially in times of dramatic disputes.”²⁴ The situation of the one who used to be called a speculator was not simple at all: he exercised the duty of identifying potential perils, in the rather ambiguous register of nocturnal light, of accurately discriminating among opinions, personal fears and real dangers. This image of the one that guards during the night confronting with the uncertainty induced by his condition and by the situation in which he is involved, may be found, according to Ștefan Afloroaei, in more hypostases, starting with the watchman to the one that contemplates the world and life spectacle and from the one who reviews, in the evening, the deeds during the day in view of a moral evaluation to our very human condition which constrains us to interpret facts and words, things and people, internal and external signs in the unsure and unclear light of the darkness in which we were placed to watch.²⁵

The one who reflects upon himself discovers what is foreign to him. Only that after this first estrangement of his, what is truly foreign to him will be experienced as his most familiar. What is defining for the speculative mind is the fact that it is not shut off in its differentiating between image and the thing in itself; on the contrary, “it searches access to the way in which a thing in itself offers itself outside itself.”²⁶

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 103.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 109.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 110-113.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 123.

Starting from its own experience, of self-reflection in which the self becomes a foreign to itself, it is image and object, presence and representation, and it can now understand that “the nature of a thing gives itself at the same time with its image, a meaning of that thing.”²⁷ Therefore, speculation can bring again to light the originary correlation between what are the radically different, “such as the thing that can be thought and the act of thinking.” Speaking about this, the very separation between the speculative philosophy and the practical one becomes unacceptable, since the former is the latter in the highest degree because it concerns “the very essence of the human life.” The speculative exercise means, according to Cusanus, “leading your life in peace,” “the tranquility of the spirit or its greatest happiness.”²⁸

A number of definitions of thinking in its contemplative hypostasis are truly remarkable: “the faculty that reflects, the reflecting act and the being on which it reflects, all come to be one and the same thing,” “exemplary form of what used to be called *speculum*, mirror, the metaphysical place in which it is constituted, all in one and the same act, what it reflects, the thing reflected and its image,” “thinking becomes clear and distinct to itself exactly when it brings itself into discussion, when it doubts even its own perception mode.”²⁹ These definitions are related to an extremely nuanced analysis of the situation described by Descartes in his *Meditations*. At the end of doubt we meet certitude, at the end of the self we find God.³⁰

The image of the eye looking at itself is eloquent. It perfectly renders the act of speculative reflection. And starting from this experience of the self who finds itself doubled in its very grounds, meaning double in its uniqueness, one can find the whole world under the sign of reflection. Nothing escapes reflection, in the double sense of this term: what reflects is itself reflected by what it reflects - the sky against the depth of the seas, the seas against the floating clouds, the forest in the savages' eyes and the savages in the good or precarious

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 122.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 124.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 126-128.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 129.

condition of the forest, man's face in his mate's way of looking and the one who looks in the state of mind of the one who watches, the world itself in the language you talk and the language in the state of things of the existent world.³¹

Metaphysics and the speculative attitude of thinking appear when man feels he confronts with certain phenomena that exceed his normal, usual thinking and experience fields, or when certain limit situations refuse to a simple, technical, calculated, scientific solution or to analytical, formally non-contradictory logics. Though described as being "totally different" (Rudolf Otto), "foreign to the object condition", "out of commission and indeterminable" (Heidegger), "under the double tendency of showing and hiding in one and the same movement" (Lossky), "dialogic, meaning that the logos itself betides as originary dialogue," (Gadamer) "epiphanies," (Eliade) having "a profoundly non-intentional meaning," (Levinas) and "irrevocably foreign," (Waldenfels) these phenomena give birth to some questions that "although refer to the human way of life, seem to orient to other horizon lines and, therefore, to a different world."³² Despite this, the questions that the speculative thinking raise relate to life itself and people find themselves in an affective disposition more profound and more often than usually believed. Metaphysics is "at work" even when it seems to lack. "This means, simply speaking, that metaphysics is always present in what man does and thinks. Even simpler, it is already surmised by any other act of our thinking or will: some beliefs and representations active in our minds, some images and symbolic codes (as the one of grammatical nature in Nietzsche), some limit questions which visit us in the most unexpected situations, all these prove us that metaphysics is at continuous work."³³

What is a speculative exercise according to Stefan Afloroaei? It means conceiving the differences as orienting to a third term. Thus, for example, the distinction between the passing of the time and eternity finds its meaning in the light of a new term, that of the eternal moment (*nunc trans*). This is

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 155.

³² *Ibidem*, pp. 170-171.

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 172.

not a case of dissolving the tension between the two terms, but a bringing to light of the “originary horizon in the presence of which there becomes possible any elementary distinction in the order of existence.”³⁴ This originary horizon is nothing else but the horizon of being. Perhaps this task is entirely proper to man, exactly because of its interval - being status, as it is called in Afloroaei’s another book, *Lumea ca reprezentare a celuilalt / World as Representation of the Other*: “We remain crucified between sky and earth or between being and nothingness. Our being hangs forever between Satan and the good God, with the possibility or curse to participate in each of the two limits. We dwell in this space of the in-between, having to embody the total indetermination or ambiguity. You do not have to see in this crucifixion that repeats with each and every of us any cause of despair or immeasurable pride, but just a contingency given to man, forever.”³⁵

The meanings of being as a phenomenon of the double exceedance: being “exists as such,” “is present,” “happens,” and “is real.”

But being knows more interpretations. Stefan Afloroaei stops on those speculative interpretations of being from our daily vocabulary, which “illustrate the hermeneutical phenomenon of a double exceedance.”³⁶ These interpretations are: being “exists as such,” “is present,” “happens,” and “is real.” Exceedance manifests, on one hand, by the fact that the existence event cannot be transformed in an object and cannot be determined logically in a satisfying manner; on the other hand, in the very moment in which we name a thing we consider, more or less, the difference between the existence of that thing and its way of being. Put it differently, faced with an existence hypostasis, there is felt the impossibility of signification and semiosis in general, and also “the distance between apparition and the state of facts of a thing,” in which,

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 177.

³⁵ Ștefan Afloroaei, *Lumea ca reprezentare a celuilalt*, Editura Institutul European, Iași, 1994, p. 46.

³⁶ Ștefan Afloroaei, *Metafizica noastră de toate zilele*, Editura Humanitas, București, 2008, p. 182.

inextricably, "there is the source of a huge reservoir of signification." Always, the simple existence of a thing exceeds any possible signification of that thing, this situation being inextricably related to the immense difference that we feel between the existence as such of a thing and one way or another in which it appears. However, we continue to talk about things "as they are," "in reality," "in fact."

To exist. Regarding the first acceptance of the term, Stefan Afloroaei notices the fact that each time we use "to be" as copulative, its existential meaning remains as a horizon which totally surpasses any potential predication. When we say about someone that he is in a way or another, we always assert the very condition of his existence, which makes possible any attribution of a predicate or another, but which does not reduce to any of these, being transcendent.³⁷ Here it is how in this simple act of talking there hides a metaphysical meaning which, though we are not always explicitly aware of, we accept implicitly.

To be present. Not differently do things happen with the other interpretation of „to be,“ namely "to be present." "To be present" is not exhausted by the spatial-temporal coordinates of the fact of being here and now; presence is not exhausted by being present. On the contrary, it is very likely that someone be present, in front of you, but in reality, to be elsewhere or even "absent." The other way round, things long passed or not yet happened could "be present." Many times, these value much more than those effectively running in front of us. Consequently, "the meaning of presence of the word "to be" leads much behind the logical space of a sentence."³⁸

„*There is*“ – This acceptance of being brings, again, exceedance. When you say that "there is" something in a certain place, in its way to, or in a certain state, besides the attribution of certain properties, "there" announces a situation which can no longer be encompassed within the common categories of thinking.³⁹ "There is" means more than "being in a certain place in, in a particular mood"; it means exposing in

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 190.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 196.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 197.

what that thing has as its most unencompassing. When you say about something or someone that “there is”, you implicitly recognize its pure being, which surpasses any category and cannot be reduced to any concept.

“*To happen*” – enlightens being from another point of view, as we know how to recognize it in our most common experiences. When I assert about something that it happens I feel what goes beyond any power of signification; despite this, the distance is not infinite since the “event still lets me catch a glimpse of what leads beyond it.”⁴⁰ “*To happen*” sends to a situation in which the subject is either undetermined or inexistent as such. An example we could bring forth to lighten the author’s concept could be taken from the way in which the usance dictates formulating a deposition. The simple sentence in the beginning, “On the X (day) of Y (month), the following happened”, sends to this interpretation of being. “*To happen*” does not limit here to the involved persons, to the event narrated, to the mentioned circumstances or to the witness’ point of view: it indicates the incommensurable between the facts related and those which really happened. By “it happened” one recognizes that the origin of the event completely surpasses the “causes” of the event and the event itself. By “it happened” metaphysics makes itself present under the more humble guises of our lives’ deeds. When sorrow “happens” to us the feeling will not be significantly different from the one experienced by a tragedy hero in front of the destiny, a situation which shades away and brings into the discussion the boundary between happening and destiny.⁴¹

“*To be real*”. This last acceptance of “being” in day-to-day talk sends to the experience of what is “more”, of what “surpasses” or is beyond our power of thinking. Though we cannot have access to an ultimate meaning of life, of things or facts, we do not stop considering this acceptance of being. We talk about things as they are in reality, about real facts and real people, but this “to be real” remains mostly indeterminate. We cannot seize it in a definition and yet it operates like a

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 199.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 204.

regulatory idea.⁴² Today, other meanings are prevalent, such as that of actuality (the requirement to be updated), of the immediateness, of quantity and extension, of relating, possession, fact and of the new. But, above all, contingency imposes itself as “a name of the everyday being.”⁴³

As today we can no longer talk about knowing “what it is because it is,” thinking will consider contingency as “an irreducible and natural fact.”⁴⁴ Since the world leans upon nothingness, on an abyss, and the feeling of the absent being is more and more experienced, contingency becomes “a name for being in the today world, maybe its most frequent and inoffensive name.”⁴⁵ Contingency has “an element that exceeds evidently the sphere of the human intentionality” and belongs to “the world of a rather free dialogue between what is proper to us and what is foreign.”⁴⁶ In the ambiguous economy of contingency we could also remark the “place of a free power or energy.”

There stands as significantly important and valuable the idea of contingency as meeting point between will and what surpasses it, finitude and what no longer stands under the sign of a known limit, the familiar and the foreign. As Stefan Afloroaei remarkably puts it: “The consciousness of finitude and of a proper way of being is disclosed to man only as long as he actually can get a glimpse of a genuine beyond, a sky for this earth and a destiny almost incomprehensible of those that seem lost in the world.” Contingency is not pure contingency because this cannot be understood without its opposite term. Even if by saying “it happens” we no longer endorse a divine power or the blind force of destiny, yet “contingency indicates another source of signification except the one proper to the human mind and will.”⁴⁷

The relationship between contingency and destiny is extensively analyzed by Stefan Afloroaei in his book, *Intamplare si destin / Contingency and Destiny*, published in

⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 207.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 220.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 221.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 223.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 225.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 232.

1993. The inspired collocation, “destine(d) / necessary contingency”, can be found in this context and, without any doubt, it can join the great collocations of world philosophy, such as “nunc stans,” “coincidentia oppositorum,” “still engine.” Only to a metaphysical mind does this paradox make sense – a paradox that we can meet in our everyday life, namely that destiny emerges from the chaotic sea of contingencies in which we live. As if it descended directly from the model or archetype of creation, contingency is a free necessity and a necessary liberty, being subdued to an internal necessity, all that being done because of it having to have been done as soon as it was done. Placing time under the image (of Heraclitean origin) of a playing child, much valued by Nietzsche, is brought forth by Stefan Afloroaei too with the same intention of representing the antinomy of temporality. And if destiny (and contingency) was said to be blind, it is equally true that there is some kind of clairvoyance which only the blind people could possess.

The manifestation of Being: Beauty as a noumenal phenomenon

We could say that this entire discussion culminates in the pages in which Stefan Afloroaei writes about beauty. Starting from Borges’ text, *Beauty as Physical Sensation*, he remarks that between sensitive beauty and beauty as such or in itself, there is not only one possibility to choose. Some have chosen the beauty in itself as being the true and real beauty, compared to which the sensitive beauty – that of a beautiful girl, of a horse or of an object – would not be but copies, images, appearances. On the other hand, others have opted for the sensitive beauty as being the only reality, generalizing a beauty in itself, without a face and shape, without color, being but a meaningless abstraction. Without leaving behind the distinction between “in itself” and “sensitive”, Stefan Afloroaei brings them together, makes them depend on each other,

makes them exist one because of the other: "beauty is pure and sensitive, simple and contingent."⁴⁸

Those who consider the Kantian distinction between the thing in itself and the phenomenon in terms of some "realities" radically separated, in the way in which textbook philosophy separates them, would be surprised to find out that Kant himself speaks about the thing in itself in terms proper to the description of a phenomenon, a limit phenomenon however. Also, in *Being and Time*, Martin Heidegger brings to light a meaning of the phenomenon proper to being itself: what shows in itself.

The thing in itself imposes itself to thinking evidently since, if we suppose that it does not exist, we would have to accept the absurd reasoning that "the phenomenon could be without something to appear."⁴⁹ Although the thing in itself cannot be known, it constitutes "a perspective in which the object can be understood, yet not a subjective representation."⁵⁰ Those who blindly follow the textbook definition of the thing in itself will be legitimately shocked by the collocation, brightly used by Afloroaei, of "the thing in itself as phenomenon." Here follows the fragment worthy of the most outstanding pages in the history of metaphysics: "After all, if the thing in itself affects the senses continuously and thus the sensitive world, if it means a possible perspective according to which any object is perceived, if it can be thought in a certain way, then it shows itself at least in these hypostases."

In other words, it could be considered a phenomenon from this point of view. Evidently, it does not mean that it takes place somewhere or it manifests at a certain moment, yet it shows itself in a certain way to the consciousness. The distinction between *ens rationis* (the thing only thought) and *ens reale* (the thing that exists in reality) is indecidable in this situation. What *to appear* means (different as signified from *to seem*) does not make sense only in relation with the sensible

⁴⁸ Ștefan Afloroaei, *Metafizica noastră de toate zilele*, Editura Humanitas, București, 2008, p. 239.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 272 cf. *Critica rațiunii pure*, p. 257.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 275.

experience, but also in relation with an experience in which faith or human will are decisive. That is the reason why we consider *that one could talk about the thing in itself as a phenomenon, yet a phenomenon that can exceed unlimitedly the boundaries of our empirical experience.*⁵¹ If we translate “to be in itself” by “to be one and the same”, says the author, we could notice that alterity penetrates into the core of the absolute identity. What is one and the same will be the other, on one hand in relation with what is not like that and, on the other, it will be the other in relation to itself. This is the remarkable idea of the Romanian philosopher: the phenomenon is no longer regarded as appearance, but as apparition: it is no longer a modality to hide the being, but the way in which being gives itself. In the same way in which the various apparitions – a beautiful face, for example – do not confiscate the “in itself” which they make visible, the “in itself” can no longer be separated from its apparition, from its phenomenon.

When we see a beautiful face we do not perceive a “certain” beautiful face or a more or less “quantity” – horrible dictu! – of beauty: we see the beauty itself radiating from and on the face we admire. It is all here and entirely elsewhere, it is that absolute somewhere else which is fully present here. In this moment, thinking has to give up the dichotomies and to accept the antinomies if it wants to catch a glimpse of something beyond the limits within which it obliges itself to think. Therefore, “what shows itself at a certain moment appears both as a thing in itself, and as its image. In other words, it is both an inexhaustible source and a relatively defined apparition. It constantly intersects, therefore, its unconditioned or free betiding with the fact of its constitution under conditions such as the temporal ones.”⁵²

And if the image belongs to the non-real ones, we are constrained to assert that “the non-real belongs to the substance of the real – and the other way round. Put it differently, any thing has a non-real side, somehow intangible

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p. 276.

⁵² *Ibidem*, p. 335.

and pure. Though non-real, it is in no way abstract, purely fictive, but it manifests a particular concreteness. In the same time, though sensible, it is still ideal and untouchable.”⁵³

Finally, we have to accept the paradoxical situation of our mind to think what transcends the act of thinking.⁵⁴ The paradox Kierkegaard speaks about is invoked by Ștefan Afloroaei because it means “the passion of thinking” and it is only this paradox that can make us able to embrace both the unconditioned freedom and the historical liberty under the signs of which we live. This paradox also refers to “the wish to accede to what brings with itself an absolute difference, as the presence of something divine is.”⁵⁵ As when referring to love, where embracing comes into existence from the lovers’ will to annul the separation given by the individuality of each of them, this antinomy is grounded on the desire to bring together those radically different. Both love and metaphysics stand their grounds only if the dream of unity is attainable as embrace, namely as speculative exercise.

(Translated by Ecaterina Pătrașcu)

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⁵³ *Ibidem.*

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 354.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 356.