

From *Logos* to *Logoi*: The idea of *the world's rationality* in the history of european thought

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Abstract

This paper aims at evaluating the significances of the concepts of *reality* and *world's rationality* from the perspective of the main periods of the history of European thought. The premise was that these paradigms of thought were still present today in various shapes, with important consequences on the understanding of the world, both at the level of macrocosm and microcosm. A series of explanations for the existence in this world, between a rationality pertaining to *the harmony of opposites* and one to the *indefinite virtuality* is provided by Heraclitus and the Church Fathers. As this study shows, the perspectives herein seem to be only a central element of the entire attitude of European man in history, not only with respect to the world, but also to himself.

Keywords: Reality, World, Rationality, Logos

Discussions on the meanings of the concept of reality have, undoubtedly, dramatic effects on the direction of scientific research, as well as on the understanding and description of human cognitive capacities. And, if modernity's inquiry and explanation models become relatively unusable, at least in fundamental research, one question emerges: are answers to questions on the nature of reality and the human capacity to effectively know this reality, given by other historical ages, still useful, one way or another?

The situation is not that simple. Although the involvement of scientific ideology in the interpretation of the results of fundamental research has been denied, philosophical hermeneutics has made it clear that there is a *pre-scientific*

dimension that cannot be neglected when the orientation of scientific research, as well as the way in which its results are capitalized on, are evaluated. *Language* is the obvious pre-scientific dimension that creates the frameworks in which the capacities of scientific discourse unfold. Natural languages, with their specific nuances and manner in which they have actualized and crystallized the practice of human communities, have lent a certain semantic charge to words. Significations in a certain language also represent the path along which the frameworks of human knowledge are articulated, to the extent that this knowledge needs to receive a formulation, a linguistic articulation. Yet language appears as geological strata or rings in a tree trunk, and it simultaneously preserves several horizons for a word's formation or re-signification. However radical the most recent science would wish to be, it cannot ignore this fact. Such a radical discourse that would bracket the data of natural languages cannot be built, even though one were to use an extremely formalized mode of signification. However, this must not be considered a principled limit imposed to knowledge by historicity and the relativity of natural languages. Something else has to be eliminated.

Obviously, what is needed is an interpretative framework of history, especially of the history of thought (in which scientific theorizing has been prioritized in exemplifications) where the perspective of a progressive evolution from simple to complex, from elementary to superior, from little to much, is dominant. In this outlook, sooner or later, quantitative accumulation must lead to a quantitative leap that must necessarily signify progress. This interpretative paradigm - an essential component of Enlightenment ideology - created the impression that history cannot contain something that has not been understood by modernity, which stands on a superior level as compared to previous ages which modernity, in essence, contains. The evolutionist vision couches, nevertheless, a reductionism that one is too little aware of, for it has eliminated, from previous episodes of history, all that does not fit the perspective it upholds. Many data of the history of culture and civilization were simply skipped because they had not been considered significant for the evolution of humanity towards what was considered the peak of history,

namely modern culture. The elimination of this interpretation paradigm proves to have very productive consequences for the explanatory needs of current fundamental science. A careful review of the sources that we have from more distant ages points to the existence of some diverse and very nuanced preoccupations to understand the nature of reality, which also testify to the awareness of the difficulty to accede to genuine knowledge of the rationality under which the world stands.

This is the case of the first horizon of Greek philosophy, the so-called pre-Socratic age. For us, who articulate our thoughts in terms whose origin lies in the reflection of Greek antiquity, it is essential to recover as accurately as possible the intention behind the production of conceptual thought. A study such as this one, which raises questions about the meanings of the rationality of the universe in relationship to human rationality, is exceptionally conditioned by the need to clarify the meanings that a key concept of Greek thought, namely *logos*, had. On the other hand, we have to mention that what the Greeks understood by an exercise in philosophy differs heavily from the meanings of philosophical reflexion in modernity¹. It is only nowadays that we begin to realize the scope and nature of Greek thought, in its true proportions.

For Greeks, *philosophia* was a radical ontological attitude, as its practice did not aim to achieve mere theoretical knowledge, but also knowledge of the most concrete effects on the one who acquired it. Pierre Hadot warns us that the philosophy of the ancients was first of all experience and thought in the making, thinking that is being performed: "Plato's philosophy did not consist in constructing a theoretical system of reality and then in 'informing' the readers about it, by writing a sequence of dialogues that methodically expose the respective system, but it consists in "shaping", or, to put it differently, in transforming individuals,

¹ Pierre Hadot insisted on a few dimensions that characterize philosophy in Greek antiquity: its formative and not informative function, its therapeutic virtue and its non-systematicity. cf. Pierre Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy*. Trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

as in the example of the dialogue that readers have the illusion to attend, by making them experience reason and, finally, the norm of the good”². For the Greeks, *Theorein* has the meaning of *contemplation*. Contemplation, just like love, was an act as practical as possible, from the point of view of both the path and the purpose envisioned. Therefore, for any philosopher from Antiquity, *theoretical thinking* is a phrase whose meaning was extremely different from ours. The same holds true for the meaning of science. Technical mastery over the world was an unconceivable act for the Greeks.

Martin Heidegger’s interpretation of this myth emphasizes the significations of what is presented in that myth from *The Republic* as *re-orientation of the gaze*³. Heidegger understood the “myth of the cave” as a *paideutic* one, for in essence what it aims to do is *periagoge oles tes psyches*, the guidance towards a reorientation of the whole human being in his or her very essence. As Heidegger mentioned, “the ‘allegory of the cave’ concentrates its explanatory power on making us able to see and know the essence of *paideia* by means of the concrete images recounted in the story. At the same time Plato seeks to avoid false interpretations; he wants to show that the essence of *paideia* does not consist in merely pouring knowledge into the unprepared soul as if it were some container held out empty and waiting. On the contrary, genuine education takes hold of our very soul and transforms it in its entirety by first of all leading us to the place of our essential being and accustoming us to it”⁴.

The Greeks did not conceive of the possibility to know outside an act of inner reorientation which would allow access to a truth that appears as another degree of reality. As Heidegger warns us, in its Greek meaning, the truth – *aletheia* – must be understood as an *exit from hiding*, as a *state of unhiddenness*, and it has various degrees. The truth is what is obtained by ensuring the accessibility, in its visible form (*eidos*), of that which appears and makes visible this

² *Ibidem*, 101.

³ Martin Heidegger, “Plato’s Doctrine of Truth” in *Pathmarks*, William McNeill Cambridge (ed.), UK/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998, 155-182.

⁴ *Ibidem*, 182.

something which appears, namely the *idea*. What Plato means by *idea* has no connection with the modern understanding of the concept of idea, as product of thought. "The 'idea' is the visible form that offers a view of what is present. The *idea* is pure shining in the sense of the phrase "the sun shines." The "idea" does not first let something else (behind it) "shine and appear" ["*erscheinen*"]; it itself is what shines, it is concerned only with the shining of itself. The *Idea* is that which can shine [*das Scheinsame*]. The essence of the idea consists in its ability to shine and be seen [*Schein- und Sichtsamkeit*]. This is what brings about presencing, specifically the coming to presence of what a being is in any given instance⁵.

These clarifications made by Heidegger open a totally different possibility to understand the purposes of the act of knowledge with Plato, and what is more important for our current study, of the description of the nature of reality and of the human ability to gain access to its knowledge. In very recent studies, researchers started to seriously consider this model of the process and aim of knowledge. This comes from necessities dictated by the assessment of results from highly advanced science.

A telling example is offered by Roger Penrose's book, *The Road to Reality: A Complete Guide to the Laws of the Universe*, printed in 2005⁶. Roger Penrose is a researcher of well-known results in theoretical physics, a specialist in the theory of relativity. He is the author of the "twistor" theory and he formulated the "Penrose transformation". In this book, Penrose analysed the implications of Plato's remarks according to which mathematic notions and propositions in which they intervene do not have an exact correspondent in the world of Physics. These notions, or, according to Heidegger, *aspects (ideas)*, have an autonomous existence, in a world of mathematic forms. To declare that a mathematical statement has an autonomous, proto-type-like existence - Penrose notices - means to state that it is true in an *objective meaning*. Penrose asks: "What is reality?" and "What does it

⁵ *Ibidem*, 190.

⁶ cf. Roger Penrose, *The Road to Reality: A complete Guide to the Laws of the Universe*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 2005.

mean to understand?”, just rejecting the naïve belief that we deal with absolute and definite knowledge. Science proposes only increasingly perfected models which approximate what we call reality.

Roger Penrose’s answer to the question “What is reality?” is especially important. One has to consider three universes: the mental universe, Plato’s mathematical universe, and the physical universe. The author considers that the connection between these Universes stands under the sign of mystery. Yet he carefully analyses the specificity of these connections, the difference that is proper to each of the three connections between these worlds. The outcome of this analysis is that a certain *reality* of mathematic concepts must be acknowledged, although this reality cannot be identified with physical reality. The relevance of these statements is that they come from someone who does not plunge into speculations. Scientific rigour in highly advanced research accepts now expressions and perspectives that used to be rejected as short of what modern classicism understood by precision and specialised language.

If we are to understand the preoccupation of the Greeks for the authenticity of the cognitive act in the situation in which reality acquires a meaning that is not only different from description via the category of the substance which took the form of modernity’s physico-chemical ideology, but also has the complexity of some *levels*, we have to carefully study how their thought emerged. A privileged opportunity is the survey of the emergence and evolution of the terms in which philosophical reflection was articulated.

Logos is a concept that can be seen as the arch stone in the architecture of Greek thought. There is a vast literature written on the topic of this term’s significations, yet many times there was an underlying presupposition that it has a clear and definite meaning. The use of the concept of *logos* became a commonplace in the literature of modernity, and not only in philosophical writings. We have become accustomed to using it in the most diverse contexts when we wish to describe an act or a situation which proves that which we wish to demonstrate. Yet, unawares, we have also transferred this understanding to those who used this essentially Greek term

in the first horizon of philosophical thought, considering that nothing truly significant could exist in its original expressions. Heidegger warned us that this is not that case, and he proved it forcefully by analysing several terms which, for us, did not seem to have anything left uncovered in their signification. Suffice to mention only the spectacular interpretation that the German philosopher gave to Aristotle's *physis*.

A research on the significations that great dictionaries and lexicons give to the concept of *logos* uncovers something unexpected: there is no uniform understanding of the term; moreover, this word was used by the Greeks sometimes (at least apparently) in a confusing manner. The truly exceptional situation of the term comes with Heraclitus. Heraclitus' philosophy openly admits that it starts from *logos*, as an expression of what really pertains to the *logos*. The interpretation of Heraclitus' dicta on the *logos* is far from being exhausted, and it represents, maybe, one of the most serious challenges posed to us by the system of thought of antiquity. Modern attempts to frame Heraclitus' central statements within the canons of metaphysics or of the scientific model justified by the philosophy of nature have proven to be increasingly insufficient. What, for metaphysics, was explained by the lack of a pre-Socratic distinction that would have indicated immature thought, namely the one between matter and spirit, proves now to be worthy of very serious re-assessment.

Man is an embodied being and not one that took flash, if we are to read the Scripture carefully. Heraclitus' Logos is not just the *logos* of the cosmos (a concept that gained a special signification in Heraclitus' description) but also of the human being; it is not just divine (or spiritual, in metaphysical terms), but also concrete, material. Heraclitus does not claim any philosophical affiliation, nor does he wish to create one. This is so because the only affiliation that he admitted was that of pursuing the exigency of the *logos*, an exigency which is not only accessible to humans, but also a duty for them. Yet to put this into words is not easy. As he was fully aware of this difficulty, Heraclitus' writings are metaphoric and emphatic. The Logos cannot be easily expressed, as it is intelligible

neither to the ear, nor to the spirit. Heraclitus' obscurity springs from the difficulty to express verbally an intuition that language cannot grasp. His texts reveal his distancing attitude and rejection of both religious practices of his contemporaries, especially of the way in which initiations were performed, as well as of the way in which the Physics of his time understood reality. As Taylor mentions, Heraclitus' statement according to which no material substance persists represents a rupture from the Ionian tradition which suggested that unity can be found behind material processes as water, air or apeiron, which remain unaffected by change⁷.

It is also significant to analyse how Heraclitus described the manifestation of the Logos. The latter is what provides the unity of all things and, present in us as it is, it reveals to us that everything is one. The physical world is not, as Anaximander believed, the kingdom of injustice, because transformations in the world are subject to certain rules, and becoming is fully subject to a divine law – the law of the Logos which achieves the unity of all things - on which all human laws depend. Logos is described as *fire* (we should express our reservations vis-à-vis an interpretation which invokes the naiveté of such an association, an interpretation which affected so much the reception of texts written in his time), fire which is lit and extinguished with measure. Yet this measure, which describes a nuanced and profound understanding of the rationality of the world, received the name of justice - a *Dike*, that which penetrates everything and makes sure that the processes of the world do not surpass their confines.

However, the great innovation of Heraclitus' thought is the topic of the hidden harmony of opposed forces, the genuine justice, i.e. the profound unity that seeming oppositions hide and translate: contraries are aspects of the same reality, which are necessarily involved so well that, in reality, reality is one. The Logos is shared by all, and for humans this common thing is intelligence or understanding. This statement must be understood to mean that we have to always stay close to that which is common; it refers to this force, partly material, partly

⁷ C.C.W. Taylor, *Routledge History of Philosophy*, vol. I, Routledge, London, 1997, 91.

spiritual, which makes rational order possible. In any case, Heraclitus states that in human matters, the *logos* is more profound and it escapes material uncovering⁸.

With Heraclitus, for the first time, we have a stated and described correspondence between the rationality of the world and human rationality. Nevertheless, this correspondence is not one of mechanical influence, but under the paradox of overcoming the non-contradiction law (which, later, Aristotle will consider unacceptable, just like the tradition that followed the rules of formal Logics) and is hard to express. Yet, certainly, the world's rationality stands under something that for Heraclitus cannot be called otherwise but *logos*. And, together with this change, the term is enriched to a degree that cannot be framed in a simple definition, and it will play another part in the history of thought.

In Heraclitus' description, its action uncovers a status that goes beyond mere physical force, beyond a principle of nature or of human reason, thus lending it a divine character. Here is a key aspect that will constantly challenge subsequent philosophers, so that when John the Evangelist identifies the embodied, crucified and resurrected Jesus with the Logos, from a conceptual point of view, such an identification was intelligible. Some interpreters saw Heraclitus' doctrine on the Logos as the criss-cross of Philosophy, Physics and Mysticism. We cannot find a more significant example of an understanding which went beyond even the modern scientific imaginary, despite its technological advances, and it was only Quantum Physics that recovered this understanding of the world which surpasses the limits of the study from the perspective of the limitations imposed by a certain discipline or another.

This "mystic" dimension of Heraclitus' Logos must be understood rather via the term's Greek etymology than through the acceptations that Mysticism acquired within the Christian horizon. Plato, who paid due attention to the mode and contents of Heraclitus' philosophy, will state something that will strengthen once again the original Greek meaning of the

⁸ Heraclit, *frag. B 45*.

philosopher's act, not as love for wisdom, but as love so as to acquire Wisdom: Logos cannot be reached in any manner, but only via *Eros*. Plato is the author who proves to have extreme subtlety of discourse. When he touches upon topics genuinely relevant he takes a leap that is disconcerting for modern thought, from explanation to myth, thus implying that it is difficult to talk about truly elevated concepts. Plato, the philosopher from Athens, writes here in the vein of Heraclitus – and shares with him, to the same degree, the awareness of the difficulty to express the rationality of the world. As Yvon Bres stated, the genuine Platonic “use” of love is to accede to the Logos. Yet, one cannot approach the Truth anyhow – this is the topic that will dominate Greek philosophical meditation during classicism and later. The result was that philosophy increasingly received obvious marks of mystic discourse, which were best evinced by Plotin and his school.

The Stoics held Heraclitus doctrine on the Logos in high esteem, and they integrated it in what they called *Physics*, a term whose meaning is totally different from the current one. This is so because Physics included concepts and topics that Modernity considers to be the province of ethics; yet, the Stoics gave more weight to *how* over *what*. The Stoics' ideal was not to obtain information on reality, or the formulation of an *ontology*, but the serene, peaceful acceptance of suffering, for virtue is constantly accompanied by pain.

In the acceptation given by the Stoics, *Logos* means the divine power to operate via which the universe acquired unity, coherence and meaning (*logos spermatikos*) which, just like seed, gives shape to shapeless nature. Humans are made in accordance with the same principle, and they are said to have both internal logos (*logos endiathetos*), and logos expressed in speech (*logos prosthorikos*). The Logos is considered a model of the harmony between humans and nature. Zenon, the founder of the doctrine, had become deeply convinced that the access to truth necessarily means the elaboration of a language that should be as precise and accurate as possible. This precision was justified by, and was aiming for, a certain *way of living*. The correct way of living is that which cannot not agree with the rationality of the universe. For Stoics, *to feel* means to *con-feel*, to know means to reach *comprehensive representation*

(*phantasia kataleptike*) as a consequence of the agreement, of the transformation of simple representation. Wisdom means appropriate action founded on these comprehensive representations – the ideal of wisdom for the Stoics.

Yet Hellenism, with its cultural fusions in Alexander the Great's legacy, brought a new dimension to the understanding of the term *Logos*, when the Greek mentality encountered the Hebrew understanding. The site of this encounter was Alexandria and the motivation was very special. Jews from Alexandria felt the need to read their own texts, the Scripture, in Greek. Why should this have happened? Several reasons contributed to a seemingly paradoxical decision. Jews from Alexandria who were speakers of Greek were reading Plato just like other Greek philosophers. And, in a gesture that founded the need for exegesis, Moses was read in Plato's key. This is the origin of *allegory*, as lecture key for passages that cannot be read literally. But maybe we can no longer understand a text written in a language which had stopped being used for common use⁹. Anyway, the translation of the Septuagint is an utterly spectacular moment given its spiritual and cultural consequences. This is so because finding Greek equivalents for Hebrew terms was more than mere translation. It marked the meeting of two semantic "charges" coming from different historical experiences.

The Septuagint simply opened perspectives for understanding which the Hebrew text did not allow. Such a case is the equation of *dabar* with *logos*. The Hebrew word *dabar* (whose root means "that which stands behind") when it is translated by "word" it means "sound with meaning" but it can also mean "thing". Yet, a human being's *dabar* is considered an extension of his or her personality which *possesses its own substantial existence*. God's word possesses a power that is similar to the power of God who utters it; God's wisdom is seen as a hypostasis that is distinct from He, as we could see in *Solomon's Wisdom* (7:21). Pylon of Alexandria, by virtue of this conjunction of two semantic areas and two

⁹ Henry Chadwick, *History and Thought of the Early Church* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1982), 137.

existential attitudes, identified the concept of *logos* with Plato's world of Ideas. In Pylon's works, *Logos* means that God's creative power is the *instrumental cause*, but it is also an archetypal light (an opening which we encounter with Plotin as well).

The starting point of these spectacular interpretations of the Hebrew Scriptures in the translation of the Septuagint was the passage in which, at the oak tree in Mamvri, Abraham welcomes the three Angels and addresses them in the singular, as he was talking to God, the One. Phylon's *Logos* is *almost* personified, since it is also called The Second God, The Ideal Man, Paracletos, The Great Priest. However, he can only see Him as *power*, and not as a person, and especially not as God – Person of the Trinity.

What is extremely important is that *Logos*, as a term, at the dawn of Christianity, was one of the most complex concepts. It was a concept that represented, to the highest degree, the encounter between Greek philosophy and Judaic wisdom. Along the Heraclitus - Stoicism filiation, *Logos* was the conceptual instance that described a *rationality* – the rationality of the world, the meanings and purpose of the world as *cosmos*, as well as the rationality that governs humans, the meaning that governs, or should govern, an individual's life. The path along which the Greeks remodelled a term that they took from the daily use of their natural language and gave it ultimate and elevated meanings in explanation, stood under the umbrella of *objectivity*. However, the subjective – existential dimension that accompanied the meanings of the Hebrew equivalent is also obvious. The encounter of these two perspectives was, to a certain extent, shocking, but also very productive. This brought about not just a richer philosophical discourse, but also a change of attitude in religious experience. Developments in Alexandria fully demonstrate this thesis, with the emergence of the *Therapeuts sect*.

This was, roughly, the horizon of the significations and uses of the concept of *logos* at the dawn of Christianity. We can notice that this term was already carefully used, paying much attention to shades of meaning, and when it was uttered, it must have immediately called for the need to clarify and

discuss it. When two philosophers would meet and use the term, they would almost inevitably tarry, before moving on to other discussions, on clarifying their special understanding of the *logos*. Yet interest in *logos* was no longer just an area of discussions among philosophers: it had become a preoccupation that cut across the whole cultural area of late antiquity, under the circumstances when, what they understood by religion then, was governed by innovation, syncretism, searches prompted by the need for another equation of personal salvation.

When John the Evangelist identified the Trinitarian Person of the Son with *Logos*, this identification represented a challenge for the mentality of late Hellenism. Although there was a certain closeness between *Logos* and a particular understanding of Divinity, for the Greeks, as they had learnt from Parmenides, it was unconceivable for Being to have anything to do with the sensitive, especially under this incomprehensible embodiment. Nor could the Jews accept an identification of Jesus, who lived as a human being and suffered human passions, with the One God, even though, unlike Neoplatonians, they had the experience of a Personal God. In addition to this, John's identification is rich in consequences. It definitely produces a major paradigm break, which is essential in the understanding of *the Greek idea of the Logos*. The paradigm break is from the Greek standpoint because it changes the perspective of the relations between the absolute and the relative, the sensitive and the intelligible, time and eternity. It occurs against the background of a new distinction, which Greek philosophical meditation and Greek religion were not familiar with, namely the distinction between the *created* and the *non-created*.

The distinction that had dominated Greek thought had been between the *generated and the non-generated*, not between the *created* and the *non-created*. Although the generated and the non-generated have different meanings in Greek, both belong to the non-created. The generated is only that which changes, the flux and the liquid, for which the law of identity is not valid.

The non-generated was the unchangeable, the founding principle. The duality that comes from this difference enables the support of a few central distinctive features of Greek classicism, especially of the distinction between the sensitive and the intelligible. Yet the assertion of another relation, between the created and the non-created, introduces a totally different perspective, as Nikos Matsoukas remarks. The created includes not only the sensitive realm *but also* the intelligible realm. Second, creation does not mean emergence from nothing, but that which does not proceed from the divine being, yet proceeds from the work or the will of the divine being.

The ontic break between the created and the non-created is rich in consequences for the Christian understanding of the Logos, and from the beginning, John's prologue means a clear situation of the origin and work of a Person of the divine Trinity, via Whom all were created and Who took flesh for the restoration of the entire creation. Thus, even the subjective-objective dilemma in how Logos was understood is overcome.

For the new Christian horizon, the use of a notion such as *logos* raised problems if it were to be used in a *conceptual* meaning. Conceptual thinking represented the spectacular leap that Greek philosophy operated inside language. The need of such a re-signification of words came from the need to clarify certain meanings that no longer depended, immediately, on the sensitive, but on what was considered to be exclusively intelligible. Yet Christianity brings another necessity in language. The conceptual use of the language became improper when reference was made to a personal reality that was not the province of the created. The concept, with its precision and rigour, frames and orients understanding towards a certain direction; conceptualization means the ability to conceive. But the divine Logos can be accessible to the understanding of the created nature of the human being only to the extent to which it is revealed. Beyond this, silence is more appropriate. And the personal, free and totally unconditioned mode in which the Logos of the Trinity manifests itself makes its conceptualization impossible. The notion of Christian *Logos* simply ceases to have a conceptual dimension. This becomes obvious in the discourse modalities

of the first dogmatic outlines of Christianity, and especially in the texts of the 4th century Fathers from Cappadocia.

The understanding of the world's rationality suffers a significant modification, but not just one connected to the understanding of the role of the terms (especially of those crystallized by Greek philosophy) in the expression of a reality beyond words. Christianity, in its acknowledgement of the dimension of the Person as essential in the description of reality, created another paradigm for *understanding*. Knowledge is not just a personal act, this is why the question of understanding must be asked from the perspective of another anthropological model; it necessarily implies another way of relating to the world, which is understood as being created. Since the world was created via the Logos, it contains the seeds of reason, some *reasons of creation*, reasons that cannot be reached at once. This is why one can talk about *progress* in knowledge as *experience*, a development of what has been called *Tradition*. This is also why that spectacular formulation in John's prologue, as well as the whole content of the Scriptural Revelation, could be understood only by going through a personal experience, as personal fulfillment of the Scriptures.

Experiential fulfillment is what offered the criteria for the understanding of another meaning of rationality. The objective-subjective dilemma in the understanding of what characterizes the Logos was overcome, in a way that could not have been anticipated by previous discourses in the Greek and Hebrew horizon. And this understanding, which goes beyond the fixed frames of the concept and the conceivable, was the result of the deepened existential-concrete experience that was crystallized in the Tradition of the Christian East. The Byzantines and their Eastern inheritance described both the Trinity Dogma, and the purposes of creation in the perspective of the *Person*, that was called *hypostasis* in Greek.

Dumitru Stăniloae captures the essence of the Eastern Christian vision on the rationality under which this God-created world stands, when he states that the world as nature, characterized by rational unity, exists for inter-human

dialogue, as a condition for human spiritual growth¹⁰. If the world is created for a purpose, this is the purpose, and consequently, the discussion about the rationality of the universe gains another perspective. As Stăniloae says, “The rationality of the world is *for* man and it culminates *in* man; it is not man that is for the rationality of the world.”¹¹ According to Patristic tradition, all things have their origin in divine Logos. The notion of *logos* is invoked also with reference to grasping the objective reason of things, as well as with reference to what Stăniloae calls *strict personal reason*. The latter phrase aims to create a nuance of meaning and a difference between two ways of understanding that are proper to humans. On the one hand, there is the way of *analytical reasoning* – essentially strict and connected to objective reason, also called eternal or divine reasoning; it leads to partial and fragmentary understanding, but it allows the progressive knowledge of the material world, as well as the use of its proprieties according to human needs.

On the other hand, there is a more synthetic and direct understanding which stands under the sign of *intuition*; it gives consciousness of higher meanings and purposes of nature. This is so because, according to the texts of Tradition, among which the texts by St. Maxim the Confessor hold a special place, when the eternal rationalities of things comprised in divine Logos are invoked, they are understood as ever higher meanings, hidden in them.

One can notice here the difference between *logos* (the strict meaning of things) and *noema* (higher meanings hidden in things)¹². The rationality of the world has multiple virtualities, and it is especially *malleable, contingent*. “The malleable rationality of the world, full of multiple virtualities, corresponds to the indefinite virtualities of reason, to human imagination and creative and progressive power.”¹³ In this phrase, Father Stăniloae synthesizes the true spirit of the

¹⁰ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, [Orthodox Dogmatic Theology], vol. I, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al B.O.R., București, 1996, 237.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, 241.

¹² *Ibidem*, 241.

¹³ *Ibidem*, 247.

patristic understanding of the world. Here also lies the essential difference from previous understandings of the world's rationality, especially because now it is *man* who uses and reveals the world's rationality. Man uses this rationality of the world in order to make progress in his communion with God and his fellows, as well as in order to accede to higher meanings and purposes of nature¹⁴. It is also only in the human being that the indefinite virtualities of nature gain meaning; though him or her, the world's rationality is completely fulfilled. We should also make a special note with reference to human nature, as a space that is always open for the exercise of human freedom.

Stăniloae talks about a *human growth through things*, for it is through things that God's loving intentions are progressively revealed. In this context, one can talk about the progress of both human spirit and of the world via relationships among things¹⁵. These statements by Dumitru Stăniloae are the best expression that Modernity has produced on the path to understanding what patristic tradition, and the Christian Orient in particular, proposed on the topic of the world's rationality. Stăniloae's texts must not be seen as theology only, just like patristic writings must not be made to fit the narrow canons that rationalism imposed to the modern acceptance of theology. Stăniloae explicitly argued for the need to recover an *integrated spirituality*, a discourse that would go beyond fragmentariness and be able to meet the recent challenges that research has posed. In any case, as far as the relationship between science and theology is concerned, in its current terms, the Eastern Christian perspective on the rationality of the universe has an exceptional importance.

This perspective, expressed in the framework of the *Person*, on the description of reality by the essential relationship to a dimension which is that of nature, means the possibility to go beyond a paradigm that has dominated the meaning of science since Galileo. The need for objectivity is central nowadays to scientific experiments, and this objectivity

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, 238.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, 249.

is guaranteed by the possibility to repeatedly assess a phenomenon according to certain parameters, i.e. according to measurability. Yet the world's rationality is overlooked; yet it means more than this standard of objectivity, and it implies the idea of growth, virtuality and malleability. All this emerges as a result of man's interaction with the world, whose consequences mean a change on either side. The rationality described by the Christian East, as it was epitomized in the works of Maxim the Confessor, implies a *plasticity* of existence that must always be considered, yet without omitting the data of the *Person*. What humans do entails consequences such as their ability to better master and manipulate reality, following progress in knowledge; yet the true consequences refer to bringing to existence certain potentialities of the world that otherwise could have never become *manifest*. This interaction with reality, with its degrees, leads to another type of experience, which can be called interpersonal, or, put it differently, the experience of *communion*. This is the deepest mystery (for here lies, firstly, the personal closeness between the Creator and His creation) and at the same time, it is the ground and purpose of the world's existence.

The world does not have a meaning and a purpose in itself; it exists with a view to creating deeper and more effective possibilities for encounter between persons – between the Persons of the Holy Trinity and people, as well as between people. This is so because the person is the reality of the highest degree of existence, because she is aware of her existence and of the existence of persons and things. This is also so because the person exists as *I*, as *you* or as *he/she*, as a conscience aiming towards another conscience, as Dumitru Stăniloae stated¹⁶. Thus, the determinism of nature, the existence of some laws of physical reality, is not an eternal given; it was modified when Adam fell and it encounters continuous changes by the exercise of man's act of freedom, especially of the man who is on the path of restoration.

¹⁶ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Studii de teologie dogmatică ortodoxă* [Studies of Orthodox Dogmatic Theology], Ed. Mitropoliei Craiovei, Craiova, 1990, 225.

It would be more appropriate to talk not so much about *natural laws* as about the rationality of the world, or, to be more precise, the *rationality of creation*. When we talk about the rationality of the world we give a more adequate expression to the purposes for which the world received its existence, a world which, for Christians, cannot have, under any circumstances, a purpose and a meaning in itself, or could simply exist. If there are limits in Creation, and if they are not due to man's Fall, then the understanding of the limit must be positive: it is a limit that creates the possibility of communion, of the encounter, and that proves to engender an infinity of possibilities. This would be the meaning of some reasons of creation, of some *logoi*, as Maximus the Confessor calls them. Man's aim is definitely to overcome conditionings; this fact is apparent in the whole historical behaviour of humanity. Throughout his whole history, man has attempted, by all means, to go beyond his conditionings, dependences and limitations. The fact that he does science pertains to this need as well. Man has a high calling: *to mediate and to unite*. As Paul Blowers remarks, Maximus sees that man is called to consistently integrate the macrocosm with the microcosm, the objective perspective with the subjective one, in a common vision of spiritual *transitus*. The natural tension in the macrocosm between sensitive and intelligible reality must be mediated in the human microcosm via the spiritual vocation that is proper to the man of ascetic practice and contemplation. This mediation and unification asks for an *actual* change in reality, at all levels, for a subtle modification of a constitutive element in each of the terms of mediation.

This is why, when one talks about science, one needs to consider human data, and aim for more than psychologically measurable subjectivity. Our times obviously beg for this change of vision, as data offered by fundamental research cannot be interpreted and understood starting from the classical paradigm of science. The universe, in the Eastern-Christian understanding, cannot be simply described as an objective reality, whose existence is guaranteed and maintained by constant parameters, nor can humans be

understood via an anthropological model that would assert their stable essence.

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