THE PROBLEMATOLOGIC ANALYSIS OF THE PHILOSOPHICAL DIALOGUE: FROM THE CRITICAL FUNCTION TO THE MINIMAL EPISTEMOLOGY

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Abstract

In its essence, the problematologic model assumes the possibility that a question can receive at the same time without contradiction, several answers. Multiple answers may retain the equivalence relation only to the extent not to lose touch with the question that generated the problematologic difference. In this context, the dialogue as a way of using the language performs, according to the problematologic theory, two functions: a critical and an epistemological one. These two functions, as I will try to argue, may indicate the dynamic evolution of the dialogue.

Keywords: *problematology, historicity, dialogue, minimal epistemology.*

The starting point of problematology[1] as a discipline is the history of philosophy, *i.e.* the constant dialogue that establishes between the person that asks the question and tradition. This report highlights a key point: the philosophical questions are not new, they are returned to the surface by that one who asks the question. To ask a question and ignore tradition is quite inefficient. There is really no risk of reaching a new, but an existing, ignored result. The multiple responses entering in relation to one and the same question go beyond the way to resolve the question/ problem to the level of the binary logic. What makes problematology and hence its model, to send, or to be based on a fuzzy logic is the concept of *possibility.* From Meyer's perspective, this concept is not feasible only in terms of problematology. A dependency link is established between possibility and problematology:

"...the wish to give the answer sets the possibility as an alternative, as a choice, as a free plurality. The possible is for theory what freedom is for history."[2]

The possibility is conceived as an autonomous category as it does not interfere in any way in the

problematologic model structure, according to Meyer, as a grid capable of dissociating between possible, impossible or necessary answers. Between a question and its *possible* answers Meyer installs another concept (which articulates the possibility of being the responses, whatever they are), that of *historicity.* The difficulties surrounding this concept are received directly by the definitions. Meyer, in *De la problématologie...* and *Questionnement et historicité* outlines its scope somewhat different, hence this ambiguity. In *De la problématologie* historicity is "...the constitutive dimension of questioning by what makes it current, whenever present under different forms. It is the discharge of what changes, the timeless expression of questioning that embodies a system that wants to be eternal in its validity that structures itself in a certain manner"[3]. In the same work historicity appears in the condition of possibile position of questioning and takes to a certain extent the role of problematologic difference (difference question answer) but the purpose is to suppress the question of "to appear and answer the reflective stage, making it possible to respond, which preserves the question, while keeping the difference. (...) being the discharge of the questioning report about what is being questioned of what makes the subject of questioning. It is in the same time the condition of objectivity, if not of objectification"[4].

In *Questionnement et historicité*, the historicity appears as "putting away and when the historical point of view is not possible to overfill the tank itself, history appears by highlighting its own difference"[5].

From here certain features of the concept of historicity may be extracted and especially those

areas where it becomes active: between question and answer, between past and present, between history and historicity itself. If, as stated by Meyer, a historical event is perceived as a *block of facts*[6]; in other words, an event recorded in history cannot be understood only in conjunction with other events that preceded it, the relationships that can establish between them will reveal the relationship of cause and effect. At the problematological level, a question will always contain that possibility, the answer. Historicity, therefore, will influence in this way the questions and answers, but it will be able to notice as well, what it is new in comparison with the past, because it will accompany questioning in its approach not as an immersion in the past, but as an image of past through the present.

The act of examining one author, in terms of problematology, sends to an external interrogatory need, *i.e.* the need to ask questions different from those of the questioned author. The author is inquired, no matter whom, the question concerns an item, an issue, this interrogation refers to a specific interiority, but asking the question, by the very act of putting, it becomes in the same time external, sending necessarily to an end. It would be the first step that moves the problematologic model. The next stage is to radicalize the interrogation, which, according to Meyer, is to philosophize. The radicalization of questioning objectifies the approach. In this first aspect, what puts us through excellence in the presence of a philosophical discourse is based on the question to answer the fundamental distinction it operates, which Meyer calls *problematologic difference,* the question turns into issue, the thematization of its own problem is reflected in the problematologic response and has the capacity to hold the question. From this point, the step is repeated: from the response, as thematization of the problem to the original question, with the intention to reformulate and restore it to get a different answer. The approach can and should be repeated, where the extraordinary productivity is implied by the problematologic model.

How to structure this alternation between question and answer in a philosophical dialogue? Is there any way to indicate an order, or to mark a distance in the evolution of the dialogue? If we consider the following discourse sequence we can refer to how discourse is structured according to the problematologic difference:

"When he saw me coming, Hippothales asked me: Where are you going and where do you come from, Socrates? – From Academy I said, and I go to College. – Come here, 'he said. You know it is worth to stop. – Where do you say he comes and who is he? I asked. – Here, 'he said, showing me a room in front of the wall that had an open gate, is where we spend our time, we, along with many boys, one more beautiful than another. – What's there and what party is it? – It is a palaestra, he said, recently built and we spend time talking about many things and I am gladly to impart with you. – Well then, I said. But who is a teacher there? – A friend, he said, and your admirer, Micos. – Zeus, I said, that man is not a slouch, quite a worthy sophist"[7].

In this analysis a particular importance will be given to the verbs because they indicate the dynamism of the dialogue and by this the characters' movement participating in the discussion can be inferred and it has as a result the highlight of the dialogue structure[8]. The dialogue form is given by the verbs used in the past tense and it articulates or brings together two different intentions or actions, while shaping the technique of rendering the dialogue. It is a dialogue that took place "sometime" and is updated by Socrates, to "someone", no matter the circumstance, if this had been important Socrates would have highlighted the context in which it could have taken place this update, as in the following example.

"SOCRATES: You'll soon find out, because I cannot say that I have not carefully watched their thought, I was all ears and their sayings were well imprinted in my mind. I will try to tell you everything from the beginning, as it were. (...)"[9]

This example is an indirect rendering and a direct rendering might be:

"Socrates Welcome, Ion! Where did you come from, now? From home, from Ephesus?
ION Oh no, Socrates, from Epidaurus, from Asclepius' celebrations.

SOCRATES Do you worship the god of Epidaurus and a competition between the bards?

ION Of course, as well as competitions in all the other Muses' arts.

SOCRATES And tell me, did you, on our behalf, take part of the race? And what did you do?

ION Socrates, we were the ones who got the first prize.

SOCRATES I am glad. Now you can overcome even to the Panatenee.

ION God willing, this shall be.

SOCRATES Believe me, Ion, I often envied you, the rhapsodes, for your art. For worthy of envy is that it requires you to wear garments full of decoration, but also it forces you to devote many and good poets, and especially to Homer, who is the best of all gods, and to know well not only his lyrics, but also his thought"[10].

In case of the first fragment, the non-specification of the context in which the updating took place makes this technique of rendering the dialogue to have some common accents, one of the techniques used by the painters during the post-Renaissance era with a *mise-en-abîme* consisting in restoring a picture that shows the same picture as in an endless reflection. The process is almost identical to that used by Plato, who plays what Socrates said in a moment we can only assume it is original but whose origination is questionable. If in the case of most of Plato's dialogues is directly related to the allegation that makes the indication of the name of the speaker, as in the latter case, in *Lysis* the assignment of the statements, the difference between question and answer is also given by the verbs around which characters, ideas are structured, and that grants the dialogue this special form. Referring to the same dialogue structure *(Lysis)*, Victor Goldschmidt believes that its composition is, if not identical, at least similar to the other five dialogues regarded as being written in "youth"[11]. Obviously, this group aims to form no dialogue, but the content and function of this structure occurs:

"... The five dialogues approach through their subjects and we do not believe that it would

be the effect of chance. It seems therefore legitimate to reunite them under the title *in search of values (a* la *recherche des valeurs)*"[12].

The common point after which is given the "almost" similar structure to the five youth dialogues is that each of them does not matter that in different forms and with different subjects, they nevertheless consider them, in general, values, be it friendship, art, etc. Despite the shape, the purpose is not of a "pure science" or "obscure", but a "hybrid" one that is based on: a) the essential requirements of definitional reasoning; b) the common analogies borrowed from the world of the images. Around the value which is being built to define the term, in a geometric shape, Goldschmidt considers the dialogues and because they come from the same area, the approach should be identical and, by analogy, the structure must also match. Any of the Platonic dialogues have as a starting point apparently trivial situation, in *Lysis* this is given by a psychophysical response of that tempted by Socrates:

"– You, then, do you want to come with me to see them on the inside? – First I would like to know what I would have to do and who the nicest guy there is. – Each with his favorite, Socrates. – Who is yours, Hippothales? Tell me. Seeing that he blushes to my question, I said: O, Hippothales, (...)"[13].

Hippothales blushes and then Socrates enters into an endless game of answers and questions to learn the essence of friendship; questions that if you find an answer to, the answer will be unsatisfactory, it will not fully cover the question and it will be called bringing with it still a vagueness brought by the failed answer added to the original question.

The dialogue as a form of philosophy has not disappeared along with Plato. This form[14] was perpetuated until present, but in a simplified aspect. In the new form of dialogue, the participants have different status, those who are asked, are some well known authorities. From a problematologic perspective, the dialogue is seen as a way of using language and requires the presence of at least two instances: one asking the question and the one who answers the question – here the possibility of alternating roles occurs.

The definition can be considered open enough to fall under its general structure of the dialogue. However, a single moment in the history of philosophy meets the problematologic requirements, represented by Socrates who "raised questioning to the status of supreme value of thinking"[15]. This period is illustrated by the Platonic dialogues. Meyer goes on the same partition of Plato's dialogues into three stages: youth, middle and maturity. Through these offs it can be noticed how questioning gradually loses its duties. If in the first stage of the dialogue, as Meyer asserts, Plato faithfully restored the Socratic spirit represented by a radical questioning in the other two periods, it gradually turns into statement:

"In the so-called mature dialogues, the fundamental dialectic of knowledge will not have anything to do with the question. The conception of logos that prevails then it will not rely on the torque question-answer and it will be focused on an objective assessment of the assertion. The emphasis will not be placed on the presence of an interlocutor who inquires and responds to characterize the logos. (...) The statement is not studied as a response, but as an assertion, any reference to issue being eliminated from the analysis of the Logos knowledge"[16].

The platonic dialogues, taken as a whole and considering the transformation process that is suffered by the interrogation, meet after Meyer two functions: a) a critical function and b) a minimal epistemological function. In the first case, of the youthful dialogues, between the participants in the dialogue, there is a tie, each of the partners taking part in the discussion can act as both to ask questions and to answer questions from his interlocutor. With Socrates the process of questioning "ceases to be the privilege of the one who *can* achieve a response, thus of the fittest"[17] – as a response required by the Sophists' attitude, for whom the question was only an opportunity to show his disciples that he is worth the money: „the student's interrogation dies in the given (or sold) reply"[18]. The critical function targets but how, through questionnaires process, the knowledge is achieved. What emerges from the survey is not full knowledge; the interrogation maintains the issue that shows that it is still in question. The minimal epistemological function finds support in Menon's paradox:

"Man can neither seek what he knows, nor what he does know. He cannot seek what he knows, because he knows and nobody needs to seek what he knows; he neither cannot find what he knows, because he does not know what to look for"[19].

By virtue of this paradox questioning is not an environment conducive to knowledge and thus to achieve it.

In this context language reveals its dimensions: a) *argumentative and dialectical* b) *semantic and hermeneutic*20 by virtue responses (apocritic or problematologic) that can stand naturally to a question that appears in the dialogic order. A question can be answered in various ways, Meyer[21] attempts to recover route from question to answer, relying just on this diversity, in order to highlight the problematologic structure of the philosophical dialogue:

1) *Challenging the explicit answer* – the caller responds to challenge the speaker's response. This type of answer can be exemplified:

"Socrates – And you, are not you, Ion, the best Greek rhapsodist?
Ion – Even far, Socrates.
Socrates – And the best strategist?
John – You can be convinced, Socrates, just as I learned these things from Homer!
Socrates – Then in Gods name, Ion, why do they, being both the best of Greek – both as a strategist and as a bard – why do you wander the Greek cities reciting instead of governing armies? I somehow imagine that the Greeks take great lack of a minstrel crowned with gold, but instead of a strategist?"[22]

2) *Another answer* – the interlocutor, less brutal, calls into question what the speaker said simply providing another answer to the question. An example would be the following sequence discourse:

"Socrates – But to give, does not mean to sacrifice some gods and to pray – to ask something?
Euthyphron – Even so, Socrates.

Socrates – So, according to these words, piety would be the science of giving and asking the gods.

Euthyphron – You got very nice what I wanted to say, Socrates."[23]

3) *Adjunction to answer* – the caller does not oppose to the proposed response, but completes it. With this type of response the translation of the argumentative-dialectical stage of the semantic and hermeneutic dialogue occurs, the answer is exemplified as:

"Ion – Nothing to say, Socrates. But it is very clear that in case of Homer, I am talking, something recognized by everyone, better than everyone and I am full of ideas, which does not happen with other poets. See however what can that mean.

Socrates – I even realize, Ion, and I am about to reveal you why I think might mean. This gift of yours to speak well about Homer is, as I said before, not a craft, but a divine power that moves you, a power like that of a stone which Euripides calls of Magnesia, and by most of the people Heracleea stone. Indeed, this stone not only attracts the iron rings, but it also transmits to them the power to commit the same thing..."[24]

4) *Silence of consent* – the response is considered to be less frontal and equally ambiguous, despite the delays, the question at issue is still supported, for example this situation:

"Socrates – But you, the rhapsodes, do not turn your words translated by the poets?
John – That is true."[25]

5) *The explicit rejection of the question.* The following situation can be eloquent in this regard:

"Menon – And really, does this not seem a not well-formed reasoning, Socrates?
Socrates – No, not to me."[26]

The rejection of the questioning does not close the philosophical dialogue, Meyer shows that in this situation there may be at least three further dialogue options: a) *it is raised a problem that may extend the discussion properly*, b) *the raise of another question which is considered to be more appropriate* – the previous sequence, taken as an example continues with

"Menon – Can you tell me why?
Socrates – I can. I heard some men and women, skilled in the divine ...
Menon – And what did they say?
Socrates – Real things, as far as they seem to me, and beautiful.
Menon – But what did they say and who are they?"[27]

After rejecting the question, there is an imbalance in structuring the dialogue. The discussion resumes through a series of exploratory questions and answers. Menon seems to want an explanation. Socrates in turn lures his interlocutor with short answers and somehow avoiding a direct answer, but open enough so that Menon to see that the discussion with Socrates will continue and maybe will receive the answer he expected. The latter, according to Meyer as a further dialogue consider the interlocutor c) a polite silence understood as a lack of interest for the question.

He who asks and who answers provides the dialogue by simply reversing the roles, the induction of the problematologic difference. Changing the roles, concludes Meyer, prescribes the recognition of what will be question and the answer. Hence, the signs that clearly indicate the interrogation may disappear without producing an unabstracted between question and answer.

References

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2. Borradori, Giovana (2005), *Philosophy in a time of terror. Dialogues with J. Habermas and J. Derrida*, Parallel 45 Publishing House.
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7. Meyer, Michel (1993), *Questions de rhetorique; langage, raison et seduction*, Le Livre de Poche.
8. Plato (1976), *Works*, Vol. II, Scientific and Encyclo-pedic Publishing House, Bucharest.
9. Plato (1978), *Works*, Vol. III, Scientific and Encyclo-pedic Publishing House, Bucharest.

Endnotes

1. The author of the problematologic theory is the Belgian philosopher Michel Meyer. He defines problematology as "the study of how to ask the questions", *De la problématologie, Philosophie, science et langage*, Édition Pierre Mardaga, 1986, p. 7.
2. M. Meyer, *De la problématologie...*, p. 33.
3. *Ibidem*, p. 78-79.
4. *Ibidem*, p. 186.
5. M. Meyer, *Questionnement et historicité*, Presses Universitaires de France, 2000, p. 41.
6. *Idem*, *De la problématologie...*, p. 78.
7. Plato, *Lysis*, "Works", Vol. II, edition edited by Peter Crete, interpreting the dialogue *Lysis* by Alexander Cizek, Scientific and Encyclopedic Publishing House, Bucharest, 1976, p. 213.
8. In case of literature, Derrida will strengthen the role of metaphor focusing to direct research and to fix the results. Derrida believes that "the figures of the rhetoric are always figures of geometry, in fact, very flexible". The metaphor represents only a starting point in an analysis for the structure of the literary work is not yet given by the metaphor, but by a verb, indicating the movement described by characters in an opera. Structure, in this perspective, is a heuristic tool, a method of reading the objective relations system, independent of content and terms but rather a means or a relationship to read and write to tighten meanings, applying themes to order regular and correspondence. Strictly speaking, the concept of structure refers directly to "morphological space or geometric shapes or places". (Jacques Derrida, *Writing and difference*, trans. by Bogdan Ghiu and Dumitru Țepeneag, preface by Radu Toma, Univers Publishing House, Bucharest, 1998, pp. 33-34).
9. Plato, *Euthydemos,* in "Works", Vol. III, edition edited by Petru Creția, interpretations of dialogues by Constantin Noica, translation, preliminary explanations and notes to *Euthydemos*, Gabriel Liiceanu, Scientific and Encyclopedic Publishing House, Bucharest, 1978, p. 71.
10. Plato, *Ion*, in "Works", Vol. II, p. 135.
11. The five dialogues that are part of the 'youth dialogues' group proposed by V. Goldschmidt are *Euthyphron, Hippias Major, Charmide, Laches* and *Lysis.*

V. Goldschmidt, *Les Dialogues de Platon. Structure et methode dialectique*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1963, p. 33.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Plato, *Lysis*, 204 c, p. 214.
14. Among the attempts to redefine the philosophical dialogue and to use the term in contemporary *philosophy* we can record the work *Philosophy in a time of terror. Dialogues with J. Habermas and J. Derrida*, translated by Marie-Louise Semen, Ciprian Mihali, Parallel 45 Publishing House, 2005, dialogues recorded by Giovanna Borradori or *Dialogues Jorge Luis Borges – Ernesto Sabato*, translation, afterword and notes by Ileana Scipione, Rao Publishing House, 2005, mediated by Orlando Barone. Giovanna Borradori will consider the dialogue as a "very personal story for a philosopher who does not only express the particular styles of thinking of those who participate in the dialogue (Habermas and Derrida here), but sets in motion including their core of their philosophical theories. Orlando Barone noted: "the word *dialogue* has become the choice by both players. Other options were eliminated: *discussions, conversations, meetings.* They joked about the fact that to plagiarize, after more than two thousand years, a title given by Plato was less unworthy than to seek an inappropriate originality."
15. Michel Meyer, *De la problématologie...*, p. 81.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 91.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 83-84.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 84.
19. Plato, *Works*, vol. II, translation of *Menon* dialogue, Liana Lupaş and Petru Creția, notes *(Menon)* Liana Lupaş, p. 387.
20. Michel Meyer, *Questions de rhetorique; langage, raison et seduction*, Le Livre de Poche, 1993, p. 83.
21. *Ibidem*, pp. 84-85.
22. Plato, *Works,* vol. II, translation: *Ion,* Dan Slușanschi, p. 149.
23. Plato, *Works*, vol. II, translation: *Euthyphron*, Francisca Bălțăceanu and Petru Creția, p. 278.
24. Ditto, *Ion*, 533 c, d, pp. 139-140.
25. *Ibid.*, 535 a, p. 141.
26. *Idem*, *Menon*, 81, p. 387.
27. *Ibid.*