

## **PHILOSOPHICAL AVENUES**



# IS DISCONTINUOUS BERGSONISM POSSIBLE?

TERESA CASTELÃO-LAWLESS\*

**Abstract:** Gaston Bachelard's position toward the philosophy of Henri Bergson is most interesting. In *La Dialectique de la durée* (1936), Bachelard claims that "of Bergsonism we accept everything but continuity" and that the rest of his book will be an attempt to show the possibility of a "discontinuous Bergsonism". In this paper, I focus on the reaction of Bachelard to works of Bergson such as the *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* (1889), *L'Evolution créatrice* (1907), and *Durée et simultanéité: à propos de la théorie d'Einstein* (1922) and demonstrate that even though the conditions necessary for the possibility of a discontinuous Bergsonism are not the same ones which Bachelard had in mind when he accepted most of Bergsonism, their phenomenologies of the scientific spirit were analogous.

**Keywords:** continuity, discontinuity, epistemology, scientific creativity, metaphysics, nature of science, nature of physical reality.

French epistemologist Gaston Bachelard (1884-1962) could not have escaped confronting his philosophy of science with the philosophy of Henri Bergson (1859-1941). Bachelard's first book, the *Essai sur la connaissance approchée*,<sup>1</sup> appeared in 1927, the year Bergson received the Nobel Prize for Literature. By then, Bergson had been part of the intellectual landscape of France for almost two decades. Bergson's *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* had come out in 1889; his "new metaphysics" had been published by the *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* in 1903 and in *L'Evolution créatrice* in 1907; and his interpretation of Einstein's relativity in *Durée et simultanéité* in 1922 had sparked much controversy in the

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\* Teresa Castelão-Lawless is Ph.D. Professor, Department of Philosophy, Grand Valley State University, MI, USA. E-mail: [Castelat@gvsu.edu](mailto:Castelat@gvsu.edu)

<sup>1</sup> Bachelard's doctoral thesis

academic community. Bergson had scientists and intellectuals taking sides on his position regarding the boundaries of science and metaphysics. He had supporters in Louis de Broglie but detractors in Henri Poincaré, Albert Einstein, and Léon Brunschvicg. The divide was also sociological, since it coincided with the “competing currents of philosophical thought and practice in the French universities”<sup>2</sup>. For instance, at the Sorbonne, Le Roy was combining in his courses the philosophies of Bergson and Poincaré, thus reducing science to a system of practical conventions, whereas Brunschvicg was doing just the opposite in order to protect scientific realism against what he perceived as Bergson’s “irrationalism”(Chimisso 1997, 4-5). These facts were probably enough to motivate Bachelard’s curiosity. Not only does he mention Bergson in all of his works on epistemology, he devotes two books to Bergson’s philosophy, *L’Intuition de l’instant* (1932) and *La Dialectique de la durée* (1936). These titles suggest that Bachelard opposed Bergsonism for, according to his own view, intuition was not composed of instants and duration was not dialectical.

Scholars have taken Bachelard’s criticism of Bergson’s philosophy of continuity at face value. This is because it seemed to them that a discontinuist philosopher such as Bachelard had necessarily to reject not only continuity but Bergsonism altogether with it. My interpretation diverges from this view. It shows that Bachelard accepted continuity, with the proviso that it was continuity of scientific explanation rather than in physical reality, and that Bergson’s and Bachelard’s phenomenologies of the mind are analogous.

## BERGSON AND BACHELARD ON FLEXIBLE CONCEPTUALIZATION

Bachelard quickly detected the need to accommodate the vocabulary of philosophy to the new sciences in light of their new requirement that scientific concepts be as flexible and mobile as the dialectical mind which produces them, and which demonstrate at different times and in different situations an alternation between rationalism and empiricism, continuity and discontinuity. He knew

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<sup>2</sup> See Cristina Chimisso’s “Introduction” to *The Dialectics of Duration*, p. 4. See also Teresa Castelão-Lawless, “Gaston Bachelard et le milieu scientifique et intellectuel français”, in Nouvel, Pascal (dir.) 1997. *Actualité et postérités de Gaston Bachelard*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, pp.101-115

that, especially at the level of quantum mechanics, there were ambiguities in the act of knowing and that one had to replace causality for uncertainty and probability. He also claimed that philosophy was philosophy or metaphysics of science only<sup>3</sup>.

Bergson too was very critical of empiricism and rationalism. Both of these metaphysics of science could lead one into falsely believing that “by putting together all the diagrams [we] can reconstitute the object itself”<sup>4</sup>. He thought that traditional philosophy had made one to confuse real problems with linguistic fallacies, symbols with reality, and to think that symbols represented reality instead of fragments of it. Bergson also wanted to demonstrate that, even though science and metaphysics are complementary and ought to cross paths at some point, they should nevertheless be kept demarcated on grounds of intention and purpose, on what level of reality they were expected to grasp, and on the methodologies that were used to approach qualitatively different perceptions and levels of reality. In fact, he said, “if consciousness has to split up into intuition and intelligence, it is because of the need it had to apply itself to matter at the same time as it had to follow the stream of life. The double form of consciousness is due to the double form of the real”<sup>5</sup>. He had claimed since the *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* (1889) that our intelligence grasped “artificial” reality analytically and scientifically, while our intuition grasped “real” reality psychologically and metaphysically. Physical science gave us knowledge that was practical for life and for the study of “dead matter.” But this knowledge was a contrived, static construct of reality in its dynamic completeness. It was a mistake to expect mechanist science to be readily capable of giving us access to the essence of things. Dialectic was to Bergson an incomplete, fractured tool of analysis. It only captured in fragments, as in a “still movie,” a reality and a mind which were in constant flux.

To Bergson, metaphysics, if properly used, would give us glimpses of a reality which tended to escape rational categorization. For this to happen, we needed to keep our intellectual habits from creating static images of duration, such as imagining time as moving in a linear spatial trajectory as it was described abstractly in science, instead of

<sup>3</sup> Bachelard’s epistemology kept with the French tradition of combining history and philosophy of science

<sup>4</sup> Henri Bergson (2007). *An Introduction to Metaphysics*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p.21

<sup>5</sup> Henri Bergson (1944). *Creative Evolution*. New York: The Modern Library, p.196

the real, concrete time given by intuitive consciousness (Bergson 1944,196) . This was an extremely difficult task. As Bergson pointed out in the Essai, “all dynamic representation is distasteful to reflective consciousness”.<sup>6</sup> However, “concepts are necessary [to reach intuition], for all the other sciences work as a rule with concepts, and metaphysics cannot dispense with other sciences. But it is only truly itself when it goes beyond the concept, or at least when it frees itself from rigid and ready-made concepts in order to create a kind very different from those which we habitually use; I mean, supple, mobile, and almost fluid representations”(Bergson 2007, 13). Later in the text, he adds, “Shall we say, then, that duration has unity? Doubtless, a continuity of elements which prolong themselves into one another participates in unity as much as in multiplicity....shall we conclude that duration must be defined as unity and multiplicity at the same time? (...) when I replace myself in duration by an effort of intuition, I immediately perceive how it is unity, multiplicity, and many other things besides. These different concepts, then, were only so many standpoints from which we could consider duration. Neither separated nor reunited have they made us penetrate it.”(Bergson 2007, 14-15) The mind does fragment reality into dualisms like unity and multiplicity, continuity and discontinuity, realism and idealism, but it also makes the mistake of mixing qualitatively different ones, such as when we “make time into a representation imbued with space”<sup>7</sup>.

These passages in Bergson’s texts about metaphysics show interesting points of intersection with Bachelard’s epistemology of science. For, while Bergson was describing the metaphysical function of thinking and Bachelard talked about the metaphysics of applied rationalism, they referred in similar terms to the value of representation, to how the mind works, and to what ought to happen to the shelf-life of concepts. In other words, Bachelard believed that the capacity for concepts to be flexible testified to their adaptability to a constantly moving, probabilistic scientific reality and to the dynamic of the scientific spirit in its creative activity, whereas Bergson required conceptual flexibility and a variety of standpoints for us to be able to grasp dynamic reality and dynamic consciousness intuitively. Thus, if Bachelard defended conceptual fluidity in good science and the

<sup>6</sup> Henri Bergson (1889). *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*. Paris: P.U.F, p.7

<sup>7</sup> Gilles Deleuze (1991). *Bergsonism*. New York: Zone Books, p.22

mobility of the mind to adjust to whatever level of reality one was dealing with, and Bergson defended conceptual flexibility and the mobility of the mind to grasp the flux of reality, then they both would have to agree that either continuity or discontinuity were incomplete conceptualizations of reality. They also would have to agree that sometimes there was unity, sometimes disunity, and sometimes multiplicity in the knowledge of nature and of the self. The same texts of Bergson testify to the fact that he was not without further qualification “the philosopher of continuity.” To Bergson, labeling duration a simple “continuity” would be an error, for this would be attempting to conceptualize that which could not be conceptualized at all. As Bergson had said when referring to the study of consciousness, “the inner life is all of this at once: variety of qualities, continuity of progress, and unity of direction. It cannot be represented by images, and it is even less possible to represent it by concepts” (Bergson 2007, 10).

We could still claim that a reason for Bachelard’s criticism of Bergson’s philosophy of continuity was because they defined “intuition” differently. To Bergson, intuition was metaphysical thinking,<sup>8</sup> something that we ought to encourage in ourselves so that we could both access immaterial reality and be able to understand the operations of consciousness. It seems that Bachelard would not agree with this, since to him intuitions had to be discouraged in science because they were an epistemological obstacle to its development. However, this is not all that Bachelard had to say about intuition. In *La Dialectique de la durée* he admitted that, besides those “negative” intuitions which were “at the root of our concepts”, “positive” intuitions had an important role in science, since they could “put concepts together: these essentially secondary intuitions (...) are wrongly thought to be artificial and poor.” They too have an important role in the scientific enterprise.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, Bergson would not disagree with Bachelard that there should be no place for “negative” intuitions in science, for he too claimed that physical science ought to

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<sup>8</sup> Henri Bergson (1938). *La Pensée et le mouvant*. Paris: P.U.F., p.216

<sup>9</sup> G.Bachelard (2000). *The Dialectic of Duration* (1950). Manchester: Clinamen Press, p.30. The role given to “irrational” judgments of value which cannot be articulated linguistically but are essential to scientific theory assessment and in theory choice receives an incomparably better treatment in works such as Michael Polanyi’s *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958

be the product of intelligence only and not of metaphysics. In fact, Bergson affirmed that all intuitions ought to be subjected to empirical verification just like any other science. So, those of Bergson's intuitions which could be confirmed by observation were not dissimilar to Bachelard's "positive" intuitions which cooperated in the construction of conceptual systems. Besides, both Bergson and Bachelard believed that metaphysics should interact creatively with science, and that they should be checked against one another. In fact, the role that Bachelard gave to philosophy of science was operationally analogous to the role that Bergson gave to metaphysics: their combined effect allowed for their mutual progress and development, and enabled us to approximate the essence of reality.

## EMPIRICALLY VERIFIED METAPHYSICS

Bergson and Bachelard claimed that metaphysics ought to be empirically confirmed by science itself and by the way we thought. Bachelard spent decades showing that his epistemology fitted scientific evidence perfectly well. In his turn, Bergson had said in *L'Evolution créatrice* that "metaphysics is dependent upon the theory of knowledge", that "both one and the other depend upon experience," (Bergson 1944, 196) and in the *Essai* that "we [can] witness the superposition or, even better, the intimate fusion of many ideas that, once dissociated, seem to exclude themselves from each other in logically contradictory terms" (Bergson 1889, 101). One way for Bergson to test the metaphysical hypothesis of duration, for instance, was to do so against two of the most important scientific theories of his time, biological evolution and relativity. In *L'Evolution créatrice*, Bergson tried to demonstrate continuity in the phenomenon of life as it developed through duration. To him, "there is an unbroken continuity between the evolution of the embryo and that of the complete organism....The development of the embryo is a perpetual change of form" (Bergson 1944, 22), so that "evolution implies a real persistence of the past in the present, a duration which is (...) a connecting link...Continuity of change, preservation of the past in the present, real duration – the living being seems (...) to share these attributes with consciousness" (Bergson 1944, 27). As it can be testified by the marks of time in our aging bodies, external time or duration is not about static being, as described by non-temporal frames such as mathematics and logic, but about becoming (Bergson 1944, 324). So, even though we can find a multiplicity of durations, "there is only a current of

existence and the opposing current; thence proceeds the whole evolution of life" (Bergson 1944, 203). It was from the study of evolution that one can recognize that the two lines of thought provided by the intellect and intuition truly led to one another (Bergson 1944, 196). Also, in *Durée et simultanéité* Bergson tried to demonstrate the empirical validity of "continuity" of duration by inferring it from the conception of time as described in Einstein's theory of relativity. As Bergson put it, "not only the theses of Einstein do not seem to contradict, but they even confirm, they (...) are a commencement of proof in the natural belief that men have of a unique and universal time".<sup>10</sup>

Bachelard had tried to infer from relativity an epistemology of science that would confirm his longtime belief that discontinuity existed in matter, in history, and in consciousness. Bachelard's first critical book on Bergson, *L'intuition de l'instant*, used the views of Gaston Roupnel against those of Bergson. Roupnel had in the past criticized Bergson's dualistic phenomenology.<sup>11</sup> He had also attempted to establish a rapprochement between discontinuity and "phenomena of radiation in the quanta hypothesis".<sup>12</sup> The musings over Roupnel's *La Nouvelle Siloe* were a license on the part of Bachelard to return to relativity and to prove that continuity in duration did not exist except as a rushed, generalized approach to reality. In the midst of profuse literary considerations, Bachelard admitted that "[we] were awoken from our dogmatic dreams [i.e., our confidence in the Bergsonian thesis] by the Einsteinian critique of objective duration. It seems (...) to us evident that this critique destroys the absolute of that which lasts, but in keeping (...) the absolute of what is, that is to say, the absolute of the instant".(Bachelard 1979, 29)

Despite agreements between Bergson and Bachelard on issues such as the role of intuition, the mobility of the mind, and the need to reform philosophy of science, one would think that Bachelard's realization that the metaphysics of continuity could not be empirically corroborated by relativity would lead him to give up on Bergsonism altogether. But in fact, four years later Bachelard published *La*

<sup>10</sup> Henri Bergson (1968). *Durée et simultanéité: a propos de la théorie d'Einstein* (1922). Paris: Presses Universitaires de France

<sup>11</sup> Gaston Roupnel (1871-1946). He is seen as anticipating some of the spiritualism of Teilhard de Chardin, which makes it even stranger that Bachelard never used evolution theory to test Bergsonism

<sup>12</sup> G.Bachelard (1979). *L'Intuition de l'instant* (1932). Paris: Editions Gonthier, p.53

Dialectique de la durée to advance his own agenda of epistemological discontinuity and to further test Bergsonism against modern science. As we have seen, Bergson had not rejected discontinuity altogether. But he had definitely restricted its use when he claimed in L'Evolution créatrice that “of the discontinuous alone does the intellect form a clear idea (...) as the intellect is characterized by the unlimited power of decomposing according to any law and of recomposing into any system” (Bergson 1944, 170-173).

The problem was that Bachelard continued to be attracted to Bergsonism but did not agree that discontinuity was simply an intellectual tool to be used to capture something that was in reality continuous. He wanted to demonstrate that discontinuity corresponded approximately to the ontology of the physical world as described by quantum mechanics. So, his new book was an attempt to test again his discontinuity thesis. It was also meant to provide another falsifying test of Bergson's metaphysics, this time by trying “to develop a discontinuous Bergsonism, showing the need to arithmatize Bergsonian duration so as to give it more fluidity, more numbers, and also more accuracy in the correspondence the phenomena of thought exhibit between themselves and the quantum characteristics of reality” (Bachelard 2000, 29). The need that Bachelard had to ‘discontinualize’ Bergson came from his own belief in the functional futility of “the postulate of temporal continuity.” He did not think that presupposing a continuous reality could clarify the descriptions and the enumerations necessary for microphenomenology in general or for quantum experiments in particular (Bachelard 2000, 50). However, even though he could not accept that physical reality was continuous, he still believed that Bergsonism helped to legitimize his own views on the mobility of the mind and the need for flexibility in conceptualization.

The arbitrariness of the separation between the subject and the object did not demonstrate to Bachelard that our mind was imposing discontinuous standpoints to a fluid duration - which would be Bergson's position if he could have tested continuity against quantum theory -, but that all the mathematical standpoints created by the mind were as different as the multiple ways in which a discontinuous reality could give itself to us. In other words, where Bachelard disagreed with Bergson was not in the use that Bergson had made of continuity as a category of thought per se, since Bachelard shared the same belief that one must use multiple plastic concepts to represent possible states of knowledge and of thought. As he pointed out, “from our point of view

(...) continuity – or continuities - can be presented as characteristics of the psyche, [but] characteristics that cannot be regarded as complete, solid, constant (Bachelard 2000, 29). His disagreement was with Bergson's claim that continuity existed OUTSIDE of the self that thinks it. Bachelard said in *L'Intuition de l'instant* that “we reject this metaphysical extrapolation which affirms a continuous in itself, when we are at all times in the face of the discontinuous of our experience” (Bachelard 1979, 42). In *La Dialectique de la durée*, he even claimed that science, which provided us with “proofs of being,” (Bachelard 2000, 33) had not proved at all the existence of continuity (Bachelard 2000, 43). So, Bachelard was a realist in relation to scientific entities while Bergson was a conventionalist in relation to scientific entities and a realist in relation to the objects of intuition. But they were both “the philosophers of mobility”, and this might well be why Bachelard kept coming back to Bergson.

Bachelard's recurrent fascination with Bergson could have had two more sources. One was that, contrary to common belief, the influence of Bergsonism in French academia had not disappeared completely after 1922. In fact, five years after *La Dialectique de la durée*, Louis de Broglie published “Les Conceptions de la physique contemporaine et les idées de Bergson sur le temps et sur le mouvement” in the *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*. There, De Broglie admitted that one could disagree with some of the ideas of Bergson, including his misinterpretation of relativity and his weak argumentations, which were usually hidden by an “admirable style”.<sup>13</sup> But, now that one knew relativity was not “the last word in science” (De Broglie 1941, 246), one could not help but to be shocked by “the analogy between certain new conceptions of contemporary physics and some of the astounding intuitions of the philosopher of duration” (De Broglie 1941, 242).

Contrary to the views of Bachelard, De Broglie had not kept relativity and quantum theories in the same epistemological bag. So, he criticized Einstein's relativity on the grounds that it was unable to interpret quantum phenomena; that quantum theories allowed us to “penetrate in the deepest layers of reality” in a way that relativity could not; that relativity could only give us macroscopic and statistical views

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<sup>13</sup> Louis De Broglie (1941). «Les Conceptions de la physique contemporaine et les idées de Bergson sur le temps et sur le mouvement», in *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, T.LIII, n.4, p.242

of phenomena; and so that, contrary to wave mechanics, relativity did not allow for a detailed description of elementary processes, ones which could help us to properly access those discontinuities that were linked to the existence of the quantum of action.<sup>14</sup> In the same breath, he then asked whether “this new physics would not be in better accordance with certain ideas of Bergson than with the relativistic doctrine” (De Broglie 1941, 246-247).

What intrigued De Broglie the most was the anticipatory nature of Bergson’s speculations on time, duration, and movement. Wave and quantum mechanics showed the impossibility of being able to simultaneously “attribute to an elementary corpuscle a well defined state of movement and a completely determined position. The existence of the quantum of action (...) opposes every simultaneous determination and perfect precision of those coordinates which fixate the position of the corpuscle and the (...) energy and quantity of movement which specify its dynamic state. In other words, it was impossible to know at the same time and with precision the dynamic aspect of these elementary processes as well as their localization in space” (De Broglie 1941, 248). To De Broglie, only macroscopically could one have the illusion of being able to know these two things precisely and simultaneously and, contrary to what Bachelard thought, only rushed generalizations could make one assume that the world was as static as its relativistic descriptions.

Bachelard saw our inability to detect position and momentum simultaneously as definite proof that nature was discontinuous, while De Broglie believed that our inability to measure it except with the help from theories of quantum discontinuity was a sign that nature was fleeting, continuous, and unpredictable. Wave mechanics showed that physical entities were constantly “in progress.” Therefore, De Broglie continued, “if Bergson could have studied the quantum theories in detail, he would have noted certainly with joy that, in the image that they offer us of the evolution of the physical world, they show us nature in all its occasions hesitating between several possibilities, and he would have undoubtedly repeated, as in *La Pensée et le Mouvant*, that ‘time is that very hesitation or it is nothing at all’” (De Broglie

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<sup>14</sup> The quantum of action had been first postulated in 1900 by Max Planck and later by Einstein

1941, 252-253).<sup>15</sup> The very need for wave mechanics to renounce individualization of particles, as well as its inability to follow the evolution of particles throughout time meant that reality was fluid, just like Bergson had suggested (De Broglie 1941, 255). So, it is possible that Bachelard did not give up on Bergson precisely because De Broglie demonstrated that quantum mechanics verified continuity in nature, and thus that Bergsonism might be right after all.

Another reason for why Bachelard would not give up on Bergsonism had to do with his own work on creative imagination in art and in literature. Contrary to Bergson who believed that science and intuition or instinct were complementary, Bachelard thought that science was complementary to poetry. For instance, in *La Psychanalyse du feu*, he said that “the axis of poetry and science are first of all inverted. The only thing that philosophy should aspire to do is to make poetry and science complementary, to unite them as two well made contraries. One must therefore oppose expansive poetic spirit [and] taciturn scientific spirit (...).”<sup>16</sup> In *L’Evolution créatrice*, Bergson claimed that “instinct and intelligence are two divergent developments of one and the same principle, which in the one case remains within itself, in the other steps out of itself and becomes absorbed in the utilization of inert matter”(Bergson 1944, 184). This means that Bachelard’s role for poetry was analogous to the role Bergson had given to intuition.

Bachelard wrote a series of books on rêverie, a state of consciousness which is prompted by our contemplation of the world of matter. The reflections that we make in the state of rêverie are freed from those rational and empirical constraints which we must impose on scientific frames of thinking. There we could give free reign to the wandering mind and to those “negative” intuitions that were obstacles to the scientific spirit but fruitful to the literary and artistic imagination. Rêverie does not need to be tested, and this is probably what makes them so open to the Bergsonian metaphysical method.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Karl Popper develops this “hesitation” of nature in his theory of propensities, which is really an amendment of probability theory. To him, probability did not explain emergent evolution and other open but predictable acts of nature. Popper knew some of the works of Bergson, but he quickly dismissed Bergson’s *élan vital*

<sup>16</sup> G.Bachelard (1985). *La Psychanalyse du feu* (1938). Paris: Gallimard, p.12

<sup>17</sup> In his studies of the unconscious in science and in art, Bachelard also relies heavily on the analytic psychology of C.G.Jung

In L'Air et les songes (1943), which was a study in the imagination of movement, Bachelard said that a psychology of the imagination - in other words the study of states of consciousness in rêverie – “cannot be developed with static forms, it must get instruction from those forms which are in the process of deforming themselves, which are paying much more attention to the dynamic principles of deformation. The psychology of the aerial element is the least “atomic” of all the four psychologies that study the material imagination” (Bachelard 1938, 30). In the last chapter of the book, he recognized that Bergson had been important when he had advocated a “revolution against the philosophy of concept,”<sup>18</sup> and when he made one realize that the excesses of geometrization in the physical sciences were obstacles to the study of movement. (Bachelard 1943, 332) Then, he admitted that “the images that we propose lead us to maintain Bergsonian intuition – which sometimes only offers itself as a mode of enlarged thinking – by positive experiences (...) of the imagination....One could then multiply Bergsonism if we could make it adhere to the images of which he is so rich, by considering it in matter and in the dynamic of its own images”. (Bachelard 1943, 333)

## CONCLUSION

Is a discontinuous Bergsonism possible? Yes, but only if we agree with De Broglie’s epistemological interpretation of quantum physics. Furthermore, discontinuous Bergsonism is possible to Bachelard if he would agree to restrict Bergsonism to the study of conceptual flexibility in knowledge, in the mind, and to poetic states of consciousness where intuitions, instincts, and the freedom to dream are principles of creative action. In these realms, it does not really matter whether physical reality is continuous or discontinuous, or whether concepts correspond to reality or simple conventions. What Bachelard could not accept of Bergson was not continuity tout court, but the continuity of physical reality.

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<sup>18</sup> G.Bachelard (1996). *L'Air et les songes: essai sur l'imagination du mouvement* (1943). Paris: Librairie José Corti, p.331

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# **PLURALISM AND THE STUDY OF RELIGION: A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE**

**A.L. SAMIAN\***

**Abstract:** In the Malaysian government outline of Vision 2020, the importance of the study of religion as an integral component of general education is explicitly stated. This paper examines the present state of comparative religious studies in Malaysian Institutes of Higher Learning. Several philosophical issues are highlighted including the local concept and objective of religious studies, suitability of courses offered, and its relevance to the national development, i.e., industrialization of the country. An attempt is made to suggest how the religious course in a plural society like Malaysia, in the future, can be used to achieve Vision 2020 by integrating science and religion based on the position that science is a problem-solving activity.

**Keywords:** philosophy, multi religious, courses, pluralism, change, comparative.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Malaysia is a multi religious, multicultural and multiethnic country in Southeast Asia. Religion is observed beyond rituals and festivals. In a Malaysian daily life, be it economical, social or political, having a religious justification is a value added `capital'. For instance, religious considerations are given for classification of food and beverages at the supermarkets. Even though it is constitutionally a secular state, religion is not at all peripheral. It has been argued that Malaysia is always in the `state of stable tension', because of its fundamental pluralism and the significant way religion and all of its aspects are treated in the country.<sup>1</sup>

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\* A. L. Samian is Ph.D. Professor, Institute of the Malay World and Civilization, The National University of Malaysia, Malaysia. E-mail: [abdlatif@ukm.my](mailto:abdlatif@ukm.my)

<sup>1</sup> Shamsul A.B. (2000). "Why Malaysia is not disintegrating? Islam, the economy and politics in multiethnic Malaysia". Text of a talk for Asia Center Lecture, Harvard University, April 21

It is in the above broad context that the author wishes to highlight the sensitivities of the religious dimension in Malaysia and by extension, the problems related to its future development. In particular, the author intends to examine the current status of comparative religious study imposed by the Ministry of Education and raise some philosophical issues simply because it is the only required course on religion that must be taken by all university students. There are other university courses on religion but issues of sensitivities do not arise because of its elective nature and more often than not, these are taken and conducted by followers of the same religion. For examples, any course on Islam offered by the Faculty of Islamic Studies to Muslim students does not pose any sensitive issue because the instructor is addressing followers of the same faith. Such is not the case in conducting comparative religious courses whereby all students, irrespective of their religion, have to enroll in it. There are some philosophical issues involved which must be addressed accordingly to enhance its future development amidst the noble vision of the country, known as Vision 2020, and the aforementioned `state of stable tension'.

## INDIGENOUS CONCEPT

Malaysians are currently experiencing the spirit not unlike the renaissance although at a much humble scale. The whole thrust of Vision 2020 is encapsulated in the national slogan `Sure we can (*Malaysia Boleh*)', which is not a far cry from Battiste's "Man can do anything if they will".<sup>2</sup> At one end of the vision is the consensus of upholding traditional values and on the other is the zeal for a completely transformed industrialized society based on the advancement of S & T. The place of religion, and with it religious studies, is somewhere in between. The Vision states: "The fifth challenge that we have always faced is the challenge of establishing a matured liberal and tolerant society in which Malaysians of all colors and creeds are free to practice and profess their customs, cultures and religious beliefs and yet feeling that they belong to one nation" (Mahathir Mohamad 1992, 2).

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<sup>2</sup> Mahathir Mohamad (1992). "Malaysia: The Way Forward", in *The Journal of Malaysian Institute of Management*. Vol. 27, No.3, pp.1-9. All references of Vision 2020 are taken from this text

Within the spirit of Vision 2020, this quantum leap from an agro based society to that of an industrial one has several intrinsic values that we can examine from several perspectives; namely - economics, anthropological and sociological, the ethos of reformation, scientism and lastly but certainly not the least, the naturalization of Nature. Underlying all these themes is the growing innate belief in the Malaysian mind concerning change- that one either changes or be changed. Religion is utilized in monitoring these fundamental changes, as the author will try to demonstrate in the following brief discussion.

For example, let us consider the economics perspective. Before the implementation of the National Economic Policy, there is a widespread belief in the masses, regardless of their religion, that they do not have control over the surrounding. They are fully immersed in nature and ultimately subservient to the whims of the unseen. They don't have control over the traditional factors of production - capital, entrepreneur, land and labor. More importantly, they do not even have control over themselves. To live to its entirety is to live according to nature and that means to accept things as it is- the equivalent of the  *and *Taqdir* – that each individual is only a insignificant manifestation of nature. Consequently, the natural thing to do is to live in harmony with nature, not stoically where reasoning defines what is rational and what is not, but in full submission to the occult forces.*

On the contrary, the Vision 2020 men do not see themselves succumbing to the mercy of the occult. If the factory is not profitable, it is not caused by any psychic forces. Rather, accountability goes to the manager himself. It is not the case of the carpenter blaming his tool; he has only himself to blame. From the Christian outlook, this is not unlike that of the Protestant ethics. If seen from the Islamic viewpoint, what will be emphasize is the *qadariyyah* school of thought, the view that 'in order for the world to change, it is man that has to change' stretched to the extreme. And from the values embedded in *wu wei*, a fundamental component of Daoism, man has to repeatedly practice solving a problem until it reaches perfection. All in all, man holds the key to his worldly salvation and not any super or supra natural being.

From the anthropological and sociological perspective, the pre-Vision 2020 man is not very interested in change, as much as in maintaining the *status quo*. The past defines the future; thus the future is not deterministic at all. On the contrary, the Vision 2020 man is more interested in the present and the future than the past chiefly

because the past is not changeable; what is done is done. It is the future that is important and man, by definition, is *the agent of change*. The Vision 2020 man is not interested in myths and legends, irrespective whether they are biblical or not. It is irrelevant that these stories might be true or false, what is relevant is that they are not changeable. Progress implicates moving forward or ‘moving on’. It is inherent in the future and it is plain impossible that one can progress backward. Thus the 2020 men are only interested in changeable events. The past, as they say, is certainly not the future. The future is the peak of the mountain. Confucius says one thousand steps begin from one step and for every high mountain, there is a higher mountain. We progress by climbing these mountains.

The future, in turn, cannot be understood if men do not have the capacity to explain and predict. This does not mean that Malaysians should adopt inductivism or positivism *per se*. The pre-Vision 2020 man explains phenomena by appealing to supernatural entities. The world out there is saturated with a multitude of ever powerful supernatural beings. The belief of the pre-Vision 2020 man is deeply entrenched in hermeneutics- there is not an iota of phenomena on earth which is not orchestrated by the heavens. The Vision 2020 man, on the contrary, views nature as a completely manageable entity. Man and his activities, as an integral part of nature, is likewise explainable and predictable. Human activities are transparent and can be understood in a naturalistic way. These explanations do not require a priori belief in the existence of super naturals. This is not to say that Vision 2020 men deny their existence at all; what they categorically deny is the relevance of the super naturals in explaining and predicting human successes or failures. Moreover, Vision 2020 men would believe that there is not a single human activity that can escape a naturalistic explanation. It is due to our ignorance that we fail to identify the natural causes and attribute it to the occult.

Just as the rising and setting of the sun is predictable, so is human conduct. According to Vision 2020, our inability to predict stem not from the existence of something mystical in man, but it is due mainly to our insufficient knowledge about human nature and this shortcoming can only be addressed through human effort. In short, while complete knowledge rest with God, Who is the Most Knowledgeable, man, through his effort, can reach the truth about itself. Is it not the case that man is the vice-gerent of God and is created in His image?

The epitome of Vision 2020 man is the unshaken faith in science. It is explicitly stated in the Vision that: “The sixth is the challenge of establishing a scientific and progressive society, a society that is innovative and forward looking, one that is not only a consumer of technology but also a contributor to the scientific and technological civilization of the future” (Mahathir Mohamad. 1992).

While the pre-Vision 2020 men have a very deep seated belief in religious tradition, where truth resides with the religious establishment, owned and prescribed by them, the industrialized men consider traditions as nothing more than social consensus. Truth is socially constructed, and man by definition is a social animal. Kuhn is right when he argues for the existence of paradigms and the most that man can do is to shift paradigm. While ascertaining progress is quite problematic for Kuhn because of the incompatibility of paradigm, the industrialized men believe that progress is indeed measurable- the Vision itself is the cornerstone as well as the yardstick for progress. Progress in turn is achieved when problems are solved scientifically and more importantly, the Vision 2020 man views science as a problem-solving activity, to the end of ‘*establishing a scientific and progressive society*’ quoted earlier . Science solves problems, be it economics, political, psychological, sociological, ethics, as well as religion.<sup>3</sup>

Due to its large scale impact on the society, neither is science monopolized nor dominated by any particular group of religious tradition. The advancement of science in Malaysia involves the whole sections of the society. According to Vision 2020, it should be a mass movement, a scientific awakening, with a single purpose of constructing an industrialized society. There is an irreversible transformation in their mind about the concept of change; it becomes an innate quest of life. Change is perceived as ‘to be alive’. Consequently, those who are not ready or *trying* to change, passively watching the wheels of life from a distance, are in fact acting unnaturally. To participate in change is to do an act that is in total conformity to human nature, while the passive act is one that violates human nature. It might be argued here that it is impossible for any human to act unnaturally since men *qua* men are natural being. Even

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<sup>3</sup> The argument that science is a problem solving activity is well known in the writing of Karl Popper. See for example his writings in Miller, D. (ed.) (1985). *Popper Selections*. Princeton: Princeton University Press

the most passive act springs from some motive in the individual, the agent of change, and if the agent is a human being, then the act must spring forth from something in human nature. In response to this argument, one can say that the view that to change is to act in conformity to human nature implies that every act done by a human being is a subset of change; passivity included. Passivity than is not 'not changing'- it is the 'absence of change'. Thus what is natural is change or in other words, change is more fundamental than passivity. Accordingly, to strive for change as explicitly stated in the Vision 2020 *i.e.* the quest for an industrialized society is perfectly in line with realizing 'the natural act'.

Where than is the place of religion or in more specific terms, how would religion facilitates this transition from an agro based Malaysian society to that of an industrial one? This is a significant question because the future of religious study, at least in Malaysia, hinges upon the perceived role of religion in constructing the society of Vision 2020. In order to answer this question, we must consider at least two religions in Malaysia, *i.e.*, Islam and Christianity.

The ethos of feudalism still encapsulates the Muslim Malay man on the street and moderation in everything is the absolute rule, rather than merely a fallible, regulative principle. This extreme conservative attitude is not strong enough to spur them for radical change in any direction. The received view, that Islam is moderation and moderation is Islam, is stretched to the maximum. This view is not unlike the popular Confucian doctrine that truth lies in the middle. It explains why Islam is perceived more as a philosophy, for a lack of better word, than a religion with comprehensive prescriptions.

Unlike the Malays who have formal religious institutions having judiciary and legislative power, Hindu, Buddhists and Christians alike, as it is, depend on their religious organizations for arbitrating religious matters. Each of these religions does not have a single, pervasive, monolithic trend. For example, the Shaityya is popular in Malaysia yet it does not have complete support from the Hindu masses. Similarly the Buddhist Mahayanas is loosely connected. Putting the differences aside, the common thing that they shared is that the content of their religious education, and with it religious studies, are very traditional. In addition to the theological aspect and the unending focus on ethics and morality, little if any is related to the mission of industrializing the country. The emphasis on these 'humanistic' aspects are carried over to the compulsory comparative religious course currently offered at the

institutes of higher learning. It is to this course that we will now turn to.

## COMPARATIVE RELIGIOUS COURSES

The Government has introduced a compulsory course on comparative civilization study entitled Islamic and Asian Civilization which has a religious component. The course stemmed from several preceding intellectual discourses, focusing on Civilization Dialogue, at the national and international levels. The realization of Vision 2020 is the overriding *raison d'être* of the course, with the following several minor objectives:

1. To examine civilization concepts from various perspectives
2. To address the students popular misunderstandings of Islam and other religions
3. To instill greater appreciation of world civilizations and to acknowledge the unique contributions of each
4. To expose to the students the similarities and differences of various worldviews
5. As a compulsory complementary course in order to avoid overspecialization. The students should not know more and more about less and less.

A course evaluation was carried out recently. Standard questionnaires were given and interviews were conducted to student leaders of each university taking into account the individual curriculum of the comparative religious course.<sup>4</sup> The outcome of the studies highlight two practical problems related to the future of comparative religious studies in the country. These are:

1. The religious content are quite superficial, it does not always reflect the deep underlying religious values. Accordingly the students are unable to internalize the philosophical dimensions of the various religions.
2. The course does not relate explicitly to problem-solving, what more of solving problems scientifically.

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<sup>4</sup> See *Laporan Kajian Program Pengajian Tamadun Islam dan Tamadun Asia di IPTA, UKM, 17 Julai 2000*

## TENTATIVE SOLUTION

The first problem stemmed from insufficient time allocated. First, there is simply not much material that can be covered in a 4 unit comparative course. What the students lose in depth they gain in breadth. So the only possible solution is by either increasing the number of units or simply offering higher level courses covering each religion. With respect to the first solution, it could not be easily carried out because of the minimum 100 unit requirement and the never ending emphasis on core courses by the faculties. The second solution posed another problem because a higher level course will just be classified as an elective. Not many students will take it because of its apparent non-commercial value.

In our opinion, more can be done with regard to the second problem. The key to the solution is by organically connecting science to religion, philosophically and historically that is, rather than merely presenting religion as a standard component of any civilization. The highlights of the comparative course would then be on religion, science and civilization instead of civilization or religion proper.

The philosophical treatment for the organic relationship between science and religion, in particular the relationship between scientific and religious problems in Chinese and Indian civilizations is yet to be constructed.<sup>5</sup> For the purpose of this paper, let us take two comparative cases from other civilizations as illustrations. They are deeply religious personalities yet their literary scientific contributions are undisputed. They are the scientists, Abu Raihan al-Biruni (942-1057A.D), and the icon of western science, Isaac Newton (1642-1727).

### *Abu Raihan al-Biruni*

Much has been written on al-Biruni but little have been said about his philosophy of problem solving and his views concerning the relationship between scientific and religious problems. Generally, al-Biruni believes that man can contemplate nature because man occupies a particular place in this world. He is at the center of the universe, the vice gerent of God. He is but the guardian of nature because man is a

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<sup>5</sup> Joseph Needham's *magnum opus* work on Chinese civilizations, for example, has shown without doubt the advancement of science in China. See also Helaine Selin, (ed.) (1997). *Encyclopedia of the History of Science, Technology and Medicine in Non-western Cultures* (for the development of science in India). Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers

reflection of God, a theomorphic image, whose purpose of existence in this world is to become an ‘integrated, complete man’ (*al-insan al-kamil*). As a matter of fact, philosophy to al-Biruni can be defined as “the striving to become as much as possible similar to God”<sup>6</sup> and *al-insan al-kamil* reflects all the Divine Names and Qualities, the highest station a man can be, after the fall from the edenic state (*al-insan al-qadim*). Al-Biruni’s act of starting his research in *Tahdid* by quoting the Quranic verse shows the importance of contemplation to him. Contemplation in Islam from the Quranic point of view is a kind of ‘knowledge that relates the knower to higher modes of being’.<sup>7</sup> The scientist who contemplates reminds himself of his origin and when he reaches the station of *ihsan*, he acts for the sake of God ‘without acting’ for even though he does not see God’ he is convinced that God sees him.

Meditating on nature involves contemplating the intracacies of nature and the divine prototypes. It means making nature an object of study, in such a manner that nature becomes a witness (*shahadah*) of the Divine Presence. When al-Biruni quotes the Quranic verse concerning ‘contemplating nature’, the contemplated nature is objectified. Nature is considered as an object to be studied, in order to achieve a unitized knowledge that can aid man to act upon nature, itself notwithstanding, and to climb the ladder of perfection using his ‘*aql*’. A unitized knowledge thus gained “integrates man with his own prototype as well as the prototype of Nature...” (S.H.Nasr 1975, 75)

The element of transcendence is evident in al-Biruni’s outlook of nature. One of the major postulates subscribed by al-Biruni is that God creates nature continuously through the Quranic injunction of ‘*kun fayakun*’. God’s continuous act of creation, however, does not mean that there is no ‘glimpse of permanence’ in nature. The repetition of the qualitative changing process of nature brought forth the appearance of eternity. Moreover, the repetition of particular problems in the history and philosophy of science attest to this element of permanency in nature. For examples, the relation of one to many, the mind/body problem, the problem of continuity and discontinuity of bodies were discussed during the time of Aristotle and even in the time of al-Biruni. The encounter of man’s mind with nature, more often than not, always

<sup>6</sup> See his *India*, Vol. 1, pp. 29-30. Cf. S.H. Nasr (1964). *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrine*, Cambridge, p.114

<sup>7</sup> For an excellent discussion on this topic, the reader can consult S.H.Nasr (1975). *Islam and the Plight of the Modern Man*. Kuala Lumpur, pp.68-77

focused on those problems. When men study and contemplate the seemingly permanent features of nature, man can explain and predict. There are universal laws of nature for man to understand for his own well being. Says al-Biruni: "I say further that man's instinct for knowledge has constantly urged him to probe the secrets of the unknown, and to explore in advance what his future conditions maybe, so that he can take the necessary precautions to ward off with fortitude the dangers and mishaps that may beset him."<sup>8</sup>

The laws of nature (*sunnatullah*) which in reality are "the laws of God" having different "degree of fundamentality and universality"<sup>9</sup> and to which al-Biruni warrants examination, is possible because of the appearance of permanency in it. There is an esoteric utility to religion in studying nature. According to al-Biruni, nature should not be studied for the sole purpose of earning a livelihood at the expense of the here after.

In brief, a scientist, to al-Biruni, does not solve a scientific problem simply for the sake of solving problem. He does not solve a problem because the problem ought to be solved since it is technologically possible to do so. His motive of solving problems is dominated by his consciousness of seeking God's pleasure, "that which yields Him satisfaction".<sup>10</sup> For example, in one of his book, *The Exhaustive treatise On Shadows*, we can see clearly the orientation of scientific problems expounded by al-Biruni. In studying shadows, not only did he analyze shadows of this world but also shadows in the hereafter! There is a 'revealed perspective' on scientific problems which the scientist should take into account. The scientist should always be mindful of the connection that problems have to this world and to the hereafter. The Holy Quran views the alternation of night and day, the lengthening of shadows, as signs of God that warrant examination in our quest of knowing Him, so that we will not be "blind to the realities of the life to come".<sup>11</sup> The science of astronomy to al-Biruni, for an example, has its origin from Prophet Idris.<sup>12</sup> These are examples of scientific problems enjoined solving in the Holy Quran and Sunnah that from al-Biruni's point of view, merit investigation.

<sup>8</sup> See his *Tahdid Nihayat al-Amakin*, p.5

<sup>9</sup> See Osman Bakar (1991). *Tawhid and Science: Essays on the History and Philosophy of Islamic Science*. Kuala Lumpur, pp.64-65

<sup>10</sup> See his *India*, Vol. II, p.246; and his *Exhaustive Treatise On Shadows*, p.2

<sup>11</sup> al-Biruni quotes the Quranic verse 17:72

<sup>12</sup> al-Biruni, *The Exhaustive Treatise on Shadows*, Vol. I, p.230

### *Isaac Newton*

“The whole burden of philosophy”, says Newton, “seems to consist in this: from the phenomena of motions to investigate the forces of nature, and then from these forces to demonstrate other phenomena”.<sup>13</sup> The scientific problems, from Newton’s view, are problems in natural philosophy about phenomena.

Throughout Newton’s scientific endeavor, it appears that these scientific problems<sup>14</sup> share some common and interesting traits. The most important of them all is that Newton’s scientific problems are problems which are shadowed by arguments about God. In more specific terms, scientific problems according to Newton are problems concerning nature belonging to that part of theology which is demonstrable. That God is central in his natural philosophy is clear. His discussion about God’s name and Attributes leads him to conclude:<sup>15</sup> “And thus more concerning God, to discourse of Whom from the appearances of things does certainly belong to natural philosophy.”

To give another example, he writes the following passage in his study of optics: “And these things being rightly dispatched, does it not appear from phenomena that there is a Being, incorporeal, living, intelligent, omnipresent,...And through every true step made in this philosophy brings us not immediately to the Knowledge of the First cause, yet it brings us nearer to it, and on that account is to be highly valued.”<sup>16</sup>

As a matter of fact, God is so crucial to his philosophy of science that he declares “When I wrote my treatise about our system (that is the *Principia*) I had an eye upon such principles as might work considering men for the belief of a deity”.<sup>17</sup> He even told Conduit that the *Principia* was written “to enforce and demonstrate the power and

<sup>13</sup> See Newton’s “Preface” to the first edition of the *Principia*, 8<sup>th</sup> May 1686. *Principia*. Motte Cajori, pp. xvii-xviii

<sup>14</sup> We have in mind problems treated in the *Principia*, *Opticks*, and in the practice of alchemy. For a sample of Newton’s work on alchemy, see Castillejo (1981). *Expanding Force*, pp.17-29

<sup>15</sup> See his General Scholium in *Principia*. Motte-Cajori, p.546

<sup>16</sup> See his *Opticks*, p.370

<sup>17</sup> See the first paragraph in his first Letter to Richard Bentley in *Opera Omnia* IV, p.429

superintendence of a supreme being".<sup>18</sup> If his scientific enterprise is overshadowed with discussions about God to the extent that theology and his 'natural philosophy' are amalgamated together, what more of his scientific problems!

His fervent belief in the connection between God and problems can also be seen in his view about problems and their solutions. God is simple for He is the One. Accordingly problems and the manner of solving them should portray simplicity. Says Newton: "As the world, which to the naked eye exhibits the greatest variety of objects, appears very simple in its internal constitution when surveyed by a philosophic understanding, and so much the simpler by how much the better it is understood, so it is in these visions. It is the perfection of God's works that they are all done with the greatest simplicity. He is the God of order and not of confusion. And therefore as they that would understand the frame of the world must endeavor to reduce their knowledge to all possible simplicity, so it must be in seeking to understand these visions."<sup>19</sup>

What I want to emphasize from the passage is the similarity of finding the solutions to problems. Solutions to problems should be based on the scientist's belief in the attributes of God (God of order and not of confusion). The scientist should assume that the problem needs to be tackle in an orderly fashion in order to arrive at the simplest solution.

In view of these passages, I claim that Newton construes scientific problems as problems that have solutions which would enhance the scientist's knowledge of the Deity. Furthermore, according to Newton, phenomena are not made up from the worlds of brute facts. It is not merely data resulting from sense observations such as the rising and setting of the sun. Rather 'phenomena' to Newton results from observing the sensible while analyzing and thinking about nature and God. As a matter of fact, the various planets and the Sun which Newton mentions in order to support his arguments about the Deity<sup>20</sup> constitutes the materials for Phenomenon I to IV of his *Principia*.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Keynes MS. 130 (6), University of Cambridge, King's College Library. See also Manuel (1968). *A Portrait*, p.417

<sup>19</sup> See Yahuda, MS. 1.1. See also Appendix A in Manuel (1974). *Religion...*, p.120

<sup>20</sup> See for example, Newton's first Letter to Richard Bentley dated 10<sup>th</sup> December 1692, in *Isaac Newton Papers and Letters on Natural Philosophy*, edited by I.B. Cohen, pp.286-287

<sup>21</sup> See his *Principia*. Motte-Cajori, pp.401-406

The above two cases are given in order to illustrate the view that there exist an organic relationship between scientific and religious problems, based on the belief that science is a problem-solving activity. This is not to deny that throughout history, religion and science, or natural philosophy as the case maybe, does not always exercise a symbiotic relationship. However it is adequate, for the purpose of the comparative religious course under review, to argue that religion and science can complement each other in the pursuit of national development.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

In order for any country to be industrialized, science must be organically link to all the fundamental fabrics of the society. Science must be one of the main agenda of the state and scientific thinking should be deeply ingrained in the people's mind. In retrospect, the comparative religious courses offered would not help promote Vision 2020 unless religion, as practiced in this pluralistic society, and science, are presented in an organic, harmonious way. This can be done by infusing scientific problems as religious problems, thereafter turning scientific endeavors as those which are religiously sanctioned. The real challenge in a multi religious country like Malaysia, as it were, is to utilize comparative religious courses in promoting science without making religion merely as a vehicle for the progress of science. Paraphrasing Galileo, although the Holy Ghost 'does not teach how the heavens go', solving religious problems does provide some insights of 'how to go to heaven', scientific or otherwise.

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**ARTE E FENOMENOLOGIA BRANCIUSIANA:  
“IL METODO PURAMENTE SCULTORIO DI  
PENSARE IL MONDO”  
(BRANCUSIAN ART AND PHENOMENOLOGY:  
“THE PURE SCULPTURAL METHOD OF  
THINKING OF THE WORLD”)**

**MANUELA TEODORA BALAŞCA-MIHOCI\***

**Abstract:** The entailing creative labour reveals works that imply the whole human thinking and sensitivity aiming to comprehend them. Thus, we can reach the great Brancusian art in understanding that, beyond the glance and the material, we find the spiritual; the last is not something untouchable, but it is a sort of co-partner of the creative life experience. Fear, love, pain, happiness, and ecstasy, all the human affinities and the substance of beingness are created by art and by philosophy alike. Merely their expression is different as concerning the material and the word. We find sameness between the capacity of communication using and feeling life through wood or rock, for example, on one hand; and the gift of putting in act and writing words, of interpreting verse, on the other. Such a similarity belongs to the unique creative agent, finally, that is varying only by the material and the expressive shape.

**Keywords:** archetype, reduction, „Imaginatio Creatrix”, hierophany, *Dies-dā*, transcending, simplicity.

**UN ARTISTA RUMENO PARLA AL MONDO**

*“La semplicità non è uno scopo nell’arte. Si arriva, involontariamente,  
alla semplicità, avvicinandosi dal senso reale delle cose ...  
Guardate le cose finché le vedete. Quelli accanto a Dio le hanno viste”.  
(Constantin Brâncuși)*

Dinanzi all’opera creativa l’anima umana vibra e sente come dinanzi ad una ricerca dell’infinito, cercando di identificarsi, di ritrovarsi in stati ed emozioni dei più ordinari e profondi. Le impressioni d’ordine estetico non offrono all’osservatore un altro

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\* Manuela Teodora Balașca-Mihoci is Ph.D. Bibliographer, “Gheorghe Asachi” Library, Jassy, Romania. E-mail: [mihoci\\_manuela@yahoo.de](mailto:mihoci_manuela@yahoo.de)

mondo ma un mondo come desidera lui, come lo sogna, in cui il soggetto, l'imitazione, l'espressione, l'idea sono sulle più alte cime dell'aspirazione. Se l'accesso all'essere puro gli è rifiutato, l'uomo s'innalza tramite la sua arte e il suo pensiero, come pure tramite la filosofia di essenza pura, verso un'esistenza ancora inaccessibile a lui. L'artista può creare spontaneamente o deliberatamente; nel primo caso si tratta dell'immaginazione, nel secondo della sua fantasia intesa a trasformare la realtà in maniera creativa.

L'esperienza di vita dell'artista è quella che combina e sintetizza, produce qualcosa di nuovo, dà nascita, crea, una cosa che prima non esisteva. Lui è chiamato per trasformare la realtà. L'uomo esiste da prima del pensiero, della filosofia, dell'arte, lui, quale creatore, si trova nel profondo di tutte le cose create da lui, ha cresciuto insieme alle proprie creazioni sistematizzandosi la volontà, istruendosi lo spirito, raffinandosi i gusti per il bello. L'unità del sentimento creativo è diventata un gene umano sempre più complesso, trasmesso alle generazioni che gli danno forme sempre più diverse però senza perdere dalla vista il mitico, l'arcaico, le fonti mistiche o specifiche nazionali, lo spirito delle nazioni.

L'opera di Constantin Brâncuși è un capolavoro che si vuole sempre scoperta e interpretata, lui non "ha parlato" ad una sola generazione, tramite l'immortalità del legno scolpito, il suo messaggio trascende le generazioni e condivide una credenza unica, quella nel lavoro elevato al rango di creazione. Tutti i temi maggiori della vita sono stati trattati dall'artista con la sensibilità caratteristica, se iniziamo con quelli dell'infanzia (*Testa di bambino*, *Nuovo nato*, *Primo Grido*); dell'amore (*Porta del Baccio*, *Il Baccio*, *Pietra di Frontiera*, il progetto *Il tempio dell'Amore*); del silenzio (*La Tavola del Silenzio. Sedie*); dell'innalzamento e del volo spirituale, della creazione e della terra (*Adamo ed Eva*, *La Saggezza della Terra*, *L'inizio del mondo*, *Nuovo Nato*); della preghiera e del volto di donna (*La principessa X*, *Mademoiselle Pogany*, *Donna guardandosi allo specchio*, *Donna di colore bionda*, *Torso di ragazza*,); dei motivi di animali simbolo (*Il Pesce*, *L'Uccello d'Oro*, *L'uccello nel cielo*, *L'Uccello nello spazio*, *Maiastra*, *Il Gallo*, *La Tartaruga Volante*, *Foca*, *Pinguini*, *Leda*), statu umani (*Il Sonno*, *Testa di bambino addormentato*, *La Musa addormentata*, *Il Figlio prodigo*, *La Preghiera*, *L'Orgoglio*, *Timidezza*, *Serenità* e altri lavori).

Da punto di vista culturale è più facile dire dove non s'inquadra Brâncuși, che da quale corrente culturale potrebbe far parte. Lui stesso

si è dichiarato uno spirito libero nell'atto creatore e sembra che le speculazioni sull'impressionismo, cubismo, surrealismo sono delle semplici opinioni non risolte teoreticamente, affermazioni senza un supporto oggetto-soggetto; ugualmente, l'influenza dell'arte nera su alcune delle sue opere; "Lionello Venturi, M. Seuphor, S. Cheney considerano che l'arte di Brâncuși è astratta, R.Cogniat che questa appartiene al barocco moderno, A. Chastel che Brâncuși è idealista e platonista, R.Stoll lo considera arcaico e P. Fierens considera che questo tocca la spiritualizzazione della materia"<sup>1</sup>. Su di lui, il critico Benjamin Fondane (Barbu Fundoianu) diceva: "vi direi che Brâncuși è fiamma se non penserei che è piuttosto un svegliatore della mattina....Accanto a lui, le ricerche di Picasso sembrano quelle di un pazzo furioso...I marmi del rumeno sembrano non esprimere l'umano o il quotidiano. Questi sono degli omaggi portati alle elevazioni di curve teneri di una materia incandescente...Brâncuși è un logico in piena combustione, che non è soddisfatto da nessuna luminosità ....tendendo sempre verso un ineffabile sempre più elevato"<sup>2</sup>.

Ricuperando l'arcaico e i suoi motivi, ritornandosi verso le origini e la struttura stabile della scultura, Brâncuși creava nel suo mondo, in quello delle sue idee e dell'ambiente da cui veniva; per lui, l'arcaico non rappresentava modello o simbolo appreso, ma proprio la sua esistenza di figlio di contadino lo rendeva conoscitore dall'interno del simbolo; "per Brâncuși il segno grafico, pitturale o il taglio in legno facevano parte dell'ambiente della propria esistenza; conosceva per loro dei sensi più larghi che il semplice effetto ornamentale che avrebbe impressionato altre persone, venite dal di fuori di questa civilizzazione"<sup>3</sup>.

Pierre de Boisdeffre affermava di alcune delle opere dell'artista rumeno: "Brâncuși ritrova...le linee esenziali dei primitivi dell'Africa e dell'Oceania, gettando così un ponte tra l'arte contemporanea, la scultura romana e i fetici. All'arte antropomorfica che ci hanno trasmesso i greci lui oppone una plastica adeguata al Cosmo, così come ce lo svela nello stesso tempo la scienza moderna e una natura ridata alla sua nudità originaria" (Grigorescu 1994, 10). Parlando della sua opera Il Baccio, Brâncuși dirà: "Ho desiderato infatti fare una cosa

<sup>1</sup> Ionel Jianu (2003). *Brâncuși*. Cuvânt înainte de Mircea Handoca. Traducere de Alexandra Rednic. Cluj-Napoca: Editura Dacia, p.19

<sup>2</sup> Vlaicu Ionescu (2001). *Brâncuși și transcendenta obiectivă*. Editura Semne și Liga pentru Unitatea românilor de pretutindeni, Anul Brâncuși, p.27

<sup>3</sup> Dan Grigorescu (1994). *Brâncuși și secolul său*. Bucharest: Editura Artemis, p.10

che ci rammenti non una sola coppia, ma tutte le coppie di persone che si sono mate e sono esistite sulla terra...perché ogni mio lavoro è generato da un tale sentimento interiore”<sup>4</sup>. Su alcune rappresentazioni di Brâncuși si è affermato: “ nelle opere di Brâncuși troviamo un dualismo chiaro proprio nell’atto della creazione, quello tra scultore e pietra; un dialogo tra due esseri viventi, che influiscono – anzi non, in un senso molto reale, veramente sente e scopre – la forma scolpita assoluta finale. Quando guardiamo *Il Baccio* possiamo facilmente scoprire, nelle orme di cesello non lavorate lasciate da Brâncuși dietro di lui, il cammino di questa scoperta”<sup>5</sup>.

La sostanza della tradizione popolare rumena appare dagli elementi nuovi dell’artista: la tendenza verso la purezza della forma, la semplificazione e la realizzazione dell’equilibrio tra ritmo e forma, una purezza speciale della forma, il capire dell’essenza di un’idea personale o collettiva e il suo passaggio dal reale al simbolo attraverso la sua universalizzazione e l’apertura verso nuovi universi di interpretazione. Mircea Elide dice: “Alcuni temi della nostra letteratura popolare sono veramente ricchi da punto di vista drammatico. Per esempio *La Porta* che compie nella vita del popolo rumeno il ruolo di una creatura magica, che veglia su tutti gli atti capitali della vita di una persona. Il primo passaggio per la porta significa quasi un’entrata nella vita, nella vita reale di fuori. *La porta* veglia sul matrimonio, e il defunto è portato attraverso la porta, solennemente, verso la sua tomba. Si tratta, in quel momento, di un ritorno nel primo mondo: il ciclo è chiuso, e la porta continua a rimanere, con una persona di meno, per vegliare altre nascite, altri matrimoni, altri decessi”<sup>6</sup>. Quelli che non l’hanno capito hanno affermato sulle sue sculture che hanno numerosi influssi greci, mediterranei, africani, precolombiani, daco-traci, però hanno dimenticato di guardare nella direzione della zona natale dell’autore, Hobița-Gorj, che gli ha offerto nella creazione la fonte della sua naturalezza. “La naturalità sembra a Constantin Brâncuși l’unico principio tramite il quale l’uomo delle epoche arcaiche ha potuto trovare e realizzare la sua presenza nel mondo e la perfetta integrazione tra cicli, storia e tempo. Mantenere intatta la naturalità

<sup>4</sup> Constantin Brâncuși, in Mircea Deac (1996). *Românul Brâncuși*. Sibiu: Editura Thausib, p.76

<sup>5</sup> David Lewis (2001). *Brâncuși*. Traducere de Nina Stănescu. Târgu-Jiu: Editura Fundației „Constantin Brâncuși”, p.25

<sup>6</sup> H. Cladovan (2008). *Permanente*. Nr.12/2003.

<http://fgmanu.net/cultura/brancusi1.htm> (accessed 10/05/2008)

attraverso tappe e strati storici avrebbe significato mantenere la memoria stessa dell’umanità, strutturata come un asse verticale di albero-colonna”<sup>7</sup>. La naturalità dell’arte brancusiana nasce infatti dalla sua visione di considerare il folklore rumeno quale simbolo della sua arte e di metterlo alla base della sua creazione artistica.

Mircea Eliade configurava il periodo storico della creazione brancusiana, sottolineando: “l’interiorizzazione e l’immersione nelle profondità facevano parte di fatti del Zeitgeist dell’inizio del XX secolo. Freud aveva appena definito la tecnica di esplorazione delle profondità dell’incosciente; Jung credeva di poter scendere anche più profondamente, in quello che lui chiamava l’incosciente collettivo; lo speleologa Emil Racoviță stava per edificare nella fauna delle caverne le fossili viventi, tanto più preziose quanto queste forme organiche non si fossilizzavano; Levy-Bruhl isolava nella mentalità primitiva del pensiero umano una fase arcaica, prelogica. (...) Brâncuși era per eccellenza contemporaneo con questa tendenza verso l’interiorizzazione e verso la ricerca delle profondità, contemporaneo con l’interesse appassionato per gli studi primitivi, preistorici e prerazionali della creatività umana. – Brâncuși si è immerso in ricerche senza fine, interrotte soltanto dalla sua morte.”<sup>8</sup>

Tutti i grandi artisti hanno guardato nella storia, hanno cercato il nuovo nell’arcaico, nel vetusto, però più che altri Brâncuși ha capito che in realtà “il viaggio nella realtà si svolge dentro di noi”<sup>9</sup>. Il ritorno verso le fonti è un ritorno nel sé e una nuova scoperta dei propri valori, interiori. Nell’atto creativo la parola arcaico ha una connotazione più speciale, non fa riferimento ad una forma di primitivismo, né a una patologica, ma si svolge nel piano dell’immagine interiore, propria dell’artista e del suo modo di capire e di creare poi un’opera. L’unicità e la particolarità dell’individuo sono nutriti incoscientemente dalla matrice stilistica culturale dalla quale fa parte o in cui vive come se fosse adottato. Tutto quello che l’ha circondato o che è entrato in relazione con lui lo influirà nell’atto creativo, tramite una concatenazione inimmaginabile, incluso le leggi non scritte della

<sup>7</sup> Constantin Zărnescu (1980). *Aforisme și texte de Brâncuși*. Craiova: Editura Serisul Românesc, pp. 220-221

<sup>8</sup> See Petru Comănescu, Mircea Eliade, Ionel Jianu (1997). *Mărturii despre Brâncuși*. Târgu Jiu: Editura Fundației Constantin Brâncuși, Colecția Brâncușiana, nr. 4

<sup>9</sup> Barbu Brezianu (1974). *Opera lui Constantin Brâncuși în România*. Bucharest: Editura Academiei RSR, p.171

natura, sopravvivenze, tanto di più i svolgimenti culturali di un'epoca o di un periodo, le norme collettive, gli studi e le letture fatte, le relazioni umane coltivate, la storia familiare, il rapportarsi a quello che lo circonda e la percezione della vita e delle sue fonti.

Per capire meglio il concetto d'archetipo nel caso dell'opera di Brâncuși, si deve capire l'unità interna di Brâncuși con gli elementi della natura: fuoco, acqua, aria, terra, ma anche con i materiali offerti dalla natura, il legno e la pietra, che ha sentito tanto vicini alla sua anima, che considerava degli esseri viventi e che modellava naturalmente dandole vita in una matrice (stile) personale, però appartenendo ad un profondo e complesso incosciente culturale universale. “Ognuna di queste categorie di ierofanìe cosmiche svela una struttura particolare della sacralità della natura, o, meglio detto, una modalità del sacro espressa tramite un modo specifico di esistenza nel Cosmo. Basta analizzare i vari valori religiosi riconosciuti delle pietre per capire ciò che le pietre, quali ierofanìe, possono mostrare alla gente, cioè la forza, la purità, la permanenza. L'ierofanìa della pietra è per eccellenza un'ontofanìa: prima di tutto, la pietra esiste, rimane sempre sé stessa, non cambia, impressiona l'uomo con quello che ha di irriducibile e assoluto, e così gli svela, per analogia, l'irriducibilità e l'assoluto dell'Essere. Percepito attraverso un'esperienza religiosa, il modo specifico di esistenza della pietra svela all'uomo ciò che significa un'esistenza assoluta, oltre il Tempo, non toccata dal diventare”<sup>10</sup>. L'ierofanìa, il mistero delle creazioni di Brâncuși, non ha soltanto peso religioso, ma è anche pienamente culturale, oscillando tra un mondo del sacro e uno profano. Dallo scultore rumeno non troviamo un mondo di simboli ma tipi di archetipi che svelano un'originalità che non è nuova, ma che è scoperta diversamente, che riceve un nuovo senso. “Tanto il simbolo è più arcaico e profondo ...tanto diventa più collettivo e universale (C.G.Jung). “Spiegare la significazione universale”, questo requisito formulato da Jung, non si può realizzare che intendendo per significazione universale una significazione archetipale; così, spiegare quest'ultimo senso, totale, rimane un sogno teoretico (astratto) che la realtà metodologica (concreta) non ha convalidato”<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> Mircea Eliade (1995). *Sacru și Profanul*. Traducere de Brândușa Prelipceanu. Bucharest: Editura Humanitas, p.83

<sup>11</sup> Dorin Ștefănescu (1994). *Hermeneutica sensului*. Bucharest: Editura Cartea Românească, p.126

Brâncuși portava nell'arte europea del suo tempo un archetipo universale conosciuto, però tuttavia nuovo, paradosso difficile da sostenere teoreticamente in assenza dell'opera d'arte. Le sue sculture dovevano essere guardate e ascoltate per essere capite, non si poteva parlare di loro in loro assenza; lui portava il folklore del suo paese e scopriva un mondo magico che interferiva con altre tradizioni culturali di altre zone del globo, che non erano sconosciute all'uomo, ma che sembravano rivelate per la prima volta. La morfologia delle sue opere è vista come un a priori del pensiero culturale universale ed è poi trasposta con originalità passando attraverso il folklore rumeno. La perennità dell'opera di Brâncuși è la prova che il suo autore ha superato il limite del tempo e il suo immaginario si è manifestato come una sete di Assoluto, di essere umano, ossessione propria dell'uomo arcaico che si spiegava la natura tramite il religioso e che dava all'universo una struttura e una coerenza simbolica secondo il proprio bisogno ontologico di dimensionamento dello spazio e del tempo. Spiegando Brâncuși con il linguaggio di Elide scopriamo una parte meno valorizzata, quella della fenomenologia della scultura brancusiana, fenomenologia che ha delle radici religiose, ma specialmente che produce una nuova forma di manifestazione e una nuova funzione culturale per il concetto di archetipo. Per funzione culturale del concetto di archetipo capisco un passaggio da un vetusto a qualcosa di nuovo, una nuova creazione in cui la materia prima adoperata riunisce il vecchio e il nuovo, e il simbolo nato mantiene misteriosamente la tradizione svelandosi tuttavia l'unicità e l'originalità.

Il dialogo tra Brâncuși e le sue opere è simile all'uomo semplice che si rivolge alla natura e la interroga; "nella cultura tradizionale la comunicazione accadeva tra uomo e natura - al livello della pratica primitiva, tra uomo e le rappresentazioni che si aveva fatto sui fenomeni naturali - al livello dei miti e dei riti (...). Il messaggio nell'atto di comunicazione è un intero strutturato, un sistema di segni"<sup>12</sup>. Ognuna delle sue opere può essere interpretata tramite il ricco mondo di simboli e specialmente tramite le similitudini con altre culture, le analogie di fonti nelle leggende popolari e nei costumi rumeni essendo normali. Secondo lo spirito degli esegeti di Brâncuși, le interpretazioni variano e sono molteplici.

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<sup>12</sup> Sergiu Al-George (1981). *Arhaic și universal*. Bucharest: Editura Eminescu, p.19

## SULLA FENOMENOLOGIA BRANCUSIANA

„L’arte non è un’evasione dalla realtà,  
ma un’entrata nella più vera realtà,  
forse la sola realtà vera”.  
(Constantin Brâncuși)

I primi a lanciare una dimensione filosofica sulla base delle sculture di Brâncuși sono stati Mircea Elide, Ionel Jianu e Petru Comănescu, verso l’anno 1967, cercando una direzione di interpretazione della trascendenza; la direzione sarà seguita da Adrian Petringenaru, Ion Mocioi, I.Pogorilovschi, con vari studi da punto di vista filosofico.

La dimensione Brâncuși, sintagma adoperato da Vlaicu Ionescu, mostra la profondità dello spirito rumeno di Parigi che s’innalza tramite le sue opere al di là dei cieli visti e scopre l’essenza della gioia della creazione nella semplicità. Dallo scultore rumeno Brâncuși è molto difficile separare la filosofia dall’arte, queste due devono essere comprese insieme com’essendo la vita stessa; in uno dei suoi aforismi affermava: “L’arte non è né moderna né vecchia – è Arte... Soltanto che il tempo perfeziona lo spirito umano, e lo spirito lo chiede lui stesso... L’arte rimane un mistero e una credenza. E, quando è fatto secondo una teoria, è falso. Ci dobbiamo liberare da noi stessi e da tutta l’impertinenza umana – soltanto così riusciamo a riscoprire il bello... Sento parlare oggi di vari correnti nell’arte. E’ un genere di babilonia universale. L’arte non si è svolto che nei gradi periodi religiosi (...) E tutto quello che si crea tramite la filosofia diventa gioia, pace, luce e libertà” (Comarnescu 1997, 118). E’ possibile che quest’afiorisma brancusiano abbia radici nella filosofia e nel pensiero di Milarepa (1038-1122), filosofo tibetano dalla cui ispirazione sembra che si è nutrito anche Brâncuși e che aveva quale fondamento il sintagma: “tutto ciò che è composto è effimero”. “Molti critici hanno nominato con un termine ampio la “filosofia” di Brâncuși, il legame con il panteismo della Romania rurale: profonda pietà davanti alle cose animate o non; desiderio ardente di rinunciare alla propria individualità per unirsi alla natura; fede nell’equilibrio cosmico onnipotente e onnipresente”<sup>13</sup>. “Arte della purezza, della serenità, della semplicità e

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<sup>13</sup> Edith Balas (1998). *Brâncuși și tradițiile populare românești*. Traducere de Sorana Georgescu-Gorjan, Târgu-Jiu: Editura Fundației Constantin Brâncuși, p.29

della sintesi, arte delle essenze e della spiritualità, dei segreti della lingua e della poesia, la scultura di Brâncuși esprime una delle più profonde aspirazioni dell'anima rumena di scoprire e di mostrare a tutto l'universo la meraviglia della vita” (Jianu 2003,15).

Non si deve dimenticare che in quei tempi storici Edmund Husserl concepiva la teoria fenomenologica tra gli anni 1901 e 1913, che nello stesso periodo nasceva il cubismo, che Picasso cercava di trasformare la tridimensionalità percettiva del corpo ricostruendo la realtà secondo le proprie regole e che il talento di Brâncuși cercava una strada e conosceva dall'anno 1907 la sua gloria quale artista, prima di tutto accanto a Rodin, poi, verso l'anno 1920, da solo. Le influenze di pensiero culturale non possono passar inosservate da un artista, e la fenomenologia, anche se non nella sua forma teorica, può essere un lato d'influenza nella direzione d'altri artisti. Il ruolo della fenomenologia è di capire l'essenza e le strutture dei fenomeni religiosi, di interpretare il senso d'ogni ierofania e poi di trasmettere il contenuto rivelato e la significazione religiosa, pensa Julien Ries. Qualsiasi cosa che è esistita o che esiste può essere un ricettacolo del sacro: in definitiva, noi non sapevamo se esisteva qualcosa – oggetto, gesto, funzione fisiologica o gioco ecc. – che non fosse mai stato trasfigurato in ierofania, ad un momento, durante la storia dell'umanità. Nello stesso modo possiamo pensare sull'opera di Brâncuși. La sua concezione era grandiosa perché profonda, semplice perché autentica. Era vera perché aveva l'origine nella fonte stessa della vita. “L'arte di Brâncuși poteva esser definita come un metodo puramente scultoreo di pensare il mondo”<sup>14</sup>. In altre parole l'artista rumeno ci mette alla frontiera tra materiale e spirituale e ci lascia pensare cosa ha desiderato ridare tramite la materia e qual è lo spirito dell'oggetto proposto alla vista. “Con Brâncuși siamo al limite estremo della purezza. La contentezza che proviamo davanti alla sua arte è di un'essenza così materiale, che, anche se è dovuta ai sensi, portiamo le lodi allo spirito”<sup>15</sup>.

In quanto alla fenomenologia della scultura di Brâncuși è difficile dire se ha modellato la materia o l'essenza, se possiamo guardare il fenomeno o il suo specchio; “Brâncuși vedeva nell'arte la possibilità d'incrocio tra le forme percettibili e la realtà essenziale, tra lo spazio

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<sup>14</sup> Eugen Ionescu (1992). *Note și contranote*. Bucharest: Editura Humanitas, p.265

<sup>15</sup> Paul Morand (1998). „Brâncuși”, in *Dacia Literară*, Anul IX nr. 30 (3). Jassy, p.5

interiore e quello esteriore all'oggetto. Il potere esplosivo del volume chiuso, che determina silenzio, concentrazione, contemplazione, meditazione, attraverso l'uso di un minimo di accenti, diventa in maniera veritabile il veicolo dello spirito. L'incommensurabile e l'atemporale sono diretti in questo modo verso le forme primordiali, capaci di esprimere l'essenza delle cose, degli esseri e dell'universo. L'artista stesso diceva che non la forma esteriore è reale, ma l'essenza delle cose" (Deac 1996, 15). E' riuscito ad arrivare a quell'essenza attraverso la semplicità delle cose create perché quello che lui trasmetteva non era al primo sguardo dell'occhio umano quello che ci aspettiamo di vedere, ma le linee semplici, chiare e dirette ci lasciano indovinare l'idea che si trova dietro l'oggetto fisico. La realtà concettuale prende il posto dell'oggetto reale così come lo pensiamo esistere nella natura e sembra aprire un nuovo mondo possibile, quello del concetto trasmesso tramite la nuova forma dell'oggetto.

L'arte di Brâncuși può essere denominata concettuale nella misura in cui lui trasmette l'idea di "pesce" per esempio, e non il pesce reale così come lo conosciamo dalla natura. La percezione sull'oggetto dell'arte si fa non tramite la realtà della rappresentazione, ma tramite l'idea della rappresentazione. Brâncuși è riuscito a trasmettere il senso dell'intenzione della sua idea nell'oggetto ottenuto in seguito alla creazione, una nuova realtà aperta allo sguardo ma chiusa in qualche modo alla comprensione diretta. Davanti alle opere di Brâncuși siamo come in una realtà d'idee trasposte attraverso la materia, idee pensate, e non si tratta di quelle generalmente umane, ma di quelle che si trovano dietro la realtà conosciuta dal quotidiano. Cercandosi la propria verità, l'autore rumeno dà nascita ad un suo mondo ideatico, superando la linea tra la realtà comune, quella delle idee comuni, plasmando infatti una propria rappresentazione. Visivamente, le opere brancusiane non dicono dalla prima volta che cosa contiene il piano della realtà, e tuttavia non lo nascondono; sono delle opere che chiedano di essere pensate e riconosciute da punto di vista simbolico attraverso quello che vogliono trasmettere. Brâncuși unisce la realtà di base alla realtà percettiva e crea una nuova realtà, una realtà in sé stessa, che prende dall'oggetto della natura soltanto l'essenza trasmessa per linee, cerchi e zigzag. Brâncuși offre un nuovo linguaggio visivo della natura, prelevando dall'oggetto reale soltanto il contorno e l'essenza, però in una nuova forma.

Un conoscitore brancusiano, Vlaicu Ionescu affermava che: "il meravigliarsi del bambino è fenomenologico, il meravigliarsi di

Brâncuși è metafisico. Il bambino rimane ingenuo anche nella sua concezione sul mondo e nella tecnica di trasmettere. Un artista come Brâncuși non ha niente d'ingenuo, né nella concezione, né nella trasmissione. La purezza e la semplicità sono delle finalità raggiunte in seguito ad un lungo processo d'ascesi interiore, di separazione graduale dal mondo degli incidenti, dei fenomeni. Il numero delle varianti dello stesso tema lo dimostra chiaramente. Potremmo dunque concludere che l'avvicinamento che si fa tra la visione di Brâncuși e la mentalità del bambino non ci aiuta troppo per stabilire il valore e l'unicità del grande artista” (Ionescu 2001, 15).

Grazie alla complessità dell’opera brancusiana siamo tenuti ad accettare tanto l’avvicinamento metafisico quanto quel fenomenologico; dallo scultore rumeno questi non si escludono, ma si chiedono l’uno l’altro, sono soltanto due vie diverse di raggiungere l’essenza dell’oggetto avuto in vista. Per il vocabolario visivo brancusiano accettiamo la metafisica perché spiega lo trascendere dell’oggetto reale; per la spiegazione concettuale delle essenze abbiamo bisogno del riconoscimento fenomenologico-trascedentale delle sue opere finali. “Gli occhi” della scultura *Mademoiselle Pogany* per esempio, sono una rappresentazione attraverso tratti concettuali, loro dicono più che mostrano, e questo è il nucleo delle opere brancusiane, oltre al trascendere dei mondi metafisicamente. Possiamo considerare Brâncuși un metafisico soltanto se consideriamo le sue opere dal punto di vista di un *topos* culturale; per il resto parliamo di una fenomenologia brancusiana, ancora non spiegata al pubblico. La ricostruzione della realtà secondo le regole di Brâncuși, soltanto da lui comprese, prova che ci ha legato l’idea del lavoro fisico, più semplificata, che in un mondo già costruito dall’autore, che noi, in termini moderni, chiamiamo mondo concettuale, però lui non ha creato il concetto di foca per esempio, ma ha trasmesso la sua essenza in un materiale e le sue rotondità, la forma del corpo, in una nuova realtà che coesiste con il mondo reale stesso delle foche. Lui non si è distaccato dalla natura, soltanto l’ha rappresentato in maniera semplificata, secondo la realtà dell’essenza che ha capito nell’idea.

L’attività creatrice non ha fatto l’oggetto delle ricerche fenomenologiche di Edmund Husserl, però la teoria fenomenologica husseriana può essere modellata sull’opera brancusiana specialmente sulla direzione proposta da Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka con la sua fenomenologia della vita; abbiamo promosso l’idea di fenomenologia brancusiana specialmente perché l’atto di intenzionalità proprio alla

mente umana, dibattito dal filosofa tedesco, si può adattare e interpretare agli atti creativi brancusiani, anche evitando il psicologico. In Husserl, la fenomenologia è lo studio dei noemata; nel mondo della fenomenologia si considera che ogni persona ha una fantasia personale che la trasmette per mezzo della creazione nel mondo reale e diventa un mondo dell'esperienza per tutti. Similmente accade con l'arte brancusiana, che è una manifestazione dell'immagine del modo in cui l'uomo Brâncuși si rapporta al mondo e alla natura, non per mezzo dell'apparenza ma per la sua creazione reale che ha il merito di trasmettere delle essenze. Il Fenomeno come qualcosa che appare è un fenomeno soggettivo così come lo è anche qualsiasi altra forma di comprensione che lo segue; proprio perciò la validità oggettiva della conoscenza diventa problematica e qui interviene la filosofia sotto la forma della critica del conoscere che propone dei metodi di lavoro e di approccio dell'opera di un artista.

Molto più vicino a questa posizione fenomenologica può essere vista la fenomenologia della vita dell'autrice Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, la quale, nel lavoro *Logos and Life*, promuove il sintagma “*Imaginatio Creatrix*” – “Immaginazione Creatrice”, il senso dell'immaginazione essendo considerato una matrice creativa della vita. In Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka la creatività umana conosce un punto d'identità con la condizione stessa dell'essere umano; il valore della creazione umana è anche il punto individuale di comprensione della razionalità della vita, punto che può conseguire una moltitudine di sensi e direzioni dell'arte, secondo l'espressione attribuita. Brâncuși quale artista individuale ha svolto la sua propria matrice creativa adoperando gli schemi e le visioni da lui conosciuti, dissociando e associando nel pensiero le sue conoscenze culturali, che hanno generato una nuova forma culturale e hanno convertito i valori universali, particularizzandoli in opere brancusiane originali; *Phenomenology of Life* offre modi adeguati di spiegazione delle profondità della vita per mezzo di esperienze particolari”<sup>16</sup>, ciò che crediamo aver realizzato anche l'autore rumeno per mezzo dell'esperienza della sua vita – la creazione scultorea. “*Imaginatio Creatrix*” – “Immaginazione Creatrice” diventa il nucleo razionale dell'artista che si esteriorizza nella propria creazione, che si manifesta l'immaginazione e la spiega alla realtà già esistente che si lascia

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<sup>16</sup> Carmen Cozma (2007). *On Ethical in the Phenomenology of Life*. Roma: Edizioni Eucos, p.37

trasformata in una nuova matrice. Qui è il punto d'incontro tra la creazione umana e l'esistenza razionale stessa di quello che crea, il suo modo di spiegare il suo mondo interiore che si offre all'esteriore. La produzione culturale umana ha lo scopo di unire mondi possibili, di svelare inter-soggettività, di portare nel mondo reale un mondo dell'immaginazione o della fantasma propria dell'artista, di lavorare sullo sfondo esistente materialmente nuove forme dello spirito creatore.

Anche se ognuno di noi capisce un'opera al livello del suo intelletto, questa è svelata nella sua essenza soltanto dal critico, che spiega la ragione dalla quale ha cominciato l'artista, i legami spirituali tra il sé dell'artista e il suo modo di manifestazione, l'intuizione creatrice e il suo volto nascosto; il critico estrae dall'opera ciò che l'artista ha coperto inizialmente tra simbolico e metaforico. E' un travaglio simile a ciò che considera Cassirer sull'arte, vista come un sistema di simboli parallelo con il mito, la religione e la filosofia, per mezzo del quale si arriva alla conoscenza, ma che è tuttavia altra cosa che arte. Sempre parallelo con questi pensa anche il critico nel suo lavoro di svelare, però entrando nelle essenze dell'arte e munendo con il soggettivismo proprio un'opera trasmessa al mondo, cercando sempre una migliore comprensione. "Qualsiasi sentimento intellettivo e qualsiasi sentimento in generale, visto che si realizza come tale, può diventare l'oggetto di una intuizione e di una comprensibilità pura, e, in questa intuizione il sentimento è una cosa data assoluta. Questo sentimento ci è dato come qualcosa di esistente, come un *Dies-da* (un fatto concreto) dalla cui esistenza non ha nessun senso dubitarne"<sup>17</sup>.

In questo modo il piano ideatico di Husserl e il piano artistico della scultura di Brâncuși s'incontrano nell'opera finale dello scultore perché il rumeno ha saputo scoprire l'idea e il generale in quel posto dove l'uomo comune vede soltanto il particolare isolato in un oggetto; "...se vogliamo giungere all'arte di Brâncuși allora cerchiamo, oltre quello che appare, il fenomeno (in senso fenomenologico), come qualcosa di irriduttibile, l'esistenza dell'opera oltre la disposizione nello spazio (fisico), così che possiamo affermare: *La Porta del Baccio* non è una porta, *La Colonna senza fine* non è una colonna, *La Tavola del Silenzio* non è una tavola, ecc. Domandiamo cosa avrebbe risposto

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<sup>17</sup> Edmund Husserl (2002). *Ideea de fenomenologie și alte scrieri filosofice*. Ediție, traducere, note, comentarii și postfață de Alexandru Boboc. Cluj-Napoca: Editura Grinta, p.47

Brâncuși alla domanda: cosa vedi oltre questa porta, oltre questa colonna, oltre questa tavola? Perché queste sembrano essere insieme con quello che le circonda, con queste e con noi, e tuttavia sono....nell'arte”<sup>18</sup>.

La testimonianza eloquente del suo pensiero in connessione con quello che s'intende oggi per fenomenologia è comunicata per mezzo delle seguenti frasi appartenenti allo scultore rumeno: “dare la sensazione del reale proprio come ce la dà la natura, senza ridurre o imitare, questo è il gran problema attuale dell'arte. Creare un oggetto che per mezzo del proprio organismo esprimi ciò che la natura esprime per mezzo della sua organizzazione eterna”, lo stesso pensiero trasmesso: “l'arte deve introdursi nello spirito della natura e a suo turno deve concepire come lo fa la natura”<sup>19</sup>.

Il metodo fenomenologico husserliano propone tre tappe: la riduzione fenomenologica (tramite la quale l'oggetto arriva ad esistere come oggetto della coscienza), la riduzione eidetica (di intuizione dell'essenza) e la riduzione trascendentale (in seguito alla quale l'io si scopre come io puro). Brâncuși ha adoperato le prime due tappe di quello che chiamiamo fenomenologia, gli oggetti non essendo percepiti da lui con le loro determinazioni naturali ma quali oggetti della sua coscienza. Di fatti questa cosa è propria a tutti i grandi artisti, ai geni che hanno provato di trasmettere per mezzo della loro arte le essenze di ciò che l'uomo comune guarda in stato naturale. Loro hanno guardato oltre la materia e hanno provato di svelare un'altra visione sul mondo, realizzando la riduzione fenomenologica del materiale greggio e, per mezzo della riduzione eidetica, dando nascita ad un nuovo oggetto, l'idea di una nuova essenza. “Per mezzo delle produzioni culturali la vita umana manifesta una riorganizzazione essenziale nella libera creatività delle possibilità esistenti nel mondo”<sup>20</sup>.

Le opere di Brâncuși si rivolgono tanto all'intelletto quanto al sentimento, stimolano le emozioni del ricettore e nello stesso tempo innalzano spiritualmente. “Vivere nell'assoluto significa creare

<sup>18</sup> Alexandru Boboc (2001). „Brâncuși, arta modernă și fenomenologia” in Ion Pogorilovschi (coord.). *Brâncuși, artist-filosof*. Târgu-Jiu: Editura Fundației Constantin Brâncuși, p.24

<sup>19</sup> Ion Pogorilovschi (2000). *Brâncușiana și Brâncușiana*. Bucharest: Editura Eminescu, pp.154-155

<sup>20</sup> Gary Backhaus (2001). “Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka: The Trajectory of her Thought from Eidetic Phenomenology to the Phenomenology of Life”, in *Phenomenological Inquiry*, XXV, Watertown, MA: Evans & Faulkner, Inc. , p.38

anonimamente, essere impersonale, collettivo. Sappiamo da quanto abbiamo scoperto fin qui che un'arte toccata dall'aspirazione all'assoluto, affinché non rimanga una semplice apparizione di superficie, dev'avere le sue corrispondenze nelle altre manifestazioni della vita umana”<sup>21</sup>. Pensiamo che Brâncuși sia riuscito, ugualmente al Grande Anonimo di Blaga, a creare uno spirito visionario, per un mondo in movimento e trasformazione, riunendo il nucleo della vita in un superamento trascendentale, rovesciando il mondo della materia in una nuova realtà di forme in movimento. Brâncuși affermava su di sé: “Io ho fatto la pietra cantare – per l’Umanità”; la prova che il loro suono ancora risuona la troviamo soltanto se conosciamo l’arte di ascoltare.

Lo scultore rumeno Brâncuși è riuscito non soltanto ad essere il formatore della propria vita, creatore e conservatore dei valori umani, ma ha raggiunto le cime della creazione umana, adempiendo un dovere complesso: “incrociare i sensi estetici e intellettivi attraverso l’Imaginatio Creatrix (...) superare i limiti d’esistenza, dare all’uomo la forza dell’essere umano, quel senso di essere Custode-di-tutto-quello-che-è-vivente”<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> Lucian Blaga (1924). „Către o nouă metafizică”, in Lucian Blaga (1986). *Zări și etape*. Bucharest: Editura pentru Literatură, pp.75-77

<sup>22</sup> Carmen Cozma (2004). *Around the Aretiological Challenge of the “Ontopoiesis of Life”*, in Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (ed.). *Imaginatio Creatrix. The Pivotal Force of the Genesis / Ontopoiesis of Human Life and Reality*. Analecta Husserliana, volume LXXXIII. Dordrecht / Boston / London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, p.8

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