

THE FORBIDDEN PATH OF LATE GREEK THINKING.
MEONTOLOGY AND MEONTOLOGICAL DIFFERENCE
IN DAMASCIUS' *DE PRINCIPIIS*

CORNEL-FLORIN MORARU

Abstract. This essay aims at revealing the meontological foundations of late neoplatonic thinking in the ineffable, yet unsurpassable, difference between the first principle and the ontological and ontic domains it originates from. This line of thinking, explicitly “forbidden” by the Greek philosopher Parmenides, can give us a hint on how we can study the non-judicative experiences of everyday life in a philosophical manner that uses the idea of “meontological difference”. I will argue that the concept of “meontological difference”, as it can be drawn out from the writings of Damascius, provides us with the possibility of interpreting the ineffable and the unknowable, in connection with a pre-existing conceptual context.

Keywords: Damascius, meontology, non-judicative, ineffable, epistemology, pre-judicative hermeneutics.

Early in the presocratic period, Parmenides imposed one of the most drastic interdictions in the history of philosophy: the interdiction – *ἄνωγα*¹, in the presocratic text, or *ἀπόρησις*, as Plato describes it in *The Sophist*² – to follow the meontological³ path in search of the *principle of all things*. But this interdiction did not last long because of the Greek philosophers' curiosity and the needs of the philosophical research: a series of theoretical needs drove Plato to proclaim a *parricide*⁴ against his philosophical “father” and “mentor”. At a closer look though, Plato's act of impiety was not that radical because, as stated in the above

¹ Parmenides, DK B, 6.

² Plato, *The Sophist*, 258c.

³ Meontology, as the word's etymology suggests, is the philosophical discourse on non-being. We will be using this term in a broad sense, which also includes phenomena such as the non-judicative, the ineffable, the nothingness, etc.

⁴ Cf. Plato, *The Sophist*, 241c.

Cornel-Florin Moraru ✉

National University of Arts, București, Romania;
e-mail: cornelmoraru@gmail.com

mentioned dialogue, non-Being is not an “absolute” concept, but a “relative” one⁵. For him, the Being is essentially intertwined with non-Being and thus the latter also gains some kind of essence. This is why Plato did not actually walk the forbidden meontological path of philosophy. Rather, he took a quick peek at it from an ontological standpoint. He did not try to grasp the nothingness (τὸ οὐδέν, τὸ μηδέν) *per se*. Instead, he pointed out to the tight relation that exists between Being and non-Being on a basis of dialectical analysis of the *negation* and *negative predication*.

His successors though, the neoplatonists, explored this path in a much more systematic way and asked the question of non-Being in a more radical manner. This effort led them to the transformation of Greek philosophy itself. The question of non-Being or of the supra-essential (ὑπερούσιος⁶) nature of ideas like *One*, *Good* or *Beautiful* became a *locus communis* in the philosophy of Plotin, Proclus and Iamblichos. However, it wasn't until the late fifth century AD, when Damascius stepped on the meontological path in a methodologically rigorous manner, that the question of the nature of the *nothingness* itself (τὸ οὐδέν) got explicitly asked. He took Parmenides' interdiction (ἀπόρησις) and transformed it into a methodological tool to revitalise the aporetic tradition of philosophical research that stretches back to Socrates' times. Thus, at the dusk of Greek thought in the Hellenistic period, when the philosophical discourse became eclectic and more dogmatic than ever⁷, the question of the *principle of all things* became prominent again, just like in the presocratic period. This time though, the effort was made in an attempt to save the platonic aporetic thinking from dialogues such as *Parmenides*. Such an enterprise led to the exploration of the most extreme consequences of the platonic tradition and to a series of new methodological and theoretical innovations, which reveal a new conception of the nature of philosophical research.

My thesis is that, in doing so, Damascius “discovered” or “invented”⁸ a new kind of difference, which engulfs the ontological difference between Being and beings and offers new grounds for philosophical thought. The “meontological difference” is that between the *radical principle of all things and the realms which emanate from it*. This *first principle*, which for Damascius is *the nothingness* (τὸ οὐδέν), “gives birth” to both ontological and ontic realms and, thus, differentiates itself from both Being (essences, ideas, categories etc.) and concrete, individual

⁵ Plato, *The Sophist*, 241a.

⁶ Proclus, *Theologia Platonica*, 3, 21.

⁷ “...the *Peri Archon* is of great importance for the history of Neoplatonism because it shows how deeply felt was the critique of discursivity within this tradition, despite its seemingly positivistic conceptions. The aporetic method of Damascius subverts the metaphysical ambitions of his tradition insofar as they threaten to abandon the search for wisdom in favor of a complacent dogmatism.” (Sara Rappé, *Reading Neo-Platonism. Non-Discursive Thinking in the Texts of Plotin, Proclus and Damascius*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007, p. 203).

⁸ Both words fit the description: we could say that the “meontological difference” was “discovered” because the meontological discourse was a latent possibility of Greek philosophy ever since its beginnings; on the other hand, it was “invented” because only in Damascius' thinking this difference became operational as a methodological tool.

beings. The result of the systematic incorporation of this meontological difference into philosophical thinking constitutes a shift of the standpoint from which we understand rationality. This will provide us with a different, more flexible kind of logic, which ought to better our understanding on the problem of non-judicative experiences. I will argue that this form of rationality could also provide a better theoretical model that enables us to understand the inherent ineffability and incognoscibility of every single form of existence we experience in the world. Although this late neo-platonic way of thinking did not gain too much attention in the history of philosophy, the hints drawn from Damascius' texts concerning the meontological difference could also form the basis for developing new tools of exploration in contemporary domains of philosophical research, such as radical or pre-judicative hermeneutics and meontology.

§1. DAMASCIUS' APORETIC METHOD AND THE ΠΕΡΙΤΡΟΠΗ OF THE ΛΟΓΟΣ

As I have already suggested, Damascius applied the “aporetical” research method to the ἀπόρρησις of the parmenidian poem and walked the forbidden path of “the nothingness”. He did so by taking what is called the “turning-around” or “retorsion” (περιτροπή) of the discourse as a guiding sign, to reach the “unspoken consent” (ἡ τὴν ἄρρητον συναίσθησις)⁹ of the Ineffable. According to the Greek philosopher, the language itself must be transformed to accustom the meontological discourse, along with the rules of logic. In the case of the first absolute principle, our words do not point out to an ontic entity outside of our consciousness and neither to an intelligible entity in our mind. Therefore our sentences do not constitute themselves as forms of *onto-linguistic synthesis*¹⁰, as they do in the Aristotelian logic. The concept of truth as “correspondence” cannot be invoked anymore. In other words, the logic of the meontological discourse about the first principle does not rely itself on propositional or judicative truth, but on a more primordial, “intuitive” truth whose properties are yet to be determined. In this situation, all our common theoretical tools *fail* and all our axiomatic conventions *deceive* us.

When we are uttering a sentence “about” the nothingness, our propositions cannot signify *nothingness* itself, but only our relation towards something that our discourse and our intellect cannot grasp properly or cannot grasp at all. Instead of referring to a generic object, the discourse “turns-around” and gets trapped in its

⁹ “ἀνεθιστέον τὰς ἐν ἡμῖν ἀρρήτους ὠδῖνας, εἰς τὴν ἄρρητον οὐκ οἶδα ὅπως εἶπω συναίσθησιν τῆς ὑπερρφάνου ταύτης ἀληθείας” (Damascius, *De principiis*, I, 5). In this essay, I will be referring to the Greek text in concordance to the Ruelle edition (Cf. Damascius, *De principiis*, ed. C.É. Ruelle, vol. 1, Klincksieck, Paris, 1889).

¹⁰ Cf. Viorel Cernica, *Judecată și timp. Fenomenologia judicativului / Time and Judgement. The Phenomenology of the Pre-judicative*, Institutul European, Iași, 2013, p. 59 sqq.

own milieu of concepts that contradict themselves forming various series of paradoxes. As a consequence, the language conceived as a system of signification becomes self-contradictory and leads us to a series of apories that become more and more radical as we get closer to the first and ineffable principle of all things.

It is worth noting there are three kinds of *περιτροπή* that Damascius warns us about: there is a retorsion of the arguments, a retorsion of the discourse itself and a retorsion of thinking in general¹¹. The first two kinds of retorsion pertain to the realms of logic and language indicating the fact that, for grasping the first principle, we need new kinds of arguments and a new kind of grammar or syntax of the language that constitute our thoughts. In order to incorporate the discourse about nothingness, the basic assumptions of logic and linguistics must be revised and reinterpreted. These two tasks – the reformation of the traditional system of logic and of the grammatical/syntactical rules of our everyday discourse – are perfectly achievable, although not in a simple and easy manner, but through a fundamental rethinking of what “language” and “truth” in general mean and how they function in relation to “meontological objects”. The third retorsion, on the other hand, cannot be surpassed in this way because it indicates a constitutive incapacity of our intellect to grasp the nothingness *as* nothingness. In other words, the retorsion of thinking indicates the elementary “hypostatic” nature of human knowledge.

The reason for this third and most radical *περιτροπή* is that the highest faculty of knowledge according to ancient Greek philosophy, the *νοῦς*, which is some kind of direct intellectual and non-discursive intuition of the object, introduces a duality between the knower and the known object that is not present in the higher realms of the neoplatonic cosmos. The ideas of One and Unified are both “meontological” concepts in the sense that they both are situated “above” Being. The reason for this architectural hierarchy of ideas is that the Being itself must be *one* and must have the power to *unify* the different ontic entities into a single whole. So, it must take part in Oneness and Unity. These two ideas are somehow ineffable, just like the nothingness itself, which means that the epistemological duality that characterizes our capacities of knowing must be surpassed somehow to grasp them. In facing these (non)entities, our powers of thinking collapse and our thoughts divagate, being unable to form a coherent meaning. Or, if they make some sense at all, they implicitly interpret and distort the non-constitutivity of the first principle. This is the reason why, the retorsion of thinking cannot be surpassed by means of rethinking the tools with which we think – as in the former cases – but could be accomplished only through a kind of non-noetic and non-discursive faculty of knowledge.

For Damascius, the only way to surpass this last kind of retorsion is through the *unspoken consent*, which takes the *turning-around* of logic, discourse and

¹¹ Cf. Carole Metry-Tresson, *L'aporie ou l'expérience des limites de la pensée dans le Péri Archon de Damaskios*, Brill, Leiden, 2012, pp. 38–39.

thinking as a sign for some kind of “unreachable” and un-constituted object that transgresses the duality of our highest knowledge capacity. In consequence, the *περιτροπή* reveals itself to be the discursive attempt through which we try to explain a holistic experience in dualistic terms. This is the way in which a non-judicative experience enters the realm of discursivity and propositional truth – or the realm of the “judicative”. In this specific sense, every discourse about the first principle, the One and the Unified, are not fully judicative endeavours, but pre-judicative ones, which do not perfectly fit the rigours of noetic rationality. Thus, aporetic thinking is linked to the “outermost limit” of the *λόγος* and, when viewed under the rigours of traditional logical analysis, is a peculiar kind of pre-judicative thinking manifesting what will prove itself to be another form of rationality.

The impossibility to imprint a holistic, non-judicative, experience into the dualistic form of our knowledge and expression capacities gives birth, according to Damascius’ argument, to aporias and, especially, to the aporia of the single principle of all things (*ἡ μία τῶν πάντων ἀρχή*)¹². The *ἀρχή* is neither one of the things it originates, nor completely transcendent. In his case, there is a double difference of ontological realm: it is different from Being and from beings because it generates them both. Moreover, it is different from One¹³ because, although the latter is also ineffable, it is somehow dependent on the Being which it “gives birth” to¹⁴. In this context, it is noteworthy to say that Being in the neoplatonic tradition is conceived of as a form of slavery, lack of liberty and pre-determination¹⁵. By this logic, in order to be free of any dependency, the first principle must be an “entity” of a different type in comparison to those it originates and it must be “situated” outside the whole viewed in its Unity. However, in the tradition of Greek thought, outside the Unity of the *kosmos* viewed as a perfect and infinitely spherical ontic realm, or outside the spherical fullness of parmenidian Being, there is nothing. Then, this “nothing” must be the *first principle* which imprints its ineffability to each and every entity and idea it originates from.

As a consequence, in Damascius’ meontological logic, there is a connection between non-Being and ineffability which lies in the fact that the ineffable is “like a cornice that surrounds the discourse”¹⁶ in a similar way in which the nothing is a “cornice” which surrounds the *kosmos*. As an architectural concept, a cornice is the topmost course of stones in a wall which is built in such a manner that it gains two main functions. On the one hand, it upholds the rooftop. On the other, it prevents the rainfall to affect the walls of the building. In a similar manner, the nothingness holds the spherical Being of Parmenides’ poem into shape and prevents it from

¹² Damascius, *De principiis*, I, 2–5.

¹³ *Ibidem*, I, 26.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵ Emile Bréhier, *L'idée du néant et le problème de l'origine radicale dans le néoplatonisme grec* in *Revue de „Métaphysique et de Morale”*, T. 26, No. 4 (Juillet–Août 1919), p. 451.

¹⁶ Damascius, *De principiis*, I, 17.

being torn apart. The ineffable, the non-judicative, upholds the conceptual knowledge by giving it the self-evidence and palpability which only life experiences have.

As a consequence, aporetical thinking can be viewed as a proof that our intellect confronts its limits and our language reaches the outermost areas of expressivity¹⁷ in trying to grasp that which cannot be grasped. There is an unsurpassable gap between the non-judicative experience of the first principle and the other two realms that guide our thinking. As a consequence, the paradoxes and contradictions, which announce the lingering of the mind about the unknown, are not logical “monstrosities”, but signs of another, more profound, knowledge capacity and a peculiar form of rationality. This kind of knowledge of the ineffable must not be conceived in the epistemological terms of conceptual and propositional knowledge, but somehow like a form of affective “consent” or self-evidence, like a kind of “dispositional reason”. This kind of “consent” (συναίσθησις) is somewhat similar to a “feeling” or “affective disposition” which takes over our soul when we face the ἀρχή. Through aporetical thinking, our mind gets trapped in its own contradictions and interprets them as an indication (ἔνδειξις) of a more profound, unfathomable layer of “reality”.

To better understand the concept of ἔνδειξις as a distinct form of intentionality, which reveals the meontological difference to the “ineffable consent”, we must take a closer look at Damascius’ view about the epistemological foundations of ontology and theory of knowledge.

§2. THE INEFFABLE CONSENT AND THE INDICATION OF NOTHINGNESS

If we accept that, for Damascius, the concept of “knowledge” is complex and implies a view of the soul based on a number of specialized faculties or capacities (δυνάμεις) through which we bring to consciousness specific types of objects¹⁸,

¹⁷ “[Le mérite de l’aporie philosophique est] celui d’être une épreuve concrète et constructive de la pensée en réponse à ses limites propres dans ce qui la dépasse.” (Carole Metry-Tresson, *L’aporie ou l’expérience des limites de la pensée dans le Péri Archon de Damaskios*, Brill, Leiden, 2012, p. 27).

¹⁸ “In a few words, what all of them agree upon is that to each ontological level (level of reality) corresponds a specific type of cognitive receptor (faculty), always posited in the soul, and representing a certain morphological aspect of the soul. Each of these faculties has its own object: sense-perception deals with the perceptible object (*aistheton*), representation with the appearance (*phantasma*), having an opinion deals with the conjecturable (*doxaston*), thinking with the thinkable (*dianoeton*) and intellection with the intelligible (*noeton*). Thus, our knowledge (*gnosis*) is the conjoined activity of sense-perception (*aisthesis*), representation (*phantasia*), having opinions (*doxazein*), discursive thinking (*dianoeisthai*) and non-discursive thinking (*noesis*).” (Cosmin I. Andron, *Damascius On Knowledge And Its Object* in I. Christov, I. Bodnar, P. Gregoric, K. Ierodiakonou (eds.), “Rhizai” 1/2004, p. 107). A different perspective about the nature of knowledge in Damascius’ writings can be found in Dirk Cürsgen, *Was ist Erkenntnis? Die Epistemologie des Damaskios und das Begriffsfeld der γνώσις zwischen Spekulation und Skepsis* in „Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte”, Vol. 50 (2008), pp. 75–98.

then the first question that comes to mind is: “which of these faculties enables us to grasp the *first principle*”? The problem is that none of the “usual” faculties are really fit for this task because, in the Greek world, as well as in the most of Western Philosophy’s history, we conceive knowledge as a discursive and conceptual endeavour. It has already been noted that even the “highest” form of knowledge, νοῦς, distorts the non-judicative experience of the ἀρχή by introducing an epistemological duality – the distinction between the known object and the knower. The same distortion occurs, in a more exacerbated manner, in all the others faculties – φαντασία, δόξα and διάνοια – because, in addition to the duality introduced by the νοῦς, which is a *non-discursive* knowledge faculty, they introduce some kind of temporal dissipation of thought.

This dissipation is the mark of *discursivity* and of the temporal aspect of the λόγος. All the former three faculties of knowledge are essentially “logical” and make use of language for expressive purposes. This is the reason why they are constituted on the bases of the *temporality of judgement*. They “stretch out” the simultaneity of the noetic intuition and unveil in a temporal manner that which, for νοῦς, comes all “at once”. In other words, they respond in a *diachronic* manner to a *synchronic* intuition. By doing so, the *discursive knowledge* introduces a more subtle difference between the temporality of the different realms of Being.

On the one hand, there lies the temporality of the ontic realm, where “time passes” and has a three dimensional nature. This temporality is divided into three aspects – past, present and future – that build our everyday experience of time. On the other, there is a form of temporality that pertains to the realm of Being, of the κόσμος νοητός, which is a perpetual lingering in the present called “eternity”¹⁹. This is the temporality of the “intellectual objects” – ideas, forms, concepts etc. – which, for the platonic tradition, represented the Being and essences of concrete things. This temporal dissipation and the distinctions that it imposes to the synchronicity of the noetic intuition form the “ontological difference”, which lays the foundations of our philosophical tradition.

In addition to these, there is yet another faculty that is put by Damascius in relation to a form of non-Being, namely αἴσθησις. This faculty, although non-discursive, just like the νοῦς, is not yet rational and relates to the pure perception of concrete things. The αἴσθησις, for as long as it grasps to the apparent shape of the material things, anticipates the rational soul and the intelligible world²⁰, but it is not

¹⁹ Marie-Claire Galperine introduces the notion of “integral time” which is the time viewed as a unitary flux, in which all the dimensions are mixed together, not because of the lingering in the present, but because of the perpetual and radical passing. This kind of temporality could be linked to the temporality of the first principle as it is perceived through unspoken consent, but this would exceed the purposes of this essay (Cf. *Le temps intégral selon Damascius* in „Les Études philosophiques”, No. 3, Doctrines du temps [juillet–septembre 1980]).

²⁰ Καὶ δὴ τὴν κινουῦσαν τὸ σῶμα ψυχὴν κυριωτέραν θετέον αὐτοκίνητον οὐσίαν· διττὴ μὲν αὕτη, ἢ μὲν λογικὴ, ἢ δὲ ἄλογος· ὅτι γὰρ καὶ τὴν λογικὴν ὑπαγορεύει ἢ αἴσθησις, φανερόν. (Damascius, *De principiis*, I, 29).

rational *per se*. In other words, it doesn't have access to the intelligible world²¹, but only to the ontic realm. This is why we can say that αἴσθησις is to the sensory world the equivalent of what νοῦς is to the “intellectual world” of ideas: the faculty that grasps the entities of that realm in a direct and non-discursive manner. In this ancient Greek view of the human soul, the νοῦς grasps ideas and is supra-rational in the sense that it offers the immediate and adequate intuition of the intelligible world and the αἴσθησις grasps perceptions and it's somehow infra-rational – it grasps the pure perceptual aspect of things.

Following this distinction, Damascius talks about two kinds of nothingness – one “above” being and one “below”²² Being. The first kind of nothingness is somehow grasped by the intellect, but in a distorted manner, while the second one is somehow grasped by perception. The difference between these two types of nothingness is that the first one – that is “above” Being, Unity and Oneness – is the indefinite principle which gives birth to all things, by ways of emanation, while the second one is the last link in the chain of creation, deprived of all form. While the first is the supra-abundant principle of all things, the second is the last conceivable and most barren form of existence. In the following pages, we will focus our attention mainly on the first form of nothingness.

Summarizing this short analysis of the late neoplatonic epistemology and ontology, we can infer there are two faculties of knowledge which transcend discursivity – the intellect and the pure perception of things. They give us an intuition of the intellectual and sensory orders of things or, from another point of view, of the ontological and the ontic realms of Being. That which transcends any possibility of knowledge in both directions – the two species of nothingness – forms the ineffable, unknowable and non-being which can only be indicated, but not properly grasped by our soul.

This is the philosophical sense of the Greek word ἔνδειξις, which has played an important role in the neoplatonic tradition and Hellenistic philosophy²³. The philosophical “purpose” of the action of “indication” is not to describe a thing or an idea, but to direct the soul (or consciousness) towards the ineffable in an attempt to make it “sense” a constitutive absence in its object. This unsurpassable absence brings about the evidence for inferring that there must be some primordial “entity” that exceeds our powers of knowledge. But the “inference” that drives us to the

²¹ “...τῇ αἰσθήσει τὸ νοητὸν ἄγνωστον, τῷ δὲ νῷ γνωστόν” (Damascius, *De principiis*, I, 13).

²² Cf. Damascius, *De principiis*, I, 6).

²³ “In Neoplatonic texts, the word *endeixis* is linked to Pythagorean symbolism and conveys the sense of allusive or enigmatic language, though the history of its meaning must be recovered through aversion to Hellenistic scientific discourse. This word became prevalent in later Hellenistic epistemology as a means of distinguishing different kinds of signs. Sextus Empiricus discusses primarily two sorts of signs: the mnemonic and the indicative. Unlike the mnemonic sign, which simply formalizes the expected associations between any two events, where expectations follow directly from experience, the indicative sign designates a logical condition obtaining between two events or states of affairs.” (Cf. Sara Rappe, *op. cit.*, p. 210)

“ineffable consent” of the first principle is not a “logical one”, but an “emotional” or, yet better, a “dispositional” one.

For this to be true, the “object” of this indication must not be constituted as other objects of consciousness are. If it were, it would be a normal entity that pertains to the intelligible or to the sensible world. Instead, the fundamental character of the nothingness at which the indication is directed at is the *non-constitutivity*. *The nothingness is an “object” that is not constituted*, that doesn’t have an objectual form or matter. It is completely indefinite, just like Anaximander’s ἄπειρον, that being the reason why we can link the two concepts together. By ἔνδειξις, this non-constituted object enters our consciousness, not through any of the faculties of knowledge already mentioned, but through what Damascius calls an “ineffable consent”, which offers a direct and silent intuition of the ἀρχή. From this point of view, the primordially of the nothingness must be conceived as a form of non-constitutivity, where all the determinations are blended together just like in the concept of ἄπειρον. This is the reason why nothingness, just like ἄπειρον, is infinitely definable and can function as an authentic ἀρχή.

Although the Greek philosopher doesn’t fully explain what this “consent” means and which are its essential traits, we can link the word συναίσθησις to the plotinian philosophy, where it was the form of consciousness which the One was provided with²⁴. It is some peculiar kind of non-dual consciousness in which even the man takes part in the few moments of *ekstasis*, when he can come to perceive the idea of One. This “consent” is different from noetic intuition (νοῦς) and surpasses both the duality of the intellect and the diachronicity of the discursive thinking. According to Plotinus, this συναίσθησις is the principle of all intellect and thinking, which means that it encompasses all the contradictory arguments of rational thinking, all the paradoxes and aporias.

For Damascius, this “ineffable consent” is the “faculty” that gives us access to the principle of all things and the “turning-around” or retorsion of the discourse is nothing but the sign which indicates that the object we are investigating pertains to a “realm” where our normal instruments of knowledge don’t work any more. This is why ἔνδειξις and περιτροπή are intimately linked to the ἄρρητον συναίσθησις. The incapacity of normal reasoning and thinking to grasp the ultimate principles *indicates* a “realm of non-constitutivity”, that is different from both the κόσμος νοητός and κόσμος αἰσθητός. This “realm”, with its own laws and network of relations to the other two, is what we call, from an epistemological point of view, the unknowable and, from a meontological point of view, the nothingness.

The difference between this perpetually non-constituted principle of all beings and the other two domains is what we call “the meontological difference” and is probably the most important theoretical discovery of the neoplatonic tradition of philosophy. The principle, in virtue of this difference, “gives birth” in an ineffable manner to both τὰ πολλά and τὰ διακρινόμενα, to the multiple beings

²⁴ Plotin, *Enneade*, V, 4. 2 (7);

in the ontic realm and to the “distinct” ideas in the ontological realm²⁵. On the bases of this “meontological difference” that unfolds itself through the whole existence and gathers up all that exists, we can reconstruct the entire history of philosophy from a meontological standpoint that offers new tools and methods to grasp the non-judicative experiences we all gain during our lives. In this way, we could better understand the uniqueness and ineffability of every form of existence and overcome some of the difficulties of the contemporary philosophical research.

§3. THE MEONTOLOGICAL DIFFERENCE AND ITS RELEVANCE TO PHILOSOPHY

One of the first major consequences of introducing this meontological difference is that it switches the standpoint from which we constitute our judgements. Traditional epistemology was based on a view of the human soul or mind that favours conceptual and discursive knowledge. This is the path that gave birth to modern science or philosophy by discrediting and discarding the more obscure concepts of mythology, religion and mysticism. In doing so, the “rational epistemology” has unfortunately reduced the influence and credibility of the whole domain of arts and humanities in general. Throughout the ages, philosophy managed to undermine its traditional authority and pre-eminence in the field of human knowledge because it ignored its supra-rational principles which governed its existence ever since the early presocratic era.

As we conceive it, the concept of meontological difference proposes another view on what “rationality” means. Apart from the ontological difference that is stipulated on the basis of “noetic rationality” and that orders the things we can speak of starting from their concrete or intellectual traits, there is a more fundamental difference that gains its validity from a “dispositional rationality”, which could be related Christianity’s “the logic of the heart”. This latter “meontological difference” imposes a chiasm between that which is thought or seen and that which is experienced in a non-judicative manner by way of our affective disposition. The ineffable consent of the primordial residue of non-constitutivity – or, in Damascius’ terms, the nothingness – indicates a universal and ever-present background of ineffability which cannot be eliminated by means of noetic rationality. There is something ineffable in every being that cannot be explained otherwise than through the fact that, being the first principle, the nothingness shares by emanation its ineffability and elusiveness with all the entities it generates.

Thus, we can incorporate a whole new field of phenomena into philosophy that were previously excluded or marginalized: the field of non-discursive

²⁵ “οὔτε γὰρ ὡς ἐν προάγει τὰ πολλά, οὔτε ὡς ἠνωμένον τὰ διακρινόμενα, ἀλλ’ ὡς ἀπόρητον ἀπορήτως τὰ πάντα ὁμοίως. (Damascius, *De principiis*, I, 6–7).

experiences. The ineffability of this kind of events requires a new logic and a different philosophical discourse because, in the terms of noetic rationality, they are ungraspable. Those would imply a need to switch to another form of epistemology and logic which gives us the theoretical tools required to understand our ineffable experiences and the way they get distorted by our language and faculties of knowledge. This whole field of non-discursive experiences is and has been one of the rightful “subject matters” of both art and philosophy ever since the first manifestations of human intelligence. It may be the case that the crisis through which the humanities in general pass springs from a need to develop a fully systematic way to relate to what we have called “dispositional rationality” and to figure out the ways in which the ineffability and incognoscibility of the first principles get distorted in certain noetic contexts.

At a closer look, we can observe that every theoretical field of research has a predefined way of dealing with the ineffable in a specific context – e.g. for psychology, the ineffable is the unconscious; for aesthetics, it is the “aesthetical idea”; for epistemology, it is the unknowable. All these forms of “thinking about” the unthinkable are ways in which we implicitly distort and “impersonate” the nothingness. This is why, by taking the meontological difference into account, we could eliminate some of the preconceptions and misrepresentations that we all have about the “first principles” in every field of study. The aim of this endeavour would be to bring the humanities back in the cultural spotlight of our times.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ANDRON, Cosmin I., *Damascius On Knowledge And Its Object* in I. Christov, I. Bodnar, P. Gregoric, K. Ierodiakonou (eds.), „Rhizai” 1/2004.
- BREHIER, Emile, *L'idée du néant et le problème de l'origine radicale dans le néoplatonisme grec* in Revue de „Métaphysique et de Morale”, T. 26, No. 4 (Juillet–Août 1919).
- CAPUTO, John D., *Radical Hermeneutics. Repetition, deconstruction and the Hermeneutic Project*, Indiana University Press, 2008.
- CERNICA, Viorel, *Judecată și timp. Fenomenologia judicativului / Time and Judgement. The Phenomenology of the Pre-judicative*, Iași, Institutul European, 2013.
- CÜRSGEN, Dirk, *Was ist Erkenntnis? Die Epistemologie des Damaskios und das Begriffsfeld der γῶσις zwischen Spekulation und Skepsis* in „Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte”, Vol. 50 (2008).
- DILLON, John, *Damascius on the Ineffable* in Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie 78. Bd., Walter de Gruyter, 1996.
- DAMASCIUS, (1) *Damascii successoris Dubitationes et solutiones de primis principiis, In platonic Parmenidem*, C.É. Ruelle (ed.), vol. 1&2, Paris, Klincksieck, 1889; (2) *Despre primele principii : aporii și soluții*, traducere din greacă, introducere și note de Marilena Vlad, București, Humanitas, 2006 ; (3) *Problems and Solutions Concerning First Principles*, translated from the Greek language with Introduction

- and Notes by Sara Ahbel-Rappe, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010; (4) *Traité des premiers principes*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 3 vol., 1986–1991.
- GALPERINE, Marie-Claire, *Le temps intégral selon Damascius* in *Les Études philosophiques*, No. 3, Doctrines du temps (juillet-septembre 1980).
- METRY-TRESSON, Carole, *L'aporie ou l'expérience des limites de la pensée dans le Péri Archon de Damaskios*, Leiden, Brill, 2012.
- PARMENIDES, (1) *Fragmenta* în Diels, H.(ed.), Kranz, W. (ed.), *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, vol. 1, 6th ed., Berlin, Weidmann, 1951; (2) *Fragmente* in *Presocraticii. Fragmentele eleaților*, Teora, București, 1998 (trad. D.M. Pippidi).
- PLATO, *Sofistul/The Sophist* translated by Constantin Noica in *Platon, Opere VI*, București, Editura științifică și enciclopedică, 1989 ; (2) *Sophista* in *Plato, Platonis Opera*. (vol. I), John Burnet(ed.), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1902.
- PLATO, *Parmenide*, translated by Sorin Vieru in *Platon, Opere VI*, București, Editura științifică și enciclopedică, 1989 ; (2) *Parmenides* in *Plato, Platonis Opera* (vol. II), John Burnet (ed.), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1922.
- PLOTINUS, (1) *Enneades V*, ed. P. Henry and H.R. Schwyzer in “Plotini opera”, 3 vols., Brill, Leiden, 1951–1973; (2) *Enneade III–V*, bilingual edition, translation and notes by Vasile Rus, Liliana Peculea, Marilena Vlad, Alexander Baumgarten, Gabriel Chindea și Elena Mihai, București, IRI, 2005; (3) *Despre ceea ce este în succesiunea primului și despre unu* în *Opere I*, translation, preliminary remarks and notes by Andrei Cornea, București, Humanitas, 2003.
- PROCLUS, (1) *Theologia Platonica*, (5Vol.), D. Saffrey and L.G.Westerink (eds.), Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 19680–1987, (2) *The Theology of Plato*, translated by Thomas Taylor, Prometheus Trust, 1994.
- RAPPE, Sara, *Reading Neo-Platonism. Non-Discursive Thinking in the Texts of Plotin, Proclus and Damascius*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007.